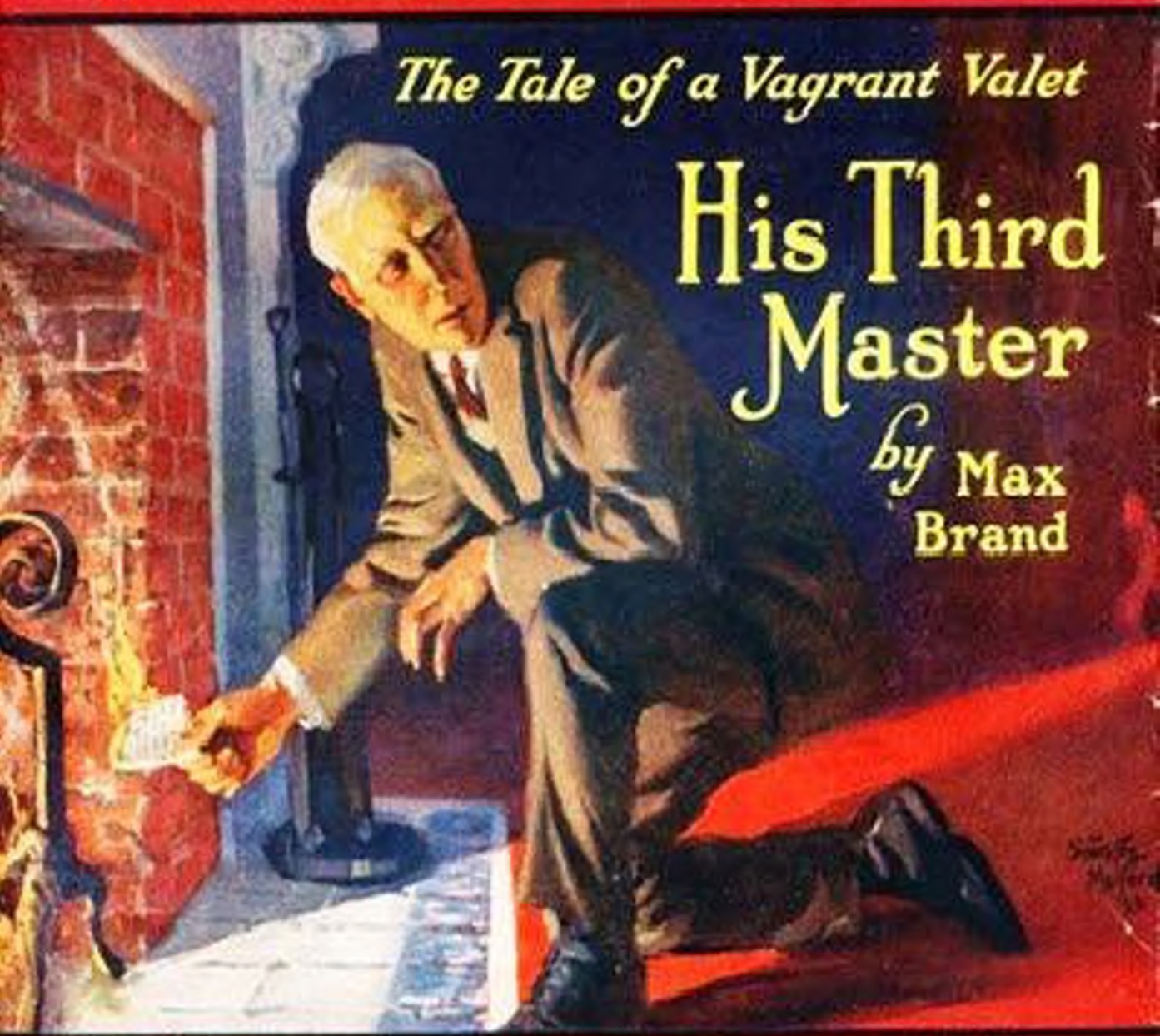
ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY



The Tale of a Vagrant Valet

His Third Master

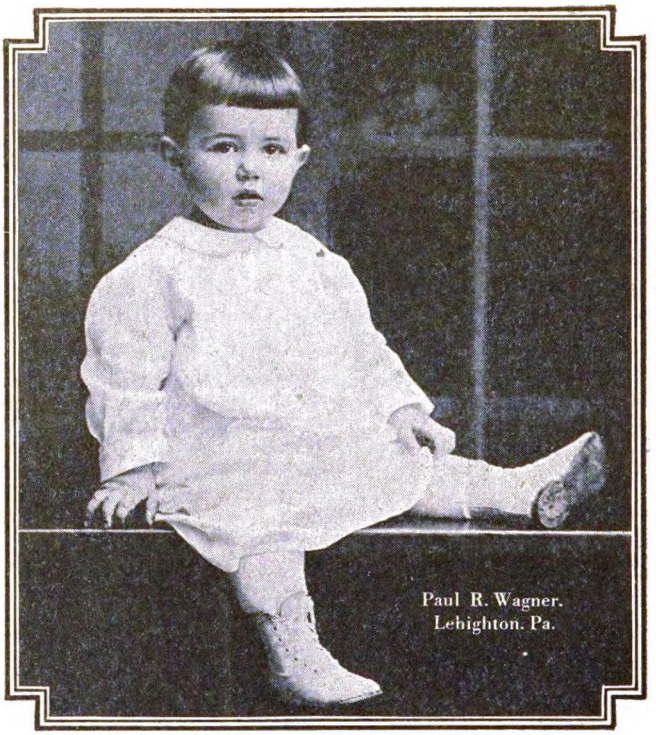
by Max Brand

10¢ PER COPY — JUNE 3 — BY THE YEAR $4.00

"We are advertised
by our loving friends"

For your Baby, use the

Mellin's Food Method of Milk Modification

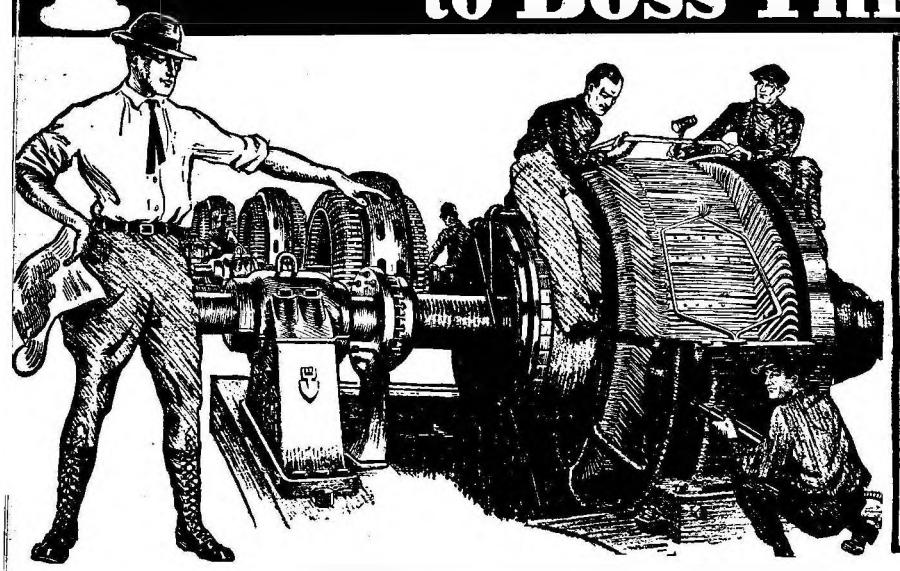


Paul R. Wagner.
Lehighton. Pa.

We will be pleased to send you our book, "The Care and Feeding of Infants," also a Free Trial Bottle of Mellin's Food.

Mellin's Food Company, Boston, Mass.

YOU Too, Can Learn to Boss This Job



EXTRA SPECIAL!

Radio Course FREE

An up-to-the-minute Home Study Course—the latest wireless developments—given free to all who enroll for my great Electrical Course **NOW.** Two courses for the price of one. Mail coupon for full particulars.

What's YOUR Future?

Today you are earning $20 to $30 a week. In the same six days as an Electrical Expert, you can make from $70 to $200, and make it easier—not work half so hard.

Then why remain in the "small pay" game—in a line of work that offers—No Big Promotion—No Big Income—No Big Future?

Fit yourself for a Big Job.

Your Success Is Guaranteed

So sure am I that you can learn electricity—so sure am I after studying with me, **you too** get in the "big money" class in electrical work, that I will guarantee under Bond to return every single penny paid me in tuition if, when you have finished my Course you are not satisfied it was the best investment you ever made.

"Electrical Experts" Earn $12 to $30 a Day

Be an Electrical Expert

Today even the ordinary electrician—the "screw-driver" kind—is making money—big money. But it's the trained man—the man who knows the whys and wherefores of Electricity—the "Electrical Expert"—who is picked out to "boss" ordinary electricians—to boss the big jobs—the jobs that pay **$3,500 to $10,000 a Year.**. Get in line for one of these "Big Jobs" by enrolling now for my easily-learned, quickly-grasped, right-up-to-the-minute Spare Time Home Study Course in Practical Electricity.

Age or Lack of Experience No Drawback

You don't have to be a College Man; you don't have to be a High School Graduate. My Course in Electricity is the most simple, thorough and successful in existence, and offers every man, regardless of age, education or previous experience, the chance to become, in a very short time, an "Electrical Expert," able to make from $70 to $200 a week.

I Give You a Real Training

As Chief Engineer of the Chicago Engineering Works, I know exactly the kind of training a man needs to enable him to get and hold good positions, and to earn big pay. I not only know, but I give you that training—I will train you as I have trained thousands of other men who, today, are holding splendid electrical positions, or are in business for themselves as Electrical Contractors.

FREE ELECTRICAL Working Outfit With me you do PRACTICAL work—at HOME. You start right in after the first few lessons to WORK AT YOUR PROFESSION in a practical way. For this you need apparatus, and I give it to you ABSOLUTELY FREE. For a limited period, besides making a slashing cut in the cost of my tuition, I will GIVE each new student ABSOLUTELY FREE OF COST, a complete Electrical Working Outfit, consisting of Voltmeter, Ammeter, Electric Motor, Bells, Wire Gauge, Wire for Wiring, Tools, etc., for home and construction work.

But You Must Act Today

This offer is positively limited, and may shortly be withdrawn. Fill in and send me the coupon, or drop me a post-card, giving me your full name and address, and receive full particulars of this great offer. But do it NOW—TODAY—before it is too late.

L. L. COOKE, Chief Engineer
CHICAGO ENGINEERING WORKS
Dept. 436, 2150 Lawrence Ave., Chicago, Ill.

L. L. Cooke, Chief Engineer
Chicago Engineering Works
Dept. 436, 2150 Lawrence Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Dear Sir:—Send at once Sample Lessons, your Big Book, and full particulars of your Free Outfit and the two Home Study Courses—all fully prepaid, without obligation on my part.

Name.....

Address.....

The "Cooke" Trained Man is the "Big Pay" Man

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CXLIII — CONTENTS FOR JUNE 3, 1922 — NUMBER 2

FIVE CONTINUED STORIES

ONE NOVELETTE

SIX SHORT STORIES

When Scrub Hazen, rancher, offers the hand of his ward to the winner of a rough-neck rodeo, no one imagines that

THE GUN-FANNER

a killer and bad-man, will take advantage of the open lists for contestants. What happens after the Gun-Fanner wins the rodeo and claims the girl is told in

KENNETH PERKINS'

latest yarn. The first of four installments appears next week.

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

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

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

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY. COPYRIGHT, 1922

Entered as second class matter July 15, 1920, at the Post-Office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879

Don't tell me you never had a chance!

"Four years ago you and I worked at the same bench. We were *both* discontented. Remember the noon we saw the International Correspondence Schools' advertisement? That woke me up. I realized that to get ahead I needed special training, and I decided to let the I. C. S. help me. When I marked the coupon I asked you to sign with me. You said, 'Aw, forget it!'

"I made the most of my opportunity and have been climbing ever since. You had the same chance I had, but you turned it down. No, Jim, you can't expect more money until you've trained yourself to handle bigger work."

There are lots of "Jims" in the world—in stores, factories, offices, everywhere. Are *you* one of them? Wake up! Every time you see an I. C. S. coupon your chance is staring you in the face. Don't turn it down.

Right now over one hundred thousand men are preparing themselves for bigger jobs and better pay through I. C. S. courses.

You can join them and get in line for promotion. Mark and mail the coupon, and find out how.

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
Box 2141-C, Scranton, Penna.

Without cost or obligation, please send me full information about the subject *before* which I have marked an X in the list below:

BUSINESS TRAINING DEPARTMENT

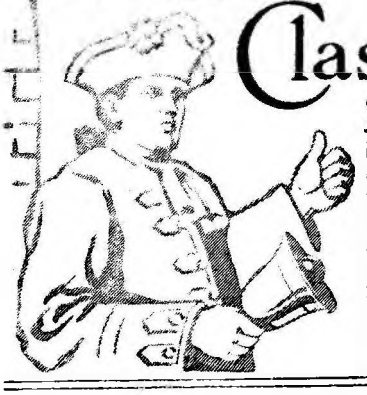
- ☐ Business Management
- ☐ Industrial Management
- ☐ Personnel Organization
- ☐ Traffic Management
- ☐ Business Law
- ☐ Banking and Banking Law
- ☐ Accountancy (including C. P. A.)
- ☐ Nicholson Cost Accounting
- ☐ Bookkeeping
- ☐ Private Secretary
- ☐ Business Spanish ☐ French
- ☐ Salesmanship
- ☐ Advertising
- ☐ Better Letters
- ☐ Foreign Trade
- ☐ Stenography and Typing
- ☐ Business English
- ☐ Civil Service
- ☐ Railway Mail Clerk
- ☐ Common School Subjects
- ☐ High School Subjects
- ☐ Illustrating ☐ Cartooning

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL DEPARTMENT

- ☐ Electrical Engineering
- ☐ Electric Lighting
- ☐ Mechanical Engineer
- ☐ Mechanical Draftsman
- ☐ Machine Shop Practice
- ☐ Railroad Positions
- ☐ Gas Engine Operating
- ☐ Civil Engineer
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping
- ☐ Mine Foreman or Engineer
- ☐ Steam Engineering
- ☐ Wireless ☐ Airplane Engines
- ☐ Architect
- ☐ Contractor and Builder
- ☐ Architectural Draftsman
- ☐ Concrete Builder
- ☐ Structural Engineer
- ☐ Plumbing and Heating
- ☐ Chemistry
- ☐ Pharmacy
- ☐ Automobile Work
- ☐ Navigation
- ☐ Agriculture and Poultry
- ☐ Mathematics

Name.....
Street
Address.....
City..... State .....
Occupation.....

Persons residing in Canada should send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada.



Classified Advertising

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

Classified Advertising Rates in the Munsey Magazines:

	Line Rate
Munsey's Magazine	$1.50
Argosy-Allstory Weekly	2.50

Minimum space four lines.

Combination Line Rate $4.00 Less 2% cash discount

July 8th Argosy-Allstory Forms Close June 10th.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

TAILORING AGENTS WANTED to sell guaranteed tailor-made clothes. We ship free prepaid large traveling sample outfit, 250 all wool fabrics at $15.00 and up, fit and workmanship absolutely guaranteed. Write for Fall and Winter samples. Jay Rose & Co., Dept. 800 M, 411 S. Wells St., Chicago.

$1,080 MADE BY WINGO IN SIX WEEKS SELLING NEVER FAIL RAZOR SHARPENERS. Purdy made $40.50 first day. Other inexperienced men cleaning up big money. Applewhite, La., six orders in thirty minutes. Hurry, investigate. Exclusive territory. Write today. NEVER FAIL CO., 148 Allen Building, Toledo, O.

$50,000 "PROFITS IN PORTRAITS" EXPLAINED in Free circular. 24 hour service. Prints, Portraits, Frames. I finance you. Samples Free. Friedman's Studio, 673 Madison, Chicago.

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

WANTED—Tailoring Sales Agents. Big profits every day—$75.00 to $150.00 weekly. Our big All Wool line sells itself. Satisfaction or money back guarantee. Get into this profitable business today, without a penny's investment. Write for full particulars, giving your experience as salesman or tailor's sales agent. Mr. A. R. Allister, Sales-Manager, Lock Box 483, Chicago.

AGENTS—Our Soap and Toilet Article Plan is a wonder. Get our Free Sample Case Offer. Ho-Ro-Co, 137 Locust, St. Louis, Mo.

1922'S FASTEST SELLING AUTO ACCESSORY. Rear signal light tells what automobilist is going to do. Stop, or turn right or left. Nothing like it. $20.00 daily average profit. Reliance Products Co., Inc., 505 No. La Salle, Chicago.

AGENTS—FREE TRIAL OFFER. HARPER'S COMBINATION BRUSH SET AND FIBRE BROOM. Consists of five parts, has ten different uses. It sweeps, washes and dries windows, scrubs and mops floors, and does five other things. Over 100% profit. Write for our free trial offer. Harper Brush Works, Dept. Y, Fairfield, Iowa.

A BUSINESS OF YOUR OWN. Make Sparkling Glass Name Plates, Numbers, Checkerboards, Medallions, Signs. Big illustrated book free. E. PALMER, 500 Wooster, Ohio.

AGENTS—MAKE A DOLLAR AN HOUR. Sell Mendets, a [illegible] for instantly mending leaks in all utensils. Sample package free. Collette Manufacturing Company, Dept. 306-B, Amsterdam, N. Y.

Big Profits. Sell handsome Windshield Wings, Mirrors, Spot Lights, guaranteed Tires, Tubes, etc. Prices that win. Car owners, dealers buy one to gross. Write for booklet and sensational agency prices. Rapid Sales Corp'n, 20-D, Grand Rapids, Mich.

RUMMAGE SALES MAKE $50 DAILY. Representatives wanted everywhere. We start you. Dept. 26, WHOLESALE DISTRIBUTERS, 609 Division, Chicago.

AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

FREE TO WRITERS—a wonderful little book of money making hints, suggestions, ideas; the A B C of successful Story and Movie Play writing. Absolutely free. Send for your copy now! Just address Authors' Press, Dept. 19, Auburn, N. Y.

WRITERS: HAVE YOU A POEM, STORY OR PHOTOPLAY TO SELL? Submit MSS. at once to Music Sales Company, Dept. 60, St. Louis, Mo.

STORIES, POEMS, PLAYS, ETC., ARE WANTED for publication. Good ideas bring big money. Submit Mss., or write Literary Bureau, 110, Hannibal, Mo.

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

LAND OPPORTUNITY! 20, 40, 80 ac. tracts near hustling city in Michigan. Only $15 to $35 per acre, very easy terms. Write today for FREE BOOKLET giving full information. SWIGART LAND CO., Y-1245, First Nat'l Bank Bldg., Chicago.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

$13.45 FOR A STYLISH MADE-TO-YOUR-MEASURE 3-PIECE SUIT—regular $25.00 value. We are making this bargain offer to prove our remarkable values in tailoring. Write for our big sample outfit showing how agents make $35.00 to $40.00 extra every week taking orders for high-grade tailoring. SPENCER MEAD COMPANY, Dept. F-204, Chicago.

AGENTS: Here's a winner. Take orders for Insyde Tyres. Positively prevent punctures and blow-outs. Guaranteed to give double tire mileage. Any tire. Low priced. One hundred thousand satisfied customers. Write for territory. AMERICAN ACCESSORIES COMPANY, B-501, Cincinnati, Ohio.

AGENTS! 1922's GREATEST SENSATION. 11 piece toilet article set selling like blazes at $1.75 with $1.00 dressmaker's shears free to each customer. Line up with Davis for 1922. E. M. Davis Co., Dept. 58, Chicago.

AGENTS—$6 to $12 a Day. Take orders for Aluminum Handle Cutlery Set. Brand new. We deliver and collect. Pay you daily. Sample to workers. JENNINGS MFG. COMPANY, Dept. 1709, Dayton, Ohio.

SELL HOLMES TIRES AND TUBES. No capital required. $100 weekly income. Price sells them, quality gets re-orders. HOLMES RUBBER CO., 1500 W. 15th, Dept. A, Chicago.

AGENTS: WIRELESS UMBRELLA. I am paying $2 an hour, taking orders for this newest invention. Send for 5-part outfit. Six inch midget demonstrator free. Parker Mfg. Co., 306 Dike Street, Dayton, Ohio.

MAKE 600% PROFIT. FREE SAMPLES. Lowest priced Gold Window Letters for stores, offices. Anybody can do it. Large demand. Exclusive territory. Big future. Side line. Acme Letter Co., 2800 F Congress, Chicago.

$10 WORTH OF FINEST TOILET SOAPS, perfumes, toilet waters, spices, etc., absolutely free to agents on our refund plan. Lacassian Co., Dept. 614, St. Louis, Mo.

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

LARGE SHIRT MANUFACTURER wants Agents to sell complete line of shirts direct to wearer. Exclusive patterns. Big values. Free samples. Madison Mills, 503 Broadway, New York.

ACT QUICK. $100 WEEKLY. SELLS LIKE WILDFIRE. Kleanrite, New Washing Compound. No rubbing. Women crazy about it. 300% profit. Premium plan gets business. Sample Free. BESTEVER PROD. CO., 1943-A Irving Park, Chicago.

AUTOMOBILES

Automobile Owners, Garagemen, Mechanics, Repairmen, send for free copy of our current issue. It contains helpful, instructive information on overhauling, ignition troubles, wiring, carburetors, storage batteries, etc. Over 140 pages, illustrated. Send for free copy today. Automobile Digest, 500 Butler Bldg., Cincinnati.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

MEN—WOMEN. Enormous Profits. $25 to $100 daily wholesale or retail. Manufacturing Polar Bars, Chocolate Coated Ice Cream Novelty. 10c package costs 3c to make. Sensational seller. Complete outfit $17.50. INTERNATIONAL CHOCOLATE CO., 218 S. Wabash Avenue, Chicago.

MOTION PICTURE PLAYS

EXCHANGE PLOTS FOR $$—Photoplay ideas accepted any form; revised, typed, published, copyrighted. Sold. Advice free. UNIVERSAL SCENARIO CORP., 918 Western Mutual Life Bldg., Los Angeles.

PHOTOPLAYS WANTED BY 48 COMPANIES: $10 TO $500 EACH PAID FOR PLAYS. No correspondence course or experience needed; details sent free to beginners. Sell your ideas. Producers League, 388 Wainwright, St. Louis, Mo.

Classified Advertising continued on page 6.

4½% on Savings

New U. S. Treasury Savings Certificates

offer an unusual opportunity to save systematically

THE United States Government, through the Treasury and Post Office Departments, has announced a sure way to help men and women everywhere who want to save money and make it earn more.

Treasury Savings Certificates, New Issue, are now added to the previous offerings of Government securities for investment of savings. These new Treasury Savings Certificates will earn 4½ per cent a year, compounded semi-annually, if held to maturity.

The Certificates may be redeemed before maturity at redemption prices which increase from month to month, as stated on the backs of the Certificates, yielding about 3½ per cent interest, compounded semi-annually.

Issued in denominations within the reach of all, at present prices, you can buy a $25 Certificate for $20, a $100 Certificate for $80, or a $1000 Certificate for $800. Each matures in five years from date of issue, earning 25 per cent for the full period of investment.

The New Way to Save

This is a new and simpler way to save methodically, devised primarily for weekly or monthly savings. If you can save $20 per week or per month, these Certificates have an unusual earning capacity.

If you save less than $20 per month, you can accumulate Postal Savings Stamps at 10 cents each, or Treasury Savings Stamps at $1 each, both non-interest-bearing. Or you can open an interest-bearing Postal Savings account. Then you can convert your savings into a Treasury Savings Certificate when you accumulate $20.

Thus the Government offers the people an ideal system of saving—absolute safety, liberal interest, ready cash if withdrawn.

Everybody can and should take advantage of this opportunity and learn how easy it is for savings to accumulate.

Become thoroughly posted on this unusual opportunity. Begin saving by this simpler, more profitable method, and let your dollars work for you. Thousands are adopting this new method.

Liberal Interest

Treasury Savings Certificates offer a liberal interest. Each dollar saved earns 25 per cent in 5 years, which is at the rate of 4½ per cent a year, compounded semi-annually. If withdrawn before maturity you receive interest at the rate of 3½ per cent, compounded semi-annually.

Safety

These Certificates are a direct obligation of your government, the soundest investment conceivable, backed by the strength of the Nation. Your principal and interest are absolutely safe. Certificates are registered in your name at time of purchase, protecting you against loss or theft.

Certain Value

The Certificates are not subject to market fluctuations and cannot depreciate in value. They are always worth what you paid for them plus the interest.

Payment on Demand

You can withdraw your money at any time, without waiting until maturity of the Certificates. This provides for any emergency.

Many Attractive Features

In addition to the advantages already listed you will find many other attractions. For instance, any individual can buy Treasury Savings Certificates up to $5000, face value, of any one series.

A new series is issued each year. Each member of the family can own up to $5000 worth; likewise corporations, partnerships, associations, and joint-stock companies; or trustees; or two persons in the alternative, payable to either person or to the survivor; or an infant or infant's guardian; or the Certificates may be made payable to a beneficiary, that is, registered in the name of one person and upon his death payable to another.

The Certificates are exempt from State and local taxation (except estate and inheritance taxes) and from normal Federal income tax.

United States Treasury Savings Certificates may be purchased at Post Offices, Federal Reserve Banks, banks and trust companies, or direct from the United States Government Savings System, Treasury Department, Washington, D. C.

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT SAVINGS SYSTEM

TREASURY DEPARTMENT, WASHINGTON, D. C.

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

HELP WANTED

RAILWAY MAIL CLERKS, STENOGRAPHERS, CLERKS, TYPISTS, wanted by Government. **Examinations weekly.** Prepare at home. Write for free list and plan 301, **payment after** securing position. CSS, 1017 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia.

Make Money At Home. You can earn from $1 to $2 an hour in your spare time writing show cards. Quickly and easily learned by our new simple "Instructograph" method. No canvassing or soliciting. We teach you how and guarantee you steady work at home and pay cash each week. Full particulars and booklet free. American Show Card School, 202 Ryrie Bldg., Toronto, Can.

SELL US YOUR SPARE TIME. YOU CAN EARN FIFTEEN TO FIFTY DOLLARS WEEKLY writing showcards at home. No canvassing. Pleasant, profitable profession, easily, quickly learned by our simple graphic block system. Artistic ability unnecessary. We instruct you and supply you work. WILSON METHODS, LIMITED, 64 East Richmond, Toronto, Canada.

HELP WANTED—MALE

BE A DETECTIVE—EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITY; good pay; travel. Write C. T. Ludwig, 126 Westover Building, Kansas City, Mo.

ALL MEN—WOMEN OVER 17, willing to accept Government Positions $135 (Traveling or Stationary) write MR. OZMENT, 198, St. Louis, Mo.

BE A RAILWAY TRAFFIC INSPECTOR! $110 to $250 monthly, expenses paid after three months' spare-time study. Splendid opportunities. Position guaranteed or money refunded. Write for Free Booklet CM-30. Stand. Business Training Inst., Buffalo, N. Y.

FIREMEN, BRAKEMEN, BAGGAGEMEN, SLEEPING CAR, Train Porters (colored). $140—$200. Experience unnecessary. 836 RAILWAY BUREAU, East St. Louis, Ill.

PATENT ATTORNEYS

PATENTS. WRITE FOR FREE ILLUSTRATED GUIDE BOOK and record of invention blank. **Send model or sketch** and description for our opinion of its patentable nature. Free. Highest References. Prompt Attention. Reasonable Terms. Victor J. Evans & Co., 762 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS. BOOKLET FREE. HIGHEST REFERENCES. BEST RESULTS. Promptness assured. Send drawing or model for examination and opinion as to patentability. Watson E. Coleman, 624 F Street, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS. If you have an invention write for our Guide Book, "How To Get A Patent." **Send model or sketch and** description, and we will give our opinion as to its patentable nature. Randolph & Co., 630 F, Washington, D. C.

RAGTIME PIANO PLAYING

RAG JASS PIANO, SAXOPHONE, OR TENOR BANJO in 20 lessons. Christensen Schools in most cities, or learn by mail. Write for Booklet or money-making teacher's opportunity. Christensen School, 441, 22 E. Jackson, Chicago.

STAMPS

FOREIGN STAMPS FREE—Fine Packet from all over the world with big price list of sets, packets, stamp supplies, etc., send 2c postage. GRAY STAMP CO., Station E, Toronto, Canada.

SONG POEMS WANTED

WRITE THE WORDS FOR A SONG. We compose music. Our Chief of Staff wrote many big song-hits. Submit your song-poem to us at once. NEW YORK MELODY CORP., 403 Fitzgerald Building, New York.

TRADE SCHOOLS

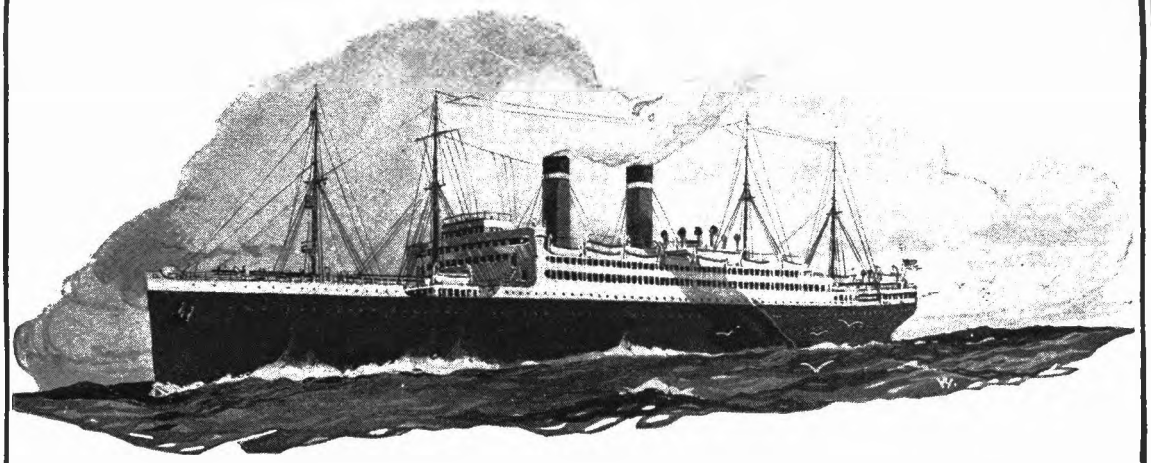
EARN $10 TO $12 PER DAY. Learn Sign Painting—Auto Painting, Showcard Writing, Decorating, Paperhanging, Graining, Marbling. A Real School. Catalog Free. CHICAGO PAINTING SCHOOL, 152 W. Austin Ave., Chicago.

WANTED—MISCELLANEOUS

MAIL OLD GOLD, unused postage, war and thrift stamps, Liberty Bonds, silver, platinum, diamonds, jewelry, watches, false teeth, magneto points, etc., new or broken. Cash immediately. Held ten days, returned if unsatisfactory. Ohio Smelting Co., 254 Lennox Building, Cleveland, Ohio.

WANTED TO BUY

Mail Us Your Discarded Jewelry, Gold Crowns and Bridges, Watches, Diamonds, Silver, Platinum, War Saving Stamps and Old False Teeth. Money sent by return mail. Packages held 4 to 12 days and returned if our offer is refused. **United States** Smelting Works (The Old Reliable), Dept 26, Chicago, Ill.



Going Abroad?

Let Your Government Give You Full Information

IF you are going abroad this Summer—if you have felt the urge to delight your mind and senses with the sights and sounds and beauties of a civilization both new and ages old—send the information blank today to your Government. You will be sent, free of charge, full information covering every phase of your trip.

You will receive too full information about your ships that now sail from New York to European ports. You will be proud of this splendid fleet that is operated by the United States Lines. The George Washington, the America, and other ships of the line are among the finest afloat.

Rates are as low as $120 for full cabin passage to Queenstown and London, $125 to Cherbourg.

Write for Booklet

Your Government wishes the name of every prospective traveler. If you are considering an ocean voyage anywhere, send the information blank now—no matter when you intend to go. You will receive without cost the Government's booklet of authentic travel information; description of ships and literature on foreign countries. You will be under no obligation.

If you cannot take an ocean trip, clip the information blank anyway and urge some friend who may go to send it in. Do not send the blank in for your friend; simply give it to him to send in. Thus you too will help the American Merchant Marine.

For information in regard to sailings and accommodations, address

United States Lines

45 Broadway *New York City*

Moore and McCormack, Inc. *Roosevelt Steamship Co., Inc.*

INFORMATION BLANK
To U. S. Shipping Board
Information Section Washington, D. C.
U. S. A227

Please send without obligation the U. S. Government Booklet giving travel facts and also information regarding the U. S. Government ships.

I am considering a trip to Europe☐, to the Orient☐, to South America ☐. I would travel 1st class☐, 2d ☐, 3d ☐. Going alone ☐, with family ☐, with others ☐.

I have definitely decided to go ☐, I am merely considering the possibility of a trip.

If I go date will be about _____

My Name _____

Business or Profession _____

My Street No. or R. F. D. _____

Town _____ *State* _____

U. S. SHIPPING BOARD

Information Section A227 **Washington, D. C.**

IVER JOHNSON
SAFETY AUTOMATIC
REVOLVER

Why you can "Hammer the Hammer"

The only way to discharge an Iver Johnson is to pull the trigger (1) intentionally way back. This action raises the lifter (2), which forces hammer (3) to cocking position. When lifter is at its highest point, it covers the firing pin (4). At this position the hammer is released, striking the lifter, which in turn strikes the firing-pin, driving it into the primer of the cartridge.

Accidental knocks, jolts or bumps cannot discharge this revolver. You can even "Hammer the Hammer."

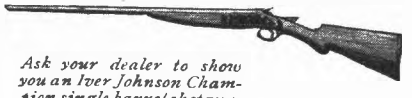
Hammer and Hammerless models in all calibres. Regular, Perfect Rubber, and Western Walnut grips. If your dealer hasn't the particular model you want, write us.

FREE! Two interesting booklets full of information. Send at once for the one that interests you.

"A 10"—Firearms
"B 10"—Bicycles

IVER JOHNSON'S ARMS & CYCLE WORKS
10 River Street, Fitchburg, Massachusetts

New York Office: 99 Chambers Street
San Francisco Office: 717 Market Street
Chicago Office: 108 W. Lake Street



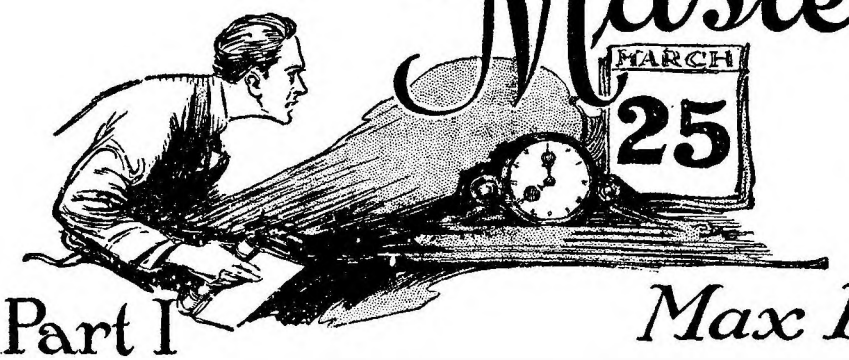
Ask your dealer to show you an Iver Johnson Champion single barrel shotgun. Accurate, dependable, moderately priced

Ride an Iver Johnson Truss-Bridge Bicycle. Strong, speedy, easy-riding and prices to suit everyone.

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CXLIII SATURDAY, JUNE 3, 1922 NUMBER 2

His Third Master



Part I

by Max Brand

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CHAPTER I.

THE MIDDLEMAN.

DICKON GREENE was a young man, but an old bachelor; that is to say, at the age of thirty he no longer fought life, but accepted it. Seven years before he came out of college with an enviable athletic record prepared to smash into the business world, and he went down to make history on Broad Street. He did not know that most of Broad Street's history is written between the lines and only the initiated can read it, but within three months he learned that there is a difference between hitting the line and bucking the curb, so he turned his attention to banking with all the humble enthusiasm of the "newsboy to president" hero of fiction. But the Whittaker Bank had no intention of using such material as Dickon at the bottom; in a short time he was placed as teller, and Dickon felt with a leaping heart that his was to be one of those soaring fortunes which sweep over the Street, now and then, cometlike. Seven years passed; he was still teller in the Whittaker Bank.

Through the first two years he lived upon prospects of a brilliant future with all a young man's invincible ability to dream, but after that, seeing man after man of his own age rise past him, Dickon Greene felt that he might have limitations; he rebelled against the business world in general and the Whittaker Bank in particular for a time, but being blessed with a peculiarly open heart and gentle disposition, he gradually accepted this new, limited self. Of course he still looked into the future, still grew tensed, now and then, for the good fortune just around the corner, but expectation became steadily more dreamlike. The more closely the chains of reality were riveted upon him, by so much he sought escape in his imagination, and the four-room apartment in the hope of which he had labored so earnestly seven years ago, now gave place to the vision of a mansion on Park Avenue, with a well-oiled household machine purring for his comfort. Long

before this time his meager list of acquaintances ceased to ask about his prospects. To be sure, he looked like a man of force, but at length he was accepted as one of those middlemen who neither sink nor soar, who achieve a very comfortable bachelorhood and only fall to the class of the shabby genteel through marriage. He lacked neither aspiration nor power, but unfortunately his ambition could be glutted with a dream and his energy needed direction. It might be said that for seven years Dickon Greene had hung on his toes ready to charge, but waiting for the signal of the quarter-back.

The clock to-night began to strike eight with a busy humming and fluster before each bell, and Dickon looked up idly from his book. Formerly he had been restless as the evening drew on to this period when the night life of the city begins, and sudden hordes of pleasure-seekers appear in the theater district of Manhattan; once, this hour made him uneasy, but now Dickon merely shrugged his shoulders like a well-broken draft horse feeling his collar in place. He shrugged his shoulders, and was turning back to his book when his eyes flickered across the calendar, and he saw: "March," in small letters above, and a great black "25" below. And not until that moment did Dickon remember that this was his thirtieth birthday. At best they are sad days, but never so dreary as in the period about thirty when a man has left the sky-storming hopes of his boyhood and has not yet reached the resignation of middle age. It is a time for writing letters filled with sad sentiment; it is a time to remember dead mistresses and lost friends; it is a time, above all, for misty eyes of self-pity; but Dickon Greene had learned how to take punishment long ago on the football field and now his shoulders were as wide and thick as ever. He was one of those who often need help, direction, but never ask it, and now he met this silent crisis of his life with a smile and an inner glance which looked himself through and through; he totaled his account with a precise eye, summed himself up, and did not wince.

All the faults, the impulses and checks of his nature were written plainly in Dickon's face. He had that high, somewhat slanting forehead which is so often found in men of action, a strongly aquiline nose, the jaw of a fighter; but his gray eyes were too wide and too quiet, and his habitual faint smile made him seem to brood in quiet amusement. A sculptor would have stretched out his hand to change that face—to shape down that nose a little more delicately and make him a poet; to put fire in his eyes and make him a conqueror. But as it was he balanced in between—a middleman—nothing.

The telephone rang. It was Harrison Gilmore, the cashier of the bank, a member of the distinctly upper social strata; but neither social nor business superiority could teach Dickon to look up to a man who had been a freshman in college when he was a senior. He thought Gilmore a trifle too dapper, a little foolish, but he liked the cashier in a protecting sort of way, just as a senior may be partial to a first-year boy.

"I have to ask you to do me a good turn, Dickon." It was the first time since their college days that Gilmore had used that name. "In one word, can you give me your evening?"

"I've nothing on."

A prodigious sigh from Gilmore.

"Good! Dickon, I'm engaged to take a girl to Silverman's"—he paused importantly—"and another thing has come up—I can't join her until ten o'clock. Will you take her in my place?"

Dickon knew the name—Silverman's—but he could not place it; he only gathered from Gilmore's tone that it was very important, indeed.

"Glad to," he said.

"Dickon, you're a trump! Jump into your clothes. I'll call for you in ten minutes with the car."

In fact, he was hardly in his dinner coat when the bell rang, and he opened the door upon Gilmore. The cashier was breathless.

"I tried three other fellows," he explained, hustling Dickon into his overcoat, "and they were all busy for the night. Gad, I was happy to hear your voice! This is fine of you."

"Really?"

"Hurry up. I'll explain in the car. We've a close shave to get to Rose in time—and she hates delays."

A big limousine hummed softly at the curb, and Gilmore opened the door, dancing with impatience.

"As fast as you can," he directed the chauffeur, and jumped in after Dickon. "Close call," he said, consulting his watch at the window. "By Jove, Greene, I was in an ugly corner!"

Dickon leaned back in the cushions and smiled, for he was remembering that he was thirty.

"Come, come," he said, "what's all this about?"

He felt a certainty of adventure ahead; the limousine trundled around the corner and headed straight downtown, the hum of the motor rising in reckless crescendo. Gilmore pocketed his watch and turned to Dickon, quivering.

"Do you know where we're going, man?" he breathed. He waited as if he absurdly feared that Dickon might guess. "Rose Martin!" he concluded. "And Silverman's! Think of that!"

"Think of that!" echoed Dickon, who had not the least idea who Rose Martin might be.

"I met her some time ago," continued Gilmore happily, "and she seemed to take a fancy to me at once. Strange, of course, considering how she can pick and choose; but she's full of whims. I couldn't see much of her because *le père* has such a prejudice against that sort of thing; he's picked out a girl for me to marry, and he can't understand why I should want to look at another woman."

He looked across for sympathy, and Dickon grinned shamelessly through the shadow. "Absurd," said he.

"But this morning I was tired of living. I decided to step out and see Rose, rang her up, and what do you think she suggested?"

"Well?"

"She asked me to Silverman's!"

Swiftly Dickon turned over in his mind the list of celebrities whose names he had gleaned from the newspapers; there was no Silverman in the lot.

"Not Silverman's!" he gasped, rising to his cue.

"I'm here to tell the world! Silverman's, and no less! Gad, boy, what a chance! All the wit and most of the beauty in New York goes to Silverman's. It isn't exactly a ladies' seminary, but who the devil cares for that? It doesn't do any harm to just look on, does it?"

"Certainly not."

"Of course Rose has a standing invitation to Silverman's. They say that there are only three women in Manhattan who have such a bid from the old chap, and one of them never goes."

"Who is she?"

"Marie Twilbert. But to get back to my tragedy. When I have this little party all planned, in steps *le père,* confound him, with a request that's practically a command to dine with him at the club. Some silly business to talk over. Naturally I can't tell him about Rose."

"Do what you want," suggested Dickon, with just a touch of malice. "Let your father whistle through his thumbs if you really wish to be with Rose Martin."

"B-r-r!" shuddered Harrison Gilmore. "You don't know *le père.* Have him whistle through his thumbs? I'd rather raise the devil. Couldn't dodge him, so then I thought of you. You won't mind, Dickon? As a matter of fact, it's a privilege to meet Rose Martin, isn't it?"

"Of course."

"She'll do the entertaining. And I'll give you a lead, Dickon. Lots of people believe all the stories that float around about Rose. Absolute nonsense. I saw at a glance that she was a lady; I couldn't amuse her with my chatter after the conversation *she's* used to, so I just treated her with respect. The minute she saw that I understood her she was mighty pleasant. Here we are. Now, mind you, the free and easy thing doesn't do with Rose!"

They were still on Broadway, just above the glow of the theater district, and when they stepped from the car it seemed to Dickon that there was a great fire down the street, for the blaze of the electric advertisements stained the low spring mist with yellow. And all the traffic seemed hasten-

ing toward that fire; the very street cars went with redoubled clanging; the taxicabs wove expertly through the mass of autos; and when Dickon and Harrison Gilmore started for the apartment house the flood of pedestrians, setting downtown, swept them well past the door. From the steps of the entrance Dickon glanced back over the crowd. He had been all his life in the class of those who walk, but he felt somehow that he had been lifted permanently out of it.

They sent up their names—the apartment was on the top floor—and were received by a maid. She had hardly opened the door when Rose Martin came, tossing a scarf about her shoulders. She had repeated and called attention to the gray-green of her eyes with an emerald pin at her breast and a row of the same stones half buried in her hair; for she was past the age when her beauty required no background of tricks. To balance her age, however, she had that strong confidence of women who know they are lovely; men agree almost perforce. There was a bright light on either side of the door, so that she came on them like a flare of fire, one might say, with green points in it; and Harrison Gilmore caught his breath. He blinked like a delighted boy.

"This is Mr. Dickon Greene," he said. "I have to run, Rose—father's waiting now, I expect. I'm leaving the car for you."

"Oh, I wish—" exclaimed Rose Martin, and then checked herself. She was half pouting, half angry.

"Terribly sorry—you can imagine," said Gilmore in agony. "The fact is, the governor—"

"Don't explain, Harry, please. Can you get away from her before the show ends?"

"Away from *her?*" echoed Gilmore. "Good gad, Rose, you don't think I'm such a rotter—another girl—"

"I'll try not to think at all, Harry."

She gave him her hand with such a smile that he flushed. "Rose, you're the very best in the world," he burst out, and then fled through the door. She closed it slowly, and Dickon knew that her smile was holding upon Gilmore until the elevator latch clicked. Then she turned, murmuring: "I'm afraid Harry is a great rounder, Mr. Greene."

She stood before fawn and rose colored tapestry; the light fell perfectly for her profile, making her a dozen years younger. She was suddenly a girl of eighteen, without artifice, looking wistfully at Dickon.

Long training had taught Rose how to pass from one graceful pose to another through an entire evening, and indeed the picture was now so perfect that Dickon found himself narrowing his eyes to enjoy it. She held her pose just an instant too long, for Dickon possessed that rare combination of faculties which is usually lost with childhood—that is, he was so simple himself that he was sensitive with hair-trigger acuteness to affectation in others. He saw that Rose Martin was a poseur—and the thought cleared his mind like the fragrance of that little flower which Hermes gave to Odysseus.

CHAPTER II.

SILVERMAN'S.

INSTEAD of answering he looked at her with silent pleasure and then smiled. As for Rose Martin, she kept her pose of wistfulness, one delicate hand upon the knob of the door, for only an instant; then she grew grave; then she broke into laughter. It had a startling effect, and Dickon felt at once that he was at home, that he had known her for a long time.

"Well?" chuckled Rose Martin, her eyes wrinkling at the sides with her scrutiny.

"Well?" smiled Dickon.

She had prepared herself for a long evening of attitudinizing, and now, watching the rather ugly, thoughtful face of Dickon, she saw that he understood and enjoyed her. There was no one more direct than Rose when she chose to be natural; she crossed the room briskly and held out her hand.

"I think we ought to shake again," she suggested.

"Thank you."

She almost upset him with this sudden change of front, but Dickon had formed a football habit of thinking in crises. She

had played the formal lady with Harrison Gilmore and she was her natural self with Dickon. He felt the full force of the compliment, but there was a sufficient degree of artifice even in this, for after she became so frank he could not go to Gilmore with caustic remarks later on.

"But how did the boy"—she gestured over her shoulder—"pick up a human being?"

"He crossed his wires looking for a substitute."

"Come in and sit down," laughed Rose Martin, and she led the way. "I was ready to be cool and pleasant—you know? And I do love a chance to be human. Don't take that chair. I have it for the looks, but I wouldn't trust a friend in it. Cigarettes? Cigars?"

Through a mist of smoke he looked over the room, which was done brightly in chintz, one of those places pleasant to visit, but trying to live in. Rose Martin brought her wraps, and chattered while he helped her into them.

"Harry is terribly flustered about going to Silverman's. I suppose you know it?"

"Never heard of Silverman's."

She had been examining him while she got into her things and now she frowned, puzzled. An instant later she shrugged her pretty shoulders, a sign that she had reached a conclusion, and turned away to make a last examination before the mirror.

"I see—you've been abroad for ages, then." She was cleverly and not extensively made up, but something about it worried her, and she began making faces at the glass and touching her powder puff here and there. It was most conclusive proof to Dickon that she accepted him as one of the initiated. "World's of fun at old Silverman's. You'll like it."

When she was quite ready, and they stood at the door to the elevator, waiting, the carelessness dropped from her and she laid her hand on his arm.

"What is it?" she asked. "Friends?"

He had an impulse to look mysteriously wise, understanding, but instead he laughed heartily.

"Of course it's friends. I'm going to have a bully party."

She chuckled approvingly.

"It's a game with the—boy, you know. But he needs teaching."

"As a matter of fact," said Dickon, "most of us could afford to spend a little time in school now and then."

They had to go into the elevator then, but when they were in Gilmore's limousine outside she returned to the subject.

"Did you mean that?"

He looked down at her, smiling faintly, and Rose Martin laughed.

"When you first came in to-night," she confessed, "you made me feel old. B-r-r!"

Silverman's was a corner house, large, and formal as brownstone could make it. They left their wraps in a quiet, square, unpretentious hall. It was not until the big door at their left was opened that they caught the first hint of excitement; they stepped through into the place of festival. What first astonished Dickon Greene was the enormous size of the rooms, for they stretched away the distance of a full block, it seemed, and then curved out of sight, giving the impression that a whole city full of guests could be received. Tables for the midnight supper were placed along the sides of the room, sometimes obscured by curves and recesses in the walls, sometimes by screens of greenery—palms and lofty ferns and in at least one place by a whole hedge of roses; but no table was completely exposed. There were flowers everywhere, not in bouquets of wreaths, but the whole place was flooded with color and perfume; wherever one moved new scents trailed after, sometimes mingling harmoniously; often a single note of fragrance.

Yet it was not the decoration so much as the lighting that distinguished the festival. Some futurist had made his dream into a wild reality. Concealed at the top and sides of the walls and hidden behind sheaths of greenery there must have been myriad electric lights, for sometimes there was a single color through the suite, and sometimes spokes of every color in the rainbow radiated from sources which could not be discovered. Not all those lights were pleasant, for sometimes there fell a shaft of vicious green, making all things that passed through it hideous; again, a torrent

of intense white that tore away masks of youth, pried under toilet secrets, showed the penciling of eyebrows and the splotchy rouge on cheeks; men and women blinked when that light fell upon them. At times the wheels of light whirled dizzily, but usually the movement was stealthy and irregular, the green pointing an insidious finger at a hidden group, or the white making a beauty cringe. Where the gentle rose color fell the eyes of men flashed and the women grew baffling, alluring; or again deep gold changed them into faces of antique marble; and there was a crimson which made the very water as red as blood. Frequently, through some cunning contrivance, a midnight shadow moved about the room and left a trailing silence after it.

Through this shaft of gloom a figure moved dimly toward them, and then a current of blood-red rushed over them. It was Silverman; a strange face with forehead and eyes that held the serenity of a god, but the lower part was bestial. He nodded and took the hand of Rose Martin at once in his warm, moist fingers.

" You haven't come for a long time, my dear," he said. " What brings you back, Rose?"

" My friend was curious," she said coldly. " And I am hungry. Have you the same chef?"

She turned and presented Greene, who bowed.

" Be happy, be happy, my young friends," grinned the grotesque. " If you are bored, let me hear of it. Shall I take you about, Rose?"

" We'll find our way. Ah!" she cried out as the white light struck her. " What a horrid lighting arrangement. It nearly blinded me!"

" The better to see you, my dear," chuckled Silverman. Then, as another figure approached: " Here's young Gilmore, who's been asking for you."

He turned away as Gilmore joined them, excited.

" Dashed over to get *le père* at the club," he explained, " and what do you think? There was only a message waiting for me; he had been called out—clear out of town." He clapped his hands delightedly.

" You look as if you'd been at a fire," said Dickon.

" But look at this place!" cried Harrison Gilmore. " Did you ever see anything like it?"

Rose Martin sent a covert glance of understanding at Dickon; it was very close to a wink.

He answered: " But now you're here, I'll leave you, Harrison."

He was sorry to go, for he thought of his room, and the rusty chiming of his clock; all the world seemed drab and dull; all the light was concentrated here at Silverman's. He saw the face of Gilmore lighten, but Rose Martin objected.

" You ought to stay," she advised. " You'll find Silverman's new; come along with us, Mr. Greene." And though Dickon saw Gilmore in a vain attempt to flash a signal of remonstrance to the girl, he decided to stay. They began to saunter through the rooms.

A party of girls and men swept down on the three and in the flurry of introductions and exclamations Dickon Greene noted one thing they had in common—their eyes were bright as the hunter or the hunted, he knew not which. He looked at young Gilmore and saw that his face was pasty pale; he was trembling, and even Rose Martin had lost her calm of long experience. Her glances roved, her color rose and fell.

They passed a table obscured by a delicately figured mist of ferns.

" Hush!" whispered Rose Martin, and checked them with a mischievous glance.

It was not necessary to cant one's ear, however, in order to hear everything that the man behind the fern screen was saying to the girl who sat with him.

" You weary me, my dear. Leave me at once."

She whispered excitedly.

" Don't ask me for reasons. Only fools give them."

" Have you lost your senses?

" Never raise your voice. It flats on a high pitch; very annoying."

" John Vincent, you're a beast!"

" John Vincent!" whispered Rose Martin. " Oh!"

" Smile when you venture a truism; it's

far more graceful, and shows your really excellent teeth."

"Bah!"

"Now, be off with you."

"John, you're breaking my heart."

"There's Gainor across the hall; he'll heal it for you."

"I hate him!"

"That shows poor sense."

"He's worth ten of you," she shrilled.

"That expression makes you look thirty."

"Ah," she moaned in speechless agony of anger.

"In a few days I may permit you to see me again."

"I'll never come near you. Never!"

"Nonsense. You are a fool only by impulse; your instincts are wise. In the meantime I must be alone. I am thinking."

A smothered exclamation, and then a girl came hastily through the ferns. Her mouth was pinched in with anger, but even at that she was so charming that Dickon Greene felt a distinct wonder concerning this boorish John Vincent. He waved farewell to Rose Martin and Gilmore, saw the latter flush with relief, and the careless shrug of Rose Martin's shoulders. Then he turned and went straight through the screen.

He found a man with silver hair and a jet black tuft of mustache. His eyes also were as black as ebony, and of indeterminable youth; on the whole he might have been anywhere between thirty and fifty. He had a great bulk of unwrinkled brow, an exquisitely chiseled nose, but while he sat there eating fragments of cracked walnuts from a silver tray and sipping a white wine, Dickon saw that his hands were out of proportion with the rest of his body; they were broad, blunt—the hands of a laborer.

Seeing this man, Dickon felt that the whole world was met here for riot; it was the law of the universe for this night, toppling standards. A shaft of the golden light struck Vincent and turned him into an enuied caliph in a yellow skull cap; the blank, Oriental eyes surveyed Dickon.

"Who the devil are you?" he asked.

"My name is Dickon Greene."

"Dickon Greene, I wish to be alone."

There was so little emphasis in his voice that all the edge was taken from the insult.

"I heard you say that before," said Dickon quietly, and took a chair at the table from which he could look through the ferns and see all that happened on the floor of the room. "I heard you say that before, and that's why I came in."

"You are attempting to be bold, original," announced John Vincent without emotion. "Be off, Dickon Greene."

"Not at all. I suppose you ought to be horsewhipped for insulting that girl, but to-night I don't feel like exercise. I come to be amused."

The other paused with half a walnut at his lips. He proceeded to eat it slowly, looking at Dickon all the while.

"Explain yourself," he said. "I detest riddles. Who told you I am amusing?"

"Aren't you?"

"Never."

"Utter rot. Your whole attitude is a pose." Dickon helped himself to a glass of wine and sat back to sip it. The music prevented him from going on for a moment. It thundered into an organ burst, changed to a chorus of singing men, deep and vibrant; now it was the single, pure treble of a woman's voice, and then it fell away to what was not a palpable sound at all, but only a rhythm felt rather than heard, like the hurried beating of a heart, varying, wildly excited. "Your whole attitude is a pose," went on Dickon at this point. "You aim at the cryptic. You affect laconic brevity. Very good. People only pose for the amusement of others, and I have come to be amused."

John Vincent showed not the slightest trace of anger.

He said: "I see you are a man of sense. Ordinarily I should welcome you, but to-night I am so drunk that I am sufficient company for myself."

Dickon saw that this was true. The fixity of the eye, the deadly pallor showed it.

"This intoxication is one of the most perfect things I have ever done," said Vincent. "I started five days ago, worked gradually toward a climax, and at this moment I have reached it. I have not slept

for forty-eight hours; my body is vanished; I am all mind, and with it I am looking into the hearts of men."

"Very good. Then look about you and tell me what you see. I have not come to talk to you. I have come to be talked to. Speak your thoughts aloud."

The other drained his glass and immediately filled it again.

"I have been drinking gin all day," he explained, "and white wine is always perfect after gin."

He bent his glance through the screen of ferns.

CHAPTER III.

HAPPINESS.

OVER them poured a current of the green light which dyed the cloth on the table and filled the wine glass with sinister, sparkling beauty; it changed the immobile face of John Vincent to a carving in mottled granite. When he spoke his lips were a dull gray, his teeth black, his eyes were two flat, unlighted emeralds.

"This is happiness. Look about you!"

Dickon obeyed, and though the ferns partially sheltered them from view they did not conceal what lay outside, just as a filmy curtain allows the eye to peer through, but turns what is in the room into an unreal mist. The revels were beginning now; voices came more insistently, and finally formed, no matter what other sight or sound was in the room, a background of humming monotone with peals of feminine laughter or a sharp whistling of the violins playing in frequent splashes of color across it.

"Happiness!" echoed Dickon. "Yes, by God!"

"See!" A gay group whirled down the center of the room, in front ran a childish figure with two long, filmy, Oriental sleeves, like the wings of a butterfly waving and fluttering behind her, and when the others tried to catch her she fled shrieking and darted here and there. Dickon was gathered into the enchantment of some Arabian tale.

"Very much like a dream," said John Vincent, "but most pleasant things are. Those girls who look so charming have flat, hard voices, as a rule, and they have souls which can be bought and sold again."

"What difference does that make?" cried Dickson. "True metal or gilding—the effect is the same. One moment of this may be worth seven years of drab morality. Besides, you underestimate them. Some of those girls have fine stuff in them."

"All of them have," answered John Vincent. "All of them started this to please some man. That's born in them, the desire to please men—any man. A woman will smile at a dry goods clerk and go away thrilled if he blushes. I don't know why. God made them that way, so that every man wants to take and every woman wants to give. Yes, they have fine stuff; they are like pure gold, and use wears away all their value."

"That's a passable epigram," said Dickon coldly.

"It is truth," asserted Vincent after a pause in which he munched some walnut fragments. "An hour from now I shall be hopelessly drunk and probably forget what I understand now; but at the present instant I see everything, to the heart. I tell you, Dickon Greene, not a woman has ever entered this room who did not go down the whole descent. Not one!"

Dickon saw, passing the ferns on the arm of a man, a girl with a soft violet light on her face so that she looked like a statue of richest marble. Her companion was darkly distinguished, thin-faced, hollow-eyed.

"That girl who's passing?" cried Dickon. "Would you say such a thing of her?"

"That's Sue Parker. She divorced her husband and left two children for this. Her husband brought home a musician whom she pitied, and that was what made her leave home. They started this life and it finished her. It's the excitement, the hysteria, the feeling of riches which most women have—such a store that they think they can make every man happy. Sue went to hell in a day, for her musician taught her that no man can take into his inside heart a girl who is handmarked with use. Now she's on the crest of her last wave, but inside of a month she'll be dead, for

Sue isn't one of the kind that sink to the dregs. Dead, and the news of it will send a chill through Silverman's for an instant, and then the music will play faster."

As if to fit with his words, the orchestra swept into a dance rhythm and a number of couples swung onto the floor, among them a young girl with a cloud of blond hair that took every shade of light which fell upon her. She was hardly more than a child, with the exquisite, flowerlike delicacy of childhood about her. John Vincent followed Dickon's eyes and smiled.

"That's Alva Delaney, and she's going faster than Sue Parker. She's the kind of woman who can give herself to many men while she loves one all the time. You don't believe that; but you're a little stupid, my friend. It started with a wild affair that blinded and stunned her. The man said: 'Come!' and she went. Then he left her, for of course the moment a woman comes like that to a man he's done with her. The women themselves have an instinct which warns them, and yet they're all in danger of doing it. Look at her. Very lovely, eh? Watch her big eyes go from face to face. She's looking for that first man still—that first man."

"That dog!" said Dickon hoarsely.

"Tush! Not a bit, not a bit! It's a man's nature to hunt and then to despise everything he can capture, just as it's a woman's nature to be hunted and love whatever can capture her."

"That handsome, good-natured looking woman of thirty or so?"

"She's had luck, that's all; otherwise she wouldn't be so fat. Her name is Gertrude Mills. She met the man who's with her now just after he'd quarreled with a wife he still loved. You see, he has kept on loving his wife all these years, but Gertrude comforted him and he needed comfort. No, he has never really cared for the girl, for if he had the pendulum would have swung back and he would have left her cold. It was his love for his wife that kept him true to the girl, and now she's a habit."

Dickon Greene felt a touch of fear, for it seemed that his companion was indeed looking straight into the hearts of the people around him and all that he said carried a ring of merciless truth. If the gate was opening before him into a wild fairyland, here was the warning at the gate to keep him out. The bulky hand of Vincent was raising his wine glass, closing over it with force enough to crush the flimsy bit, it seemed. He stood like Cerberus at the entrance to the underworld, and Dickon shuddered, looking at this satyr and then calling up a picture of some girl with the glow still on her cheeks and the crystal still in her eyes. Yet out of the lights, the talk, the music, a river of impulse gathered in Dickon and he surrendered himself to it, to be borne where it willed. He felt as if he had fallen asleep and wakened *within* a dream.

"Once they come here," Vincent was saying, "they topple and fall through infinity in an instant. The flame touches them and withers them in a second, and yet it is the very danger that brings new recruits, an endless stream. What is civilization but an elaborate attempt to guard our women? Through twenty years or more we school them, train their minds, prepare them to choose one man, wisely, bear children, live with fingers interlaced and downward eyes."

He turned to Dickon with a smile. "I am growing poetic; in half an hour I shall be dead drunk; unconscious. We try to school them to live with downward eyes, but at any moment they may lift their heads, meet the glance of a man—the electric power leaps from eye to eye—love—passion—misery—joy—death. Oh, that danger is everywhere walking the streets, you may say, but here it stands face to face with a woman. She knows it is here, she struggles against it, and therefore she is plowed ground ready for the seed. Plowed ground!"

His eyes flashed about the room and lingered on a figure at that instant entering. She wore a dark gown with a spray of blood-red flowers at her breast; her face was colorless, her hair black as night. Vincent lighted a cigarette and talked through the smoke.

"And she?" queried Dickon.

"There may be a Spartan even in Sybaris."

"Ah, then, you admit there are exceptions."

"Let me tell you about this exception. She is Lydia."

Somewhere Dickon had heard the name—a specified Lydia among all womankind—and the connotation chilled him.

"She has not even passion to justify her, and men go mad about her because each thinks that he will be the exception who will start her into a flame. They always fail."

"But in the name of God," cried Dickon, throwing out his arms, "are all the beautiful women in the world gathered here in Silverman's rooms?"

John Vincent looked at him with odd intentness.

"I would give all the rest of my life to be like you for one evening, Dickon Greene," he said. "No, they are not all beautiful; you see them through a glass of enchantment, but one touch of sunlight would blast the entire picture with reality. All men except myself have passed through such enthusiasms, but you—you have the eye of the dreamer, and the strength to keep your dreams alive. You will never grow old." He sighed. "You are youth personified, forever hungered, forever filled, eternal and unspoiled, eager as fire, finding, consuming what it finds, living every day and tossing yesterday into oblivion, flame-like, resistless." He paused. "I have about ten minutes more left before me," he mused, and drained another glass of the wine.

"Lydia sees you already. Now watch her. And yet, if I were she, I would hunt other grounds. You are dangerous."

In fact, the lovely Lydia, in passing, carelessly detached herself from her companion and came through the veil of ferns, herself as slender and as graceful.

"John Vincent," she said, and even with the warning which preceded, Dickon found it difficult to distinguish the artifice which warmed her voice, "you didn't tell me you would be here!"

But Vincent leaned back and blew a faint cloud of smoke toward the girl.

"Run along, Lydia," he said. "He still amuses me, and so I am keeping him for a time. Not even your key can unlock him just now."

Lydia's companion came up, and she turned to him with an unmoved smile, saying: "Vincent is getting drunk again. Let's go on." As she left, her glance lingered a moment on the face of Dickon; he wanted to start up and make some explanation of his companion's rudeness and then he felt the quiet smile of John Vincent and relaxed in his chair.

"What a pity Lydia is wasted," murmured Vincent. "Think of her on the stage!"

CHAPTER IV.

LYDIA.

NOW through the rooms there was rising a sound which even the noblest roll of the music could not quite drown; quick, hard, rattling, it lived through everything—the voices of men and women sharpened by abandon. For the wine flowed fast, and now the soft-footed waiters bore food no more, but only trays of shimmering glassware, or they pushed the little rubber-tired wagons of ice and wine.

A small youth with plump white hands and plump white face moved across the floor with fumbling footsteps like a man walking in the dark. His eyes were empty, his smile vacuous, and as he passed each table he stammered: "Willie Ufert wants go home. Who take Willie home? Poor Willie Ufert!" A wit cocked a napkin into a fool's cap topped with a red rose in lieu of a bell, and placed it on Willie's head. Such yells of delight came in applause of this remarkable jest that the wit felt called upon to explain how the inspiration had come to him. He staggered to the center of the floor and stood with arms outstretched, balancing himself in the manner of one who walked a tight wire over a vast gorge. A hush of expectancy.

"Ladies an' gen'lmun," he began, and stopped, convulsed with laughter.

"Ladies an' genl'mun," he repeated, and then his face went blank. "I want nuzzer drink. Waiter, dammit, why don't I get nuzzer drink?"

If his former jest had brought great returns, this speech called out a rapture of laughter. Two servants bore the wit back

to his chair where he collapsed into the arms of the girl beside him. She waited until he slept and then pushed him away, where he sprawled with mouth open, arms dangling, like a murdered man. The girl went to another table.

The lights flashed out. It was not complete dark, but by contrast the rooms were swallowed in blackness. This lasted until complete silence lay in the halls, and then the music breathed up in a dancing rhythm, weird, far off. From two entrances skeletons appeared, each figure bright, perhaps, with phosphorescent paint. Fans whirred through the rooms musty odors which overwhelmed the delicate breaths of the flowers, and the graveyard forms stalked on with rattling steps. A drunken man awoke and groaned with terror; a girl screamed, and the thin sound shook and wavered like a ray of light. Straight to the tables the phantoms strode and seized upon the women. The men strove to protect them, but they strove half-heartedly, and the girls were torn away, some laughing, some swearing like troopers, some weeping in genuine terror. One of these ghostly figures paused near the table of Dickon and gibbered with glowing, cavernous mouth, then moved on.

The floor was already crowded with the ghosts and their prizes; the music grew louder and they began to dance. The terror snapped; the girls laughed shrill and short with horror and delight mingled, and Dickon glimpsed a death's head bending close to the tilted face of Lydia. The fleshless lips touched hers.

"Horrible!" gasped Dickon.

"New," sneered John Vincent.

The music went out in the midst of a measure, the ghosts disappeared in a twinkling, and the lights came up like a dawn of mingled gold and rose. The hubbub, which had been awed to a pause, now burst out afresh, for the strange spectacle banished the last. The bacchanal rose to a wild crescendo; there was more dancing, with feet more uncertain; a couple whirled by carrying their glasses and sipping as they danced. Then came Silverman to enjoy the sensation of his newest freak.

"He hasn't eaten a morsel," said John Vincent so loudly that the words must have reached Silverman's ear. "He hasn't drunk a drop. He makes a revel and then feasts his eyes on the beastliness of others. You know of the fairy who could turn men into swine? Silverman!"

The green light struck Silverman and changed him into a satyr, a demoniac; he scowled and slipped into a shadow like a thief caught in the act. "When I think how that glutton sits down three times a day to a table which is covered with dainties for which he has no appetite, and how—"

Dickon heard no more; all the room vanished; he saw only Anton Sparini at the door with another girl. She was slipping a furred, silken wrap from her shoulders, and the light flashed on her bare arms, on a jewel at her throat, on another in her hair. She seemed in the cloak to be throwing away her armor and stepping defenseless into the danger. Dickon stood up.

"It is the distance, the wine, the music," he said in a low voice. "She cannot be real!"

"Ah!" said John Vincent; and in turn rose. The moment his weight was on his feet he staggered and had to save himself by clutching the arm of Dickon. "It is she!" whispered Vincent, and his hand tightened on Dickon's arm.

"Who?"

"Incredible! But it is she; and I am drunk—damnation!"

"Who?" repeated Dickon.

There was a spot of color in the leaden cheek of Vincent.

"The one woman!" He turned a fierce eye upon Dickon. "You? She?"

"Bah! You are drunk!"

"Drunk! Yes, yes, drunk and harmless. My young friend Dickon, my dear friend, take me by the arm, so, and lead me to her presence, supporting me cleverly so that none could guess I walk by assistance. You hear? I must speak to her."

He attempted to make a step, but his knees buckled and he would have pitched to his face on the floor had not Dickon caught him beneath the shoulders and lowered him roughly into his chair.

"Her name?" repeated Dickon.

But in his chair Vincent seemed to re-

cover his self-possession. He studied Dickon with bright, mocking eyes.

"The man is Anton Sparini; the woman is Marie Guilbert."

The very sound of her name fell upon Dickon like a cold, pure dew.

"Chains of spider-web, chains of spider-web," laughed John Vincent. "But, God, how they hold!"

A dozen men had swept from every corner of the room toward the newcomers, and first of all, Silverman was there, holding the hand of Marie Guilbert in both of his. Anton Sparini, his eyes on fire, was bowing right and left and presenting his acquaintances as they came up. Some of them walked unsteadily; the faces of all were flushed; and Dickon burned when he noted how their fingers lingered over the hand of the girl. He thought of what Vincent had said—fine gold worn away by use—pure, soft gold. He could read her mind by her smile and her gesture. She saw nothing but the adulation, felt nothing but the triumph, and when they moved away from the door and paused at a table, she allowed herself to be lifted—or did she jump of her own accord?—onto a chair. Red wine was poured, red wine was in her hand, red wine was raised flashing toward her on every side; and then she drank.

"She is gone!" said Dickon aloud. "Let her go. Why not?"

The music struck into a waltz measure and the group around Marie Guilbert paused, milling around her, each with his request for the dance.

"Look at me," said Dickon, and he shook John Vincent by the shoulder. "Sober up; tell me about her in ten words."

But the other was chuckling, and his eyes were growing wild.

"Ropes of spider-web!" he repeated. "They have you, Dickon Greene. You are on fire; you will burn to a crisp! Good!"

"The girl! Marie Guilbert!"

"I shall tell you. She came out of the gutter; in the slime of the city Marie grew up. Anton Sparini found her, put her on the vaudeville stage, spent a hundred thousand to advertise her, gave her the victory."

"And she? Sparini?" said Dickon, grown hoarse.

"She made him her—friend. No more. They have spun the web for her a thousand times, Silverman, all of them; but she kept away—she was only friendly. But to-night she is here and she is with Sparini, and it means only one thing; the fire has touched Marie; she will be a cinder; a shell; she is lost; like you; like me—the fire—"

He dropped his head on his hands and was instantly asleep.

When Dickon stepped through the ferns the dance was ended and the couples streamed back toward their tables through a jangle of voices. The center of a cluster, Marie walked by, close to him, and when an excited youth touched her shoulder to call her attention, she brushed his fingers away, laughing, and looked full in the face of Dickon. He felt her glance counter on his with a shock, and as her laughter died out into a smile his soul rushed up to his eyes and poured out at her. She was gone on, and a voice cried in Dickon: "It is love!"

Dimly his glance followed her to a table. He must get there, but he must go with some one who would furnish an excuse for the intrusion, and introductions as well; then, providentially, he saw the black gown and the wine-red flowers of Lydia across the hall. There was a man on either side of her, but she was watching Dickon with open interest, probably because of that repulse which Vincent had given her earlier in the evening. No matter for reasons, he smiled, and when she responded he went straight to her and bowed beside her table. She rose at once.

"I forgot all about you," she said, and to her companions, with an insolence which Dickon felt must be habitual: "Amuse yourselves; this is important." And she took Dickon's arm.

"They will hate me for that," she said.

"For a while. Afterward it will make them seek you again."

"They will?"

When she turned to him he saw how perfectly unmarred she was, every line firm, her forehead smooth as glass, her eyes untroubled. She wore no make-up; whatever the secrets of Lydia might be, they were certainly not of the toilet.

"Surely," said Dickon. "They will

come to find out which of them you intended to insult."

"Ah!" said Lydia, and she studied him while she laughed. It was very pleasant to hear her, and Dickon decided that if she sang her voice would be a high soprano, crystal-clear, and a little thin. He knew she was studying him, but it was oddly agreeable to be examined; perhaps because she was so frank about it.

"You were looking for some one; can I help you?"

"I was looking for you to apologize."

"Yes?"

"For letting Vincent speak to you as he did."

"He speaks that way to every one; besides, he was drunk."

"I'm glad you understand."

"Perfectly. I can tell you what he said of me afterward."

"Really?"

"He said that I am a professional wrecker of the happiness of men. Bah! I have heard him say it." Her face contracted, and the effort with which she managed her smile immediately afterward left her flushed.

"You are quite wrong; he only warned me that you are very charming, and very cold."

"He hates me, but he has a reason for it. You see, I understand every scruple of that snake soul of his; but because I understand him he accuses me of being like himself. Shall I tell you the whole truth about myself?"

Dickon waited, lowering his eyes for fear she might read in them.

"But you will wonder why I talk like this to you."

"I don't wonder at all. You were slandered before me, and you wish to be understood. My name is Dickon Greene, and for the rest, why, I have an idea that you may know a great deal more about me than I guess."

"Ah!" murmured Lydia, and they looked straight at each other. "I like you," she said impulsively. "And do you know that implies the truth I was about to tell you? I want men to be my friends, and friendships can be very beautiful, don't you think?"

"Of course."

"I guessed that you would understand."

"You can trust me," said Dickon, "I shall never breathe a word of your great secret."

She looked sharply at him; his face was profoundly solemn. All at once her eyes narrowed and twinkled.

"I suspect you of being rather deep," murmured Lydia.

"On the contrary there is not a secret about me."

"Tell me the truth. Why did you come to my table?"

"I'll be perfectly frank."

"Good!"

"As open as you have been with me. Well, it was a selfish motive." He saw her both suspicious and prepared to be amused. "I thought it would be wonderful if people could see Dickon Greene walking with the most beautiful girl at Silverman's."

She lifted her head and laughed so freely that Dickon quite forgot everything he had heard from John Vincent, and thought her charming; the laughter made her bloom.

"We are going to get on," said Lydia, her eyes very bright, "if you will promise not to quizz me any more."

"Upon my honor, I'm as open as day. Do you know that even John Vincent, whom you dislike, said that you are the loveliest woman in Manhattan?"

"He did? That was before Marie Guilbert came in."

"Afterward."

"Tush! I saw him stand up and stare at her."

"But he sat down again."

"He was too drunk to stand."

"Not at all. He said: 'Her mouth is too wide,' and sat down."

"He said that?"

"He has a close eye," nodded Dickon, judiciously. He paused and they were close to the table of the actress. "There she is. Now what do you think yourself?"

Lydia half closed her eyes to judge, but Dickon saw her lips press together a trifle.

"I think she is exquisite—but John Vincent is supposed to be a judge. How they buzz about her!"

"But she has a good background."

Indeed, the two other girls at the table were comparatively ordinary in appearance. Lydia looked quickly from Dickon to Marie, and back again. She seemed to hesitate.

"Do you know her?"

"No."

"Then I'll introduce you." She watched Dickon closely, but he began to turn away.

"Not in this mob; unless she's a friend of yours?"

"See! Why, it's a triumph for Marie!" He saw the struggle in Lydia, her desire to share some of this adulation, her fear lest she would be placing herself beside a flame that would make her seem wan by contrast.

"Mob judgment," murmured Dickon.

"Come," said Lydia, decided. "I want you to hear her talk. She has an odd vocabulary."

CHAPTER V.

THE HOAX.

As they walked toward the table a spin of the lights whirled the room into dizzy confusion; then a rush of rich gold made everything resplendent. Coming close Dickon searched Anton Sparini. He was a tall, significant-looking man with one of those perfect Grecian faces which look young at forty and weak in spite of the strong lines of the chin; when he talked he used his hands a good deal in the fashion of a foreigner who feels that the words he speaks are not strong enough or clear enough to convey his meaning; his heavy eyebrows were so flexible that his face repeatedly lengthened with surprise or delight, but they could again contract and darken his whole expression in an instant. A cigarette was between his nervous fingers now, and his gestures were traced by zigzags of smoke.

"Do you remember me, Marie?" asked Lydia.

The girl leaned back in her chair. In that tide of golden light there was something Olympian in her beauty and her careless grace.

"I'll say I remember you, Lydia!"

Dickon blinked; his goddess toppled from the heights and sat near, a mere woman.

"I want you to meet Dickon Greene; he's been clamoring for an introduction ever so long."

There was no better way to make a man grow reserved and cold than such an introductory speech, but Dickon had not an instant to think of this. The eyes of the girl had grown serious as they fell upon him, and he found himself staring into them as far as one may look into a blue evening mist.

"I've seen you before," she said positively. "Oh, I remember! Grab a chair, won't you? Sit down, Lydia."

Sparini was at her right, but in the vacancy at her left they took chairs, Dickon next to her.

"I passed you a minute ago and you were looking at me in a queer way. Why?" asked Marie Guilbert.

She was so direct and alert, so overflowing with happiness that Dickon felt a mist brushed from before him; he could see her more and more clearly. All the time her eyes danced over him and away; they flashed with recognition here and there like sparks leaping from a battery.

"That was because I had something to say to you," said Dickon gravely.

She checked herself in the very act of smiling at some passing face and looked seriously at Dickon.

"Say," she said, "are you in the profession?"

"No."

"All right, shoot, then. But you sounded like third-act stuff with the curtain only five minutes away."

"This is what I wanted to say: You shouldn't be here."

For just a moment she rested her elbow on the edge of the table and looked at him intently; but then she laughed.

"Oh, I see. That's your regular line?"

Dickon shrugged his shoulders and turned away, and at the same time a crown was placed on the head of Marie. She turned toward a tall, handsome youth who leaned above her, resting his elbows on the back of Dickon's chair.

"You don't know me. I'm Tom Oliver, and I have a bet on you."

"*Pfui!*" cried Sparini, gathering his

brows until his eyes were merely sharp points of light. "This is new; this is odd talk. A bet?"

"Hush up, Anton." Without looking at him she reached out her hand and patted Sparini into good humor. "What's the bet, Tommy?"

"One hundred that I could make you sing."

"How?"

"With these. Red roses, you know." He touched the wreath on her hair. "It ought to be worth one song to look as pretty as you do now, eh? Listen! There's the music!"

"It's for a dance."

"They won't dance if you sing."

"Tommy, I'll do it."

"Marie! Marie!" groaned Sparini. "The smoke! You'll ruin your throat."

But she was already gone, on the arm of Tommy Oliver, and walking up and down she sang; the dancers who had poured out from the tables were halted in full career, the buzz of voices hushed, the music itself drew down to a light accompaniment of stringed instruments, and the singing of Marie possessed Silverman's. Dickon saw Lydia lose color with envy and he managed to seem indifferent; he even returned the covert smile she sent him, as though implying that they two, at least, saw through all this. As for the rest they were agape, and Sparini sat with his hands clasped before his face, overcome. It was a colorful voice, not over-strong, without a great range; if one looked away from Marie Guilbert it seemed quite an ordinary performance, but seeing her dance about Tommy Oliver, she seemed to press out the music with the rhythm of her feet; every one who listened was swaying a little with the catch of the song. She only sang through one chorus and then began to dance with Oliver; they clamored for an encore, but when she only waved over Tommy's shoulder, the couples poured out on the floor again.

"You see," said Dickon, "the background is what does it."

Lydia flushed with pleasure, for she had felt overwhelmed, crushed, forgotten. "I suppose you're right, but—what's happened to Marie, Anton?"

"Ah!" he cried. "She is wonderful, no?"

"On fire."

"*Pfui!* Yes! What has happened? I shall tell you in one word: Lydia, for six, eight, ten months I spend money like water to make Marie great. They came to see her, the crowds, and she charmed them—with her voice, her face, her dancing—so!"

"But never made a riot, eh?"

"No, no! But to-night there was a change. When she stepped out from the wings I saw it coming. She stood close to the lights without dancing. She sang, and drove them mad—mad! They stand up. They shout. They throw flowers. *Pfui!* I could have wept. I saw—what do you say?—she was arrive! When she came off-stage I was there waiting—I kiss her hands. 'Marie,' I say, 'you are divine! What is happen?' 'Nothing, everything,' she says. 'Listen!' Outside, the house it stamps, it raves; the gallery they whistle—so! She stood with her hand on her heart; she was transform; she was like one who drinks. 'What is it?' I say. 'It's because I love 'em all, and they know it,' says Marie. She is so quaint, no? 'Besides, it's the first day of spring,' she says. She goes back; she sings; she dances; with a sweep of her hand—see—she makes their hearts to jump. Triumph! In one second she is arrive, she is great, she is famous. No? And when she comes off the last time her breath is quick, her eyes are wild. 'Anton, I owe it all to you,' she says. 'You are a—what you call—brick!' I ask her, will she come to Silverman's, for the world must see her. She would go to the end of the world, she says; so she is here!"

The music ended, and out of the tangle on the floor Marie Guilbert came surrounded by a group that swept about the table like a bright wave; but as she sat down she met the impersonal glance of Dickon and the laughter was shocked from her eyes.

"Now tell me," she said.

"What?"

"Why I should not be here."

"I'll tell you that when you leave."

"Wild horses couldn't draw Sparini away from here now."

" Certainly not. So come with me."

He puzzled her, and therefore she was interested, and when she looked around at all the gayety the grave face of Dickon seemed to outweigh the rest.

" Is there really something wrong?"

" A great deal."

" Well?"

" I can't tell you here."

A rush of conversation broke in between them. It was whole minutes later before she turned to him again; by this time the party at Silverman's was reaching a screaming climax and now and then a woman's voice cut in on the clamor with a wild, hysterical laughter that brought every one up short—for an instant, and then eyes grew bright and the chatter began once more. They were oblivious to everything except the belief that happiness was to be found at Silverman's; it blinded them, made them reckless.

" I don't drink," she was saying to Tommy Oliver, who had pressed a wine glass toward her.

" Why not?"

" It goes to my head. You're very nice, Tommy Oliver, but I don't want to see two of you at once. " Then she touched Dickon's arm. " Do you really know something?"

He smiled at her without answering.

" Of course it's all a hoax."

He shrugged his shoulders.

" If you can't tell me here at the table we'll dance, and you can tell me there."

A thread held her to him, a thread of spider-web silk, and it was so meager that when he stood up with her for the dance he wondered how he had drawn her as far as this. Over her shoulder he looked into the icy eyes of Lydia; he knew that he had burned one bridge behind him. Then Marie was in his arms, and the rhythm of the waltz carried them away. She looked up quickly, for Dickon danced well, and at the flash of her glance he felt his control washed away, and he was carried out into a sea of abandon.

" Steady, Dickon Greene," he muttered. " Steady!" And in this utterance was almost a prayer.

" Now there's not a soul can hear."

" Not here," he answered.

" It *is* a hoax."

" Come away from Silverman's."

" For how long?"

" Long enough to drive around the block."

He watched her weigh him on the one side and her curiosity on the other; curiosity turned the balance. Without a word she slipped from the crowd and into the hall. There, while they waited for her car: " Do you know how I feel?" she said, eying him up and down and laughing.

" Well?"

" Like an opening monologue on the big time."

" And that means?"

" Plain scared."

" Around the block," she told her driver when they stepped into a low, rakish closed car. " Jim cuts the corners," she warned Dickon. " So talk fast. What d'you know? Hand it to me straight, and tell me where you live."

That sting of romance which he felt when he first saw her was gone, like a pricked bubble. But all her slang did not bring him close to laughter. He remembered what John Vincent had said of her; she had grown up in the very shadow of the underworld, and yet she was clean.

" One block gone," said Marie Guilbert impatiently. " Three left. If you've done this on a bet you win, and I'm the fall guy; if it isn't a bet cut the mystery; don't be up-stage."

If a marble Venus had come to life—and asked for a cigarette, or Da Vinci's smiling woman had stepped out of her frame and sung a snatch of ragtime it could not have startled Dickon more than the vocabulary of Marie Guilbert. But he looked so steadily at her that her smile came and went.

" You'll have to do something before you can listen."

She nodded, and her eyes brightened again in expectation of the jest.

" Lean close to the window and take a deep breath," he directed.

She obeyed with a side glance of amusement.

" Now sit back and close your eyes."

Once more she followed the direction.

"Hurry!" she said. "We must be almost back!"

"We're not going back," said Dickon.

"Not going back?"

"You've had a breath of good, clean air, and you've closed your eyes and got the light of Silverman's out of your head. So we're not going back."

"Why?" she inquired, a little amused still.

"Silverman's won't do for you."

"Go on," she chuckled. "Silverman's is the cream; they break their hearts to get there. They curl up and die when their day at Silverman's is done—but Silverman's won't do for me?"

"It won't. It pleased you for a moment. It was new. It went to your head. But now you've got away from it and it disgusts you. You see that it's full of trickery. Those lights, for instance, and the liquor, and all that. You seen how that place turns men and women into beasts and it sickens you."

The last spark of mirth was gone from her face.

"And the way men looked at you in there—you remember it now, and it makes your flesh crawl."

"Stop talking!" she cried suddenly. "I *do* remember!"

Then Marie recovered herself, and said in a low voice: "Tell him to go back and send in for Sparini."

"We're not going back even for that. If Sparini wants to know why you left—well, I'll trust you to tell him with sufficient emphasis. You're going straight home, I think."

"Who are you?" muttered the girl. "What are you?"

"Dickon Greene," he answered. "Plain Dickon Greene, at your service."

She laid an impulsive hand on his arm and then, seeming to go weak, fell back against the cushion, her hand still in its new place.

"Take me home; quick!"

He gave the order, and neither of them spoke. until the car was halted. When Dickon stepped out onto the curb and looked back, he saw the face of the girl very clear, very white among the shadows of the cab, like a drowned face floating in a black river.

He helped her out, and the car purred softly away, but Marie Guilbert stopped Dickon with a gesture when he turned to go with her into the house.

"I don't know how it is," said she in the same small, troubled voice, "but I don't want you to see me—just now. I'll say good-by to you out here in the dark."

He took off his hat and held out his hand, but she did not seem to see the gesture, and placed her own hand on his arm.

"Listen! I dunno who handed you the tip you've played on me—but you're square, I think." She found his hand and her fingers closed firmly over it. "The rest of 'em are so smooth they slip; but you're square, Dickon Greene, and if you happen to drop around at any time to give me the once-over, you'll find the latch hanging outside. Good-by!"

He watched her slip through the door which the liveried house servant held open for her, and on down the hall, hurrying with her head bent a little and the long cloak fluttering about her shoulders. But where the hall swerved to the left she turned and cast one glance behind her, a hunted look.

Oddly enough, out of all the evening the thing which remained most vividly with Dickon was that last glance from Marie Guilbert. He wanted the fresh air in his face, he wanted to think, and above all, he wished to keep away as long as possible from the drab room in which he lived; so Dickon walked home. He went with a long, swift step, for of all the programs for self-education which he had laid down the only one which he had followed was a routine of exercise; but this night his pace varied. It quickened when he thought of Silverman's banquet rooms, it slowed when he remembered John Vincent, and once he came to a full halt with the last picture of Marie Guilbert, looking as if she fled from herself.

With his hand on the door to his room Dickon heard the clock within chiming midnight, and he sighed; for it seemed as if his old self were in that room, looking up

from his book, while a new Dickon Greene stood there with his hand on the door.

CHAPTER VI.

FREEDOM.

THE major part of the routine which kept Dickon in trim was his walking, and the major part of his walking was the trip to the bank each morning and the stroll back at night, a lengthy walk, for the bank was far down Fifth Avenue, and his room was on upper Broadway. The morning after Silverman's was gray and wet, and Dickon bowled down Riverside Drive against such a snapping wind that when he came to the park at Seventy-Second Street, he was breathing hard. He had turned down the right-hand path when a burst of sunlight rushed about him, not the chill winter sun, but a rich warmth upon his face and hands, so that Dickon involuntarily took off his hat to it and looked up. The wind was splitting the clouds and hurrying them north; he looked down and noted the swelling black buds of an aspen, stained with rusty brown where the sun gleamed on them; and from the ground he heard a murmur of moisture seeping, as if the grass were bursting up to meet the sun. The rumble of street cars and the rush of traffic down Central Park West grew suddenly dim, as if he had turned a corner.

" It's spring!" chuckled Dickon. " Marie Guilbert knew that last night, and I'm half a day late."

He felt an irresponsible happiness that had stayed with him since Silverman's, even through his dreams of the night, a feeling that there were infinite possibilities in the world, and as he went on he noted the slender naked limbs of the trees, and how they melted away in the faint blue haze of that March morning.

The blare of a horn, a frantic yell; he found himself in the middle of a great boulevard with a taxi rocking away in the distance and the driver leaning out to shake a fist at him. He distinguished something about " Damned, sleepy-headed fool!"

Dickon Green merely waved his hand joyously. He felt a great desire to seize the hand of that fellow and shake his very fist; he laughed with great good nature at the nurse girl who stood on the curb still gaping at the closeness of his escape; it was all he could do to resist a mad impulse to run to that gardener yonder and clap him on the shoulder and bid him look up to the blueness of the sky. There was beauty in the world, and Dickon overflowed with the joy of living. At the bottom of his happiness, though, there was a small, stinging sense of sadness, as if he had found a great treasure and lost it again.

Coming out onto Fifty-Ninth Street a ragged fellow with a basket of flowers over one arm thrust a bunch of violets under his nose.

" Here you are, but keep the flowers." And he tossed him the first coin his fingers touched, a fifty-cent piece. The vendor was ragged and unshaven enough to pass for a foreigner, and he had even cultivated an accent to help out the illusion, but now he gripped the coin and looked after Dickon with a wholly American grin.

" Good luck to you both!" he shouted.

" What the devil does he mean by that?" muttered Dickon, but he had no time to reflect on the mystery, for the crowd on the pavement sent out an eddy which caught him and swept him along in the downtown current.

Usually he wove through a mass of people such as this, but now he cut down his gait to a stroll and drifted with the rest, for in all his life he had never met with such a jolly lot. They were like one of those gay football throngs which pour toward a stadium in autumn, and by their colors Dickon knew the two parties, employer and employee, all as happy as if they were journeying to receive a legacy. Now and again he glimpsed a lowering face, but they were merely the places of shadow which gave color to the sunshine. The very buildings he passed were symbols of gayety, the Plaza Hotel on his right, receding; the Savoy on his left, then the old Vanderbilt mansion, oddly rambling and out of place in the heart of uptown Manhattan.

Almost by surprise he found himself at the door of the bank with its columns of

rusty granite—not fifty years old, he knew, but the dinginess of ages hung about it. It seemed morally wrong to enter that place of shadow and soft footsteps, for his place was still with the crowd which poured on down the street past Madison Square to where the Flatiron Building rose doubly large in the mist with the traffic of Broadway and Fifth Avenue washing about its sharp corner. Just to wander through Manhattan was enough business in life.

He pulled open the door with a savage jerk and saw that for the first time in seven years he was late.

The porter stared at him, the boy who kept the door to the women's department sent across a sympathetic grin; for in Whittaker's Bank tardiness was so rare that one might say it did not exist. He expected a chill to run quivering up his spine and actually paused that downheartedness might take hold of him; but to his very real astonishment he felt nothing but the most perfect indifference, and even when he conjured up the stern face of Henry Whittaker it was only to shrug his shoulders. Inside his working quarters he looked about him with new eyes through the fence of heavy glass and wooden partitions and decorative steel bars; scrolls of tool-proof steel molded in grotesque image of interlacing leaves. Dickon Green sat down on a high stool and laughed. His assistant paused with a bundle of money in either hand and stared, angrily at first, because Dickon's lateness had put extra work on his shoulders, but at length a twinkle of light came in his eyes.

"What's the good word, Greene?" he asked. "Has the old Mossback bumped off?"

For there was an ancient uncle of Dickon Greene's in Michigan with a fabulous fortune in electricity.

"The Mossback will live to buy my headboard," answered Dickon. "And if he did die he'd leave his money to a Protestant Mission in France."

"Well," sighed the assistant, "you look rich this morning. I'd price that smile at ten thousand, at least."

"You begin to think like Hank Whittaker himself," said Dickon Greene. "I picked this smile in the park; if you want one like it, stick your nose out the door and grab one off the pavement."

He gestured toward the window, and while the other cashed a check for a patron Dickon slipped off his stool to greet little Miss Garthwaite from the woman's department. She was one of those who begin withering at twenty-five, and Miss Garthwaite was fifty, with gray-white hair, and shoulders which seemed eternally pinched and bowed with cold. She sent a curt good morning at Dickon and a nod toward his assistant.

"A good morning?" echoed Dickon, opening the door for her as she left with her package. "I'll wager you don't know how bully fine it is." He took her arm and when she glanced sharply up to him, half tired, half suspicious, he smiled down into her face until the weariness fled. "Why, Miss Garthwaite, it's spring!"

He went on down the main corridor with her, still holding her arm, and her drab voice was saying: "Spring? Really?"

"It came up and fairly tapped me on the shoulder while I was walking across the park. Let's celebrate!"

They were opposite the half-walled den of Vice-President Gordon McSwain Loring, an iron soul with an iron face and only one weakness in the world—roses. He kept a vase of them always in a corner of his office, and now Dickon Greene leaned over the partition, snapped the stem of a splendid pink bud, and returned with it to Miss Garthwaite. She was pale with concern.

"Mr. Greene!" she murmured. "What in Heaven's name has come into you?"

"Spring!"

"Mr. Loring—"

"Would discharge me? He didn't see."

"But why did you do it?"

"Because it's just the thing for you." And he held the bud with its spray of leaves against her breast, conjured a pin out of empty air, apparently, and fastened it in place. She covered it with both hands and flashed a guilty glance about.

"Confound it," said Dickon; "he won't see it, and if he does he'll never dream that it doesn't belong there. Honor!"

They stood at the door of the women's

department, and she turned to him with a trace of color in her cheeks. Her lips, compressed by thirty years of pain, trembled into a vague semblance of a smile and a ghost of youth looked out of her eyes.

" Dickon Greene, you child!"

As the door closed on her he walked back rather thoughtfully to his cage, for all the dead crispness had left the throat of Miss Garthwaite and it was the voice of a girl that he had heard.

" If it isn't a legacy," broke out his assistant later that day, " I wish you'd knock off that tune, Greene. You've been humming the same thing for two hours."

Little packages of greenbacks were heaped in front of Dickon, five hundred dollars to a bundle. He raised one of them.

" Money can't make a fellow sing, Billy. On my honor I could trade this bundle for my bank account and come out even."

" Well," growled Billy, " if the coin isn't the fruit and flower of the job you have, tell me what is?"

It tumbled Dickon out of a whole-floor apartment fifteen stories above Park Avenue and thudded him back on his stool. The fruit and the flower—five hundred dollars as a harvest from seven years of work; he whistled softly, and then smiled with narrowing eyes into the future. He might have sat there without moving for ten seconds or half an hour, but the next he knew was Joe, the office boy, at his side with a message that President Whittaker wished to see him at once in the office.

The president was opening the window when Dickon entered, and as he went back toward his desk he hobbled more painfully than usual. His left knee had been fearfully injured in his boyhood, and even now, it was said, he had hardly a moment free from pain. Under that handicap he worked his way to eminence, and both the victory and the price of it were written on his face. The brow was clear and smooth, and the eyes as untroubled as the eyes of a child, with a disarming frankness which was one of Whittaker's greatest weapons; but his cheeks fell away to wrinkled hollows, his mouth was colorless, straight, with one deep, sardonic line carved on either side of it. Even his bristling, curly hair was of two colors, pure white at the sides, but gleaming black in the center. He looked mildly upon Dickon.

" Sit down, Mr. Greene."

Dickon took a chair and waited. This gentle beginning might cover anything from a compliment to a sharp dismissal. The eyes smiled upon him; the mouth damned him black. It was the custom of Whittaker to make these pauses in the early part of an interview, for there were few men who could face him in silence for long without beginning to show signs of perturbation; but Dickon Greene never wavered. In reality that had been the chief cause for his early promotion under the president, for above all, Whittaker demanded sturdiness of character from his subordinates, and if Dickon had not been advanced more rapidly thereafter it was because his sturdiness did not go hand in hand with fire. As the president once said to Loring: " Greene is good flint, I know; but I've never been able to hit him with the kind of steel that brings a spark." As he looked at his teller to-day he sensed more keenness, more acid. The mist seemed to lift from those gray eyes; the dream left them. He wanted this final look before he made up his mind; and the examination convinced him that he was right.

" Greene," he said without prologue, " you are due to get a raise. Beginning with this month's check your salary will increase by five hundred dollars a year."

He watched for the gleam of joy, the burst of gratitude, but Dickon Greene was thinking calmly and swiftly. Five hundred dollars increase meant that he might be able to save the entire sum by close living and no speculation on the side. Five hundred a year meant five thousand in ten years; ten thousand in twenty years; twenty thousand in forty years. That, plus the compounded interest, would give him enough to live on, but forty years added to his thirty—he saw himself a bent, ancient man. And this was the first day of spring.

" Five hundred?"

" It's not enough," concluded Whittaker. " Do I want him at a higher price? Is he worth it?"

He weighed Dickon Greene as if in the palm of his hand. Then his fingers closed and he had determined to have his man. It was the new gleam, the strange gleam in the eyes of his teller that decided him, and upon this thing of spirit he sought to set his grip. In the meantime he heard an astonishing announcement from Dickon, for it was uttered in the lifeless voice which indicates fixed purpose.

" Money is the whole fruit and flower of this—job," said Dickon, quoting. " Five hundred is not enough."

" Then what do you want?"

" Opportunity."

" He's received an offer from another place," decided Whittaker. " But I will have him."

" Greene, you have metal of the sort I want in this place. I need you. Now tell me what you want."

" Opportunity."

" You said that before."

" I say it again. For seven years I've been with this bank. To-day I have five hundred dollars in my account."

" This has been your apprenticeship, Greene."

" Exactly. Now that period is ended. I want a man's work."

" My boy, I like to hear this."

" No, you don't understand. For seven years you've been paying me more than I was worth. To-day you can't reach my price."

" Name it."

" Happiness," said Dickon.

" Eh?"

" Happiness. Can you offer me that?"

Whittaker frowned.

" Don't talk nonsense, Greene. I'm not a poet. Let me have your terms in cold cash."

" If cold cash could buy what I want, I'd set a figure."

" You're a visionary." He relaxed his tight fist and allowed the impalpable thing to escape from his hand. Then, settling back in his chair and looking at Dickon as if from a distance: " Where do you expect this happiness?"

" Somewhere outside this bank. Possibly in the streets; possibly in the park." He smiled oddly. " In a word," he concluded, rising, " I want to meet men, not bank accounts; women, not lists of mortgages."

It was perfectly plain to Whittaker that his teller had become drunk with an idea, but nevertheless he felt that there was force in the man, a lifting power which he had not guessed at during the past seven years. He caught at the new Dickon Greene, fumbling to find his mind.

" You've been reading Dumas, my boy, and the stuff has gone to your head. Upon my word you talk like a young hero about to take his horse and his rapier and ride out in search of adventure."

" Exactly. You've said the thing more clearly than I could have."

And he said this with such perfect seriousness that the president looked at him more closely, with a touch of anxiety. He said at length, dryly: " I suppose a blessing would hardly be in order, but if you wish I can speed you on your way with a discharge from this bank.

" Thank you."

" Damn it, Greene, don't be an ass! Go back to your desk and talk to me to-morrow. Where do you expect to find this adventure?"

In answer, Dickon Greene tipped back his head and his laughter was soft, but it filled the room. There was something about it that gave Whittaker a hint of exhaustless muscular energy.

" I'll find it in the streets, Mr. Whittaker. A thousand adventures rubbed shoulders with me on the way to the bank this morning. You could find them; any one could find them; simply step out and jerk the curtain from your eyes."

It was by all odds the most singular mania that had ever come to the attention of Whittaker. He rubbed his chin and his mild eyes considered Dickon Greene from head to foot.

" Just tell me how you go about it, lad."

" In this way," smiled Dickon. " Go out and stand with your eyes closed facing the sun until you get the feel of it inside you; then take three deep breaths, open your eyes, and there you are entering a new world. Good-by, Mr. Whittaker."

" Wait!" called the president. He

dragged himself from his chair, set his teeth over a groan as he caught his knee against the edge of the desk, and so hobbled to Dickon and put a lean hand upon his arm. Under his fingertips he felt the muscles roll and slip.

"Good-by, Dickon," he said. "When you're through with your fling come back to me. I'll have use for you."

"Thank you, sir. Good-by."

"And God bless you," murmured Whittaker, but the door closed on his words.

CHAPTER VII.

THE STRANGER.

AS Dickon stepped out Harrison Gilmore paused on his way down the corridor and his face lighted.

"Dickon!" he cried, and grinned in the most knowing manner. "What deviltry were you up to last night?"

"I? I only looked on."

"Looking on!" gasped Gilmore. "Man, didn't you walk away with Marie Guilbert?"

"Not a bit. She decided to go home."

"Oh," nodded Harrison Gilmore.

"Don't be an ass, Gilmore," said Dickon sharply.

"Tush!" chuckled the other. "Don't take it that way; but on my word, Dickon, I never dreamed you were such a deep, cool devil. Sparini went out of his head completely. He made a scene when he found she was gone and spluttered Italian curses. John Vincent walked out; his face was as white as chalk, and they say he had been dead drunk most of the evening. He heard some one mention your name. 'Dickon Greene?' said Vincent. 'He's dangerous; he'll bear watching.'

"I think Sparini was on the verge of getting a gun and starting to hunt for you at that, but he was calmed down."

"By Lydia?" asked Dickon.

"How the devil did you guess that?"

"It was only a guess," smiled Dickon.

"You *are* deep," said Harrison Gilmore. "By the way, did the old man raise you?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because you came away from the Tiger's den like a grinning schoolgirl, and most of the boys sneak off from the old man as if they'd just been hounded for their rent."

"I've a better thing than a raise."

"Eh?"

"I'm free."

"Discharged!" cried Gilmore. He changed color a little as he considered the size of this calamity, and he looked at Dickon with the distant concern of one who sees a condemned outlaw pass toward the prison. Ever since this fellow received his important position on the strength of his father's large deposit, Dickon had yearned to tell him face to face a few personal truths, but now that his opportunity came all bitterness was gone. He peered through Gilmore as if through a figure of crystal, and what he saw was neither good nor bad —surely not worth breaking.

"But you seem positively happy," murmured Gilmore. "By Jove!"

"Do you want the formula for it?"

"A formula for happiness?" Gilmore chuckled softly, for his voice was like his attitude, subdued, pleasant, a little studied. "You were always an odd chap. By all means let's have the formula."

"Here you are in a nutshell: If you want a thing take it; if you don't want it, drop it!"

"If you want—" echoed Gilmore, and then laughed with an approach to heartiness. "I call that good—awfully."

"Thanks. Good-by, Gilmore."

"Wait a moment." He was quite sober, biting his lip with thought. "It seems to me that there's something in what you say."

"A whole lot; good-by again."

He left the assistant cashier buried in meditation so deep that he quite forgot the existence of Dickon, and went back to his cage. It was oddly simple to break away, after all, and the chains of seven years' habit snapped at a gesture. Five hundred-dollar bills fitted so easily into his wallet that they made not even a bulge on the breast of his coat; and there was the material sum of his business career. As for friends, he had none. With the old mist lifted from his eyes it seemed to Dickon that he saw straight to the heart of every

man as he bade them farewell, and he was neither angered nor surprised by their indifference; he felt only a cold pleasure of analysis, and he was actually happy when he saw the hunger come in the face of his assistant. One more step on the ladder was open to the climbing feet of Billy.

Another moment and the door closed upon seven years of Dickon's life. In place of the morning rush of labor downtown, a throng of shoppers and pleasure-hunters now drifted up Fifth Avenue, two-thirds women and the rest youths who walked with steps as light and aspiring as the tread of Diomedes. They had no cares to stoop their shoulders and make their heels hit hard, but for that matter neither had Dickon Greene. He stepped into the current of the crowd and became instantly one of them.

The novelty of it took his breath and then made his blood tingle like a morning plunge, for there was no duty toward which he walked, and his past life was out away behind his heels. What he had been lurked phantomlike among the shadows of the Whittaker Bank or sat drearily in his furnished room far up Broadway; and a new Dickon Greene went jauntily along the avenue. He wanted to grin broadly, and when he repressed that wide grimace an electric happiness went through him, was stored up, and remained a secret strength. He had always loved travel, the rush of trees past a train window and the slow trooping of hills far away, but now he felt that this stroll was quite like a cross-continent spin, with human faces whirling by in place of trees and on either side mountainous buildings. Dickon could not know that the far-off look which had hitherto kept people at an arm's distance was gone; what he did see was that when passers-by glanced at him their gaze was apt to linger, frowns relaxed, and smiles grew up. He took no credit for it. He believed that all the change was in him; the sun was bright, the heart of the world danced under it, and he had been blind to all these things! What wonder, then, that though he could carry his wealth in that single meager wallet, Dickon Greene felt rich?

He envied no one, desired nothing. New York was the finest city in the world and Fifth Avenue the finest street in Manhattan. And he, Dickon Greene, was privileged to walk this garden spot of the universe. Every people on earth tried to press closer to this place! There across the street, on the front of a single office building, he read the names of Van Munersdorf, lawyer; McIntosh, furrier; Mme. Estelle Lebrun, modist; Arthur Vaughan & Sons, shipping agency; Levinsky & Modenheim, Insurance and Real Estate; Barrakoff, Rodol & Strannsky, Coal; Dr. William James O'Connor; Ching Lu Company, Silk Importers; José Maria Cordova, Tailor. Yes, the whole world was represented in this single block, and Dickon Greene went on with his head still higher, humming something about:

"I eat when I'm hungry,
I drink when I'm dry—"

At this point he caught sight of a figure in the crowd that arrested his song, a stately form in an obviously tailored overcoat and trousers sharply pressed; but it was his bearing rather than his clothes which held the attention of Dickon. One moment he walked with well-squared shoulders and the next he sagged veritably withered and grew small, so that he gave an impression of youth and age struggling for the upper hand; not that these alterations in his gait were so pronounced as to catch the eye of the crowd, but Dickon to-day missed nothing, not the penciling of an eyebrow, not the quirk of a smile. He had been reading faces all the way from the bank, and now he fell in a short distance behind his quarry and began to read the man's back.

The step, he decided, was that of a middle-aged man who spent a goodly portion of his time in outdoor exercise. The way in which he gave place to those who shouldered him was unmistakably the manner of a gentleman, and indeed the whole mien of the stranger, the poise of his head, the movement of his gloved hands, surrounded him with an air of self-possessed gentility. There was a suggestion, too, of the foreign; meeting such a man face to face one would be ready to tip one's hat instead of shaking hands. It was at about this moment in

the reflections of Dickon Greene that a party of youths, traveling in a solid wedge, bore down on him of the imposing back so that he had to turn nearly around and step to the outer edge of the pavement to avoid them. In this movement his face came in three-quarters view, and Dickon saw a long, pale, well-fed visage with those naïvely arched eyebrows which are so often found in portraits of the eighteenth century. He was wrapped to the chin in a black neckcloth, which at once accented his pallor and his old-world naïveté; he continued his course away from the wedge of noisy youths by turning down a side street. It was a loud, commercial alley, and the change of the stranger's direction told Dickon two things: first, he was strolling without any fixed goal; second, it was not a pleasure walk or he would not have turned out of Fifth Avenue into such a dingy byway. It was a proof of Dickon's idleness of mind that he sensed adventure in such meager details as these, and started instantly in pursuit.

The party of young men was upon him now, a round dozen of them, chattering together—some college fraternity celebrating, no doubt, and they split their way through the crowd like a football team in close formation, leaving confusion and black looks in their wake. The first impulse in Dickon was to give place, but what he actually did was to shrug back his shoulders and start straight for the point of that wedge, whistling softly. When he was fairly upon them he stopped short, as though surprised at the obstacle, but in his surprise he did not forget to lean forward with braced feet. There came a heavy pressure on his shoulders, a chorus of angry growls, and then the flying wedge rolled apart, dissolved, and Dickon was sauntering unobstructed up the street. Several pedestrians were chuckling at the result of his maneuver and Dickon smiled broadly upon them. The whole world understood him, and he understood the world. He turned the corner on the trail of the dignified stranger.

The press was instantly thinner, and now he saw his quarry pause by a newsboy, fumble in his pocket, and then pass on rather hurriedly.

"Not a cent," murmured Dickon, and measured his step with that of the stranger.

It seemed a hopeless quest, however, and by the time he had strolled to Sixth Avenue and turned north Dickon was beginning to feel a qualm for his own foolishness. After all, any gentleman might be absent-minded enough to leave home without his wallet, and Dickon was on the verge of swinging on his heel and pursuing his own way when the other paused again. This time it was in front of a rotiesserie where, close to a grating of glowing coals, two chickens turned on the spit. The stranger fairly wrenched himself away from this sight and went on with a longer, swifter step, but now the merciless eye of Dickon pierced through the imposing overcoat and penetrated the man's vitals. It was hunger that he perceived—hunger so keen that Dickon himself felt a twinge.

While he hesitated between two wildly generous alternatives, Dickon banished impulse from his mind and summed up the probable truths of the matter. If the man were hungry he could turn to for a day or so of physical labor; in fact, it argued ill if a man starved in this age—no doubt he was some spendthrift wastrel, some leech who lived on charity; so the eye of Dickon was cold indeed when for the third time his man stopped. It was a pawnshop, upon which he turned his back, working at the little finger of his left hand until he produced something which gleamed yellow in the slant sunlight. He weighed it thoughtfully in his palm.

"His mother's wedding ring!" muttered Dickon, and waited the decision in breathless interest. He was not long in getting his answer, for the ring was suddenly pushed back into place, the broad shoulders snapped back, and once more the stranger went up the street. When he sauntered his step was firm enough, but now that he was swinging along at a good pace Dickon noted the heavy fall of the heels, and the sag of the knees which followed; the whole body of the man stiffened with effort.

"By God," said Dickon Greene aloud, "I want to do it and I shall do it!"

He overtook his quarry at the corner and brought a taxicab to the curb with a ges-

ture, then he turned on the other with such suddenness that the man stopped with a slight exclamation to avoid a collision. He swayed a little as he frowned. What Dickon Greene had guessed from a distance was perfectly clear at close hand. There were purple hollows under the eyes of the stranger, and his plump cheeks were a trifle relaxed, like a balloon which has lost a vital portion of its gas.

"My friend," said Dickon, "you are coming with me." And he gestured toward the cab.

The other followed that motion and his whole body tilted a little in the direction of his glance.

"Sir," he answered gravely, "you have mistaken me?"

"Not in the least; I never saw you before to-day."

"But you wish me to go with you?"

"Because, unless you do, you'll fall on the street within another block. Come!"

The other yielded with a bewildered, childish obedience to the guidance of Dickon's hand; his foot fumbled twice for the running board of the taxi before he found it, and once inside he pitched back upon the cushions, inert. The driver listened to Dickon's home address and then looked shrewdly into his cab. He sighed with envy.

"I wonder where he got it, eh? I wonder!" And he started his machine forward very, very gently, as if he had a cargo of perishable stuff.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

Desert Law

by Harry Sinclair Drago

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

CHAPTER I.

THE VOICE IN THE STORM.

TWILIGHT was gone; black night at hand. The wind, that had swept down from the higher cañons at sunset, rose now until its thin, ghostly scream shrieked and bellowed as it tore across the open desert. For a brief second a man on horseback, with some five or six led horses strung out behind him, was silhouetted against the low-scudding clouds as he topped the crest to the left of Piute Meadows. A handkerchief muffled his mouth and nose against the whirling sand. His eyes, however, were bloodshot, but they steeled themselves as he dropped into the wide valley.

His mount, as well as the led horses, lowered their heads in vain against that

blinding blast. Impatiently the man pulled at the rope by which he led them. He was in great haste. This storm, for all its buffeting of him, was to his liking. The floor of the desert was being swept clean. No trail of man or beast left telltale message to-night.

At breakneck pace they dashed down the hard-packed road to bring up all atremble at the bank of the creek which skirted the edge of the wide plain before them. The water was whipped to spray as they forded the stream. No time for drinking now. Suddenly, however, the horse on which the man sat threw up his head and stopped in his tracks, ears stiffening, body tensing.

With a curse the man brought his *remuda* to a slithering halt, and, cocking his ears, peered into the blackness ahead. Seconds dragged by as he listened—precious seconds—and then, far off, faint, he caught the sound of a human voice.

"Help! Help!"

The man scowled and shook his head. He was about to go on when the cry came again—clear, for a brief lull in the storm. The man's mouth sagged a trifle as he comprehended that call. It was a woman's cry. His mouth straightened in a mirthless smile, but, without backward glance, he sent his little cavalcade in the direction from which the call had come.

Soon he cupped his hands and shouted against the wind:

"Hello, there! Hello!"

"Here! Here!" came the answer, nearer it seemed.

Keeping to the creek bottom, he moved toward the spot from which the answer had seemed to come. He called again and got no reply, but a second effort rewarded him. Five minutes later he was standing beside her. Black as it was in the lea of the willows and low buckthorn, he could see that she was only a girl. Her clothes were torn, her hair undone.

He put out his hand to steady her.

"No, no," she said bravely enough, "I won't faint. I'll be all right in a minute. Thank God, you've found me! I've been lost for hours. My pony threw me, and I foolishly thought I could find my way home by following the creek. I couldn't see in the willows when night came. And this terrible storm!" She shivered nervously. "There must be wolves in this bottom. They've been barking at me for an hour."

"Coyotes, I guess, ma'am. You ain't hurt none?"

She shook her head and laughed ever so slightly.

The man felt a thrill pass over his body at the full, mellow timbre of her voice there in the darkness. He broke off a piece of dead sage and lighted it. It blazed into a flood of light. A nasty scratch marred her cheek, but he saw it not. His eyes held only the wild beauty of the girl standing there in the glow of his improvised torch. The golden hair cascading over her shoulders seemed to set her as in a frame. The thankfulness in her level, wide-set blue eyes caught and held him.

There seemed to be a queer draw to the entire situation. He had not forgotten the reason for his wild, precipitous flight, and the cost of these minutes here in the shelter of the willows.

"I suppose I should tell you my name. I'm Faith Ingalls. Perhaps you've heard of my father, or our place below Pilot Butte."

He shook his head.

"It's just beyond the corner of the XL fence. I can find it if we get back to the road."

The dry sage burnt itself out in the man's fingers as he listened to her.

"I never heard that name for a girl before," he drawled. "Faith—that's about all a man wants from a woman, I guess. I aim to remember that name." He turned to his horse, then said: "You ride him. Don't saw his bit. Tell him what you want. He just about savvies human talk. I'll get along on one of these cayuses, Indian fashion."

With their backs to the storm, they headed for the road. But for his alertness they would have gone by it. The XL fence was at least ten miles away. He called to her to give the big pinto his head. They began to move faster.

The man turned to listen for any sound that should say they were followed, but only the screaming wind and the rattle of

their horses' hoofs came to his ears. Ahead of him he could see the girl, all hunched over against the wind. He muttered her name to himself; the sound of it on his lips beguiled him. His face hardened, though, as he thought of himself turned rescuer. Well, they would be at her place before long. This easy, free-swinging stride at which they rode was devouring the desert miles. Once he had her home, he'd go on his way, and that would be an end to it.

Minutes later the girl had reined up beside him.

"This is our place," she cried to make herself heard above the storm. "Back from the road a short way. I can make it by myself."

He shook his head. "I'll turn in, too."

He saw the girl's head stop as if she were listening. He did likewise, and caught the rumble of driving horses.

"That 'll be father!" she exclaimed. "Just getting back from town. He'll take care of me. He has a rig."

"That won't be your father," he said slowly. "Men coming on horseback. Let's go!"

CHAPTER II.

THE MAN TRAIL.

WHEN they reached the house Faith turned to him impulsively. "You had better not go on to-night in this storm. It's a long way to town. Father will be sure to be here soon."

The man scrutinized her closely, even wonderingly.

"You'd not be afraid to be here alone with me?"

"Why, I hadn't thought of that," she said evenly. "Cattlemen are about the only thing we've begun to fear." She then paused momentarily. "I suppose you are riding for Lundy or the XL."

"Not exactly. Your father runnin' sheep?"

"He's trying to. Lundy and Remsen are up in arms because father beat them to it this spring. He's arranged to graze his sheep on the Reservation."

"You can't blame those fellows for bein' hostile," the man muttered. "Ain't no cattle goin' to graze over land sheep's been on. And, come July, there won't be no grass anywheres else. Lundy knows we didn't git much snow last winter. I heard the big ones were organizin' to give you herders the run this year."

"Father won't run," she replied proudly. "He's such a nice old man; seems a pity men like Lundy have to antagonize him."

"I don't want to scare you none, ma'am; but this ain't no country for nice old men. You'll find it some different from New England, or wherever it was you came from back East. These men coming now ain't wastin' no time. My guess is that it's Lundy himself. You slip in the house. Don't light up till they knock. I'll slide around to the barn with my string. Say"—he stopped suddenly—"if they should happen to ask if you'd seen any one to-night you just forget about me. I've got five or six good reasons for not wanting to meet up with Lundy or his likes right now."

"Lundy will get no favors from me," she assured him. "I wish father were here."

"You take my gun," her friend urged. Thrusting it into her hands, he disappeared around the corner of the house.

Faith held it awkwardly as she entered the big room which served as the parlor. In the darkness she fastened her hair into place and washed the blood from her face. Barely had she finished when there came the sound of men tramping across the tiny porch. Before she could light a lamp they were pouring into the room. They stopped on seeing her. Lundy was at their head.

Once she had the lamp chimney in place, the girl whirled upon them, the curly-haired man's big gun in her hands.

"Where's your paw?" Lundy demanded, pretending not to notice the gun pointing at him.

"Jim Lundy, is it your habit to go about breaking into people's homes? You back out of here now in a hurry, or it's going to be bad for your health!"

The big cattleman pretended to smile.

"That's sure a man's size gun you got there," he said teasingly.

"There's a man's size woman behind it, too! You back out of here and knock, as you ought. I'll decide whether I want to talk to you or not."

Something in Faith's blue eyes convinced him.

"Come on, boys," he laughed. "I guess she means it. We got to change our rough ways."

"Pretty airy for a sheepman's kid," one of Lundy's companions growled as they moved to the door.

When they had made a mock show of politely asking for admittance Faith faced them a second time.

"If you've anything to say to me, Jim Lundy," she warned, "say it quickly."

"Anythin' to oblige a lady. I take it your paw ain't home."

"You take it correctly," she answered sharply, her gun nestling in her hand. "I can talk for this family."

"Did any one go by here to-night? For instance, a man on horseback with six led ponies? Eh?"

The girl tried to hold her eyes steady, but she could not help the tremor that stole down her spine. She knew Lundy's eyes were upon her. The implication in his words could not be misconstrued; nevertheless, she shook her head.

"No one passed here to-night that I know of."

"Or stopped here?" Remsen, a little man in corduroys, asked malevolently.

Faith turned on him with flashing eyes. "Your words do credit to you, don't they, Chris Remsen? I wonder if you have more respect for your own daughters?"

"Ain't no use goin' on like that," Lundy cut in. "Chris has lost four damn good mares, and I've been counted out of two good horses. The man that got them was headed this way. We had him dead to rights until this storm came up. He ain't no new hand at the business, either. He's been runnin' horses down in White Pine County. Duveen—Scotty Duveen—that's his name. Here's a handbill with his photygraff and description."

He handed the soiled poster to Faith. The picture thereon was that of the man who had brought her home. Uncomprehendingly she read the offer of reward for his arrest.

"Won't need any sheriff if we catch up with him," Lundy grumbled as he reached for the handbill. "You sheepmen are makin' enough hell for this country. Horse thieves ain't goin' to be added to our troubles. We're organized against that, ain't we, boys?"

A muttered answer of assent greeted him. Jim Lundy was still reaching for the soiled paper.

"I'd like to keep it, please, if you don't mind," said Faith. "If that man should come here, I'd like to show it to him."

"Guess you never saw nothin' like that back where you come from, eh?" He was not averse to tarrying in conversation with Faith. Indeed, Lundy had cast covetous eyes at her more than once.

"No use lolling round here," Remsen snorted as he watched his partner's play. "Come on, boys, we'll git along."

Lundy let them file out. He came closer to the girl.

"I wonder how long it's goin' to be before you get sick of tryin' to make money out of sheep?"

There was an insinuation, a veiled suggestion, beneath the question. Faith felt it, and it infuriated her.

"It 'll be a lot longer than it took me to get *sick* of being ordered about by you, Jim Lundy!"

"Well, you have your way now," he said, his eyes narrowing. "I didn't want to make no war on you; but you wouldn't see it thataway. I'm tellin' you now, though, they ain't no man goin' to run sheep on the Reservation this summer. It's time for you herders to git!"

CHAPTER III.

"LADY, I WON'T FORGET!"

FAITH, white-lipped, saw him go in silence. A minute later they were riding away. Lundy's threat hung on in the air. Unconsciously she had been opening and folding the tattered paper he had left with her. She started as she glanced at it. For the fifth time she read it through.

Mists swam in her eyes. She knew that Duveen had stopped to find her at the risk of his neck. Well, she had repaid him. But that wasn't it. She had liked him, felt at ease in his company, even secure.

Tears stole down her velvety cheeks. The last hours had been too much for her. Frightened, she glanced up quickly as she heard the kitchen door open. He was standing there, hat in hand, the penitent look of a bad boy on his handsome face.

" Lady," he was murmuring slowly, " I'm goin' now. I—I guess you know the truth."

Faith looked away, trying to control herself.

" Don't—don't let it matter about me," he added huskily, her tears sending his throat dry. He paused; then: " I didn't want you to know, though."

" Do you need money so badly that you have got to get it this way?" she questioned.

" Money? You mightn't believe it, ma'am, but I'd hardly thought of the money—that is, this time. I wanted to get even with Lundy and Remsen. They broke a pal of mine. I ain't the kind that forgets."

" But this," said Faith, handing him the poster. " Lundy and Remsen are not the only ones you've stolen from."

Scotty took the paper into his hands and stared at it stoically. The picture of himself seemed to interest him most. The girl watched his eyes for sign of explanation. He divined that she was waiting for him to speak. Shamefacedly he hung his head.

" What does it say?" he asked miserably.

Puzzled, Faith stared at him.

He read her unspoken question. " It ain't no use lyin' to you," he explained. " I can't read."

" Oh, I'm sorry," she told him.

He blushed beneath his tan. " No one ever bothered about me. I ain't got no learnin'. Even kids know more than me. Makes me 'shamed. I—I'd like to have learnin'."

Why his humbleness should make her cry Faith did not know. He was man grown, and yet, for all his misdeeds, there was the naïve simplicity of a child about him. Haltingly she read the paper to him.

" Lundy said they would hang you if they caught you," she went on. " Won't you promise me, please—for my sake—that you'll give up this sort of thing?"

He winced as he felt her hand on his arm. It was the first time in his turbulent life that any one had professed to be interested in what he did or did not do. And he would have been good clay in the proper hands.

The desire to please her and win her good opinion became his main object in life. " Why, lady, ma'am, I reckon I gave it up two hours ago. I'll go back as far as the creek and turn this bunch loose. They'll be on their own range by mornin'."

" That would be a brave thing to do," she assured him. " But afterward—what are you going to do?"

" I've got a dugout up in the hills on Lost Cabin Creek. I reckon I'll go there for a spell. I can almost look down here from my place. I—I won't forget what you did for me to-night, Miss—Miss Faith." He opened the door in back of him. " Good-by, ma'am," he was saying.

Their eyes held each other's. Duveen felt himself caught up as he had never been before. It left him tired, lonely. Without conscious effort he realized that the girl was staring beyond him into the black night. He saw her eyes widen.

Some one was coming. He heard the scrape of wheels.

" Don't—don't go," she pleaded. " Jim Lundy may be coming back."

" No. It's your daddy this time. He wouldn't be fooled if he caught me here with that string of horses. Lundy's perhaps talked to him."

" You can't pass him now without his knowing. When he gets here you take his rig to the barn. He'll be tired and cold. You can go later."

Faith saw that he was shaking his head.

" He wouldn't understand my bein' here."

" Nor would I, if I thought you were a coward."

He laughed at that—a boyish laugh—

and then deftly sailed his hat across the room so that it caught on one of a row of hooks which ran along the wall.

"Lady, ma'am," he drawled, "no one has yet said that word of me. Where shall I sit?"

Pointing to a chair at the table, Faith quickly placed some cold meat and bread before him. Her hands faltered as she heard her father enter.

Salem Ingalls's eyes narrowed as he caught sight of the curly-haired man sitting in his kitchen, but his ruddy face broke into a smile of gratitude as his daughter explained Duveen's presence.

Old Salem was a clean looking, pink and white sort of old gentleman with a determined jaw, but he seemed out of place in this desert country. Hardly the type of man to do combat with lean, bronzed, hard-riding men like Lundy.

Duveen wondered if he had met the posse. He had not long to wait for an answer, for when Faith's father next spoke it was of the big cattleman.

"Lundy stopped me a ways back," the old man stated. "He said they had been here. He didn't say anything he shouldn't have, did he, Faith?"

"He didn't dare," Scotty answered for her. "I suppose he told you what they were lookin' for?"

"Horse thief, he said. I didn't catch the fellow's name. Lundy's troubles don't worry me. I tend to my own business."

"Well, he's big medicine in this country," Duveen argued. "He's always done as he pleased—him and that old hawk, Remsen."

"The last thing he said," Faith stated uneasily, "was that no man would run sheep on the Reserve this year."

"Just talk," her father answered. "I won't run. Lundy forgets that times have changed. Cattlemen can't boss things the way they used to. There's law in this country now."

"If he's made up his mind to crowd you out," the younger man said, "he'll do it, law or no law. He'll make you sick of tryin' to beat him—so sick that you'll wish you'd never seen this place. I used to ride for Jim Lundy; I know his little schemes."

"Maybe you do, son; but don't forget that he's counting on our being Easterners to scare us out. No one's ever opposed him and got away with it. These poor Basques take what he wants them to have. My sheep go on the Reservation next Monday; and they'll stay there, for all of the Lundys in Nevada."

It was brave talk, but Scotty was not convinced.

"You are not looking for a job, young man?" Salem asked.

Faith noted the shrewd smile that crossed Scotty's face.

"No," he drawled provokingly. "I'm just gettin' through with one job. I reckon I'm goin' to mine a little this summer. 'As little as possible,' as old Ike used to say."

The old man got to his feet when he had finished the meager repast Faith had set out for him.

"Storm still blowing," he stated. "You had better stop here the rest of the night."

"The wind's droppin'," Duveen announced as he put his head out of the half-opened door. "I'll go on in a few minutes."

"Suit yourself about that. You're welcome to stay if you want to. You young folks can sit up. I'm dead tired."

The old man went to his room, and when his regular breathing told the two listeners that he slept Duveen tiptoed to the door. Faith held out her hand to him.

"Good-by," she whispered. "And remember that some one does care what you do. When I get the proper books I'm going to ride on Lost Cabin Creek."

His big, calloused hand trembled as it closed over hers, so small and soft.

"Lady," he murmured, "I won't forget!"

CHAPTER IV.

"YOUR TURN NEXT."

DUVEEN left the horses at the creek, as he had promised, and, taking an old cattle trail, picked his way across the mountains to finally come down into the little town of Eden. There he bought

enough supplies and tools to last him the summer through. The following afternoon found him heading back toward Lost Cabin Creek.

Ryley Gannon made a pretense of mining the lower cañon. Save for him, no one ever worked along the creek. A deer hunter or two in the fall would be the extent of any chance visitors. Duveen was familiar with the country. In the old days he had really believed he had a mine up near the headwaters of the creek. He knew that Gannon had taken out a few thousand from a stringer of decayed quartz. It had fired him on for a while, but Gannon's find had soon petered out. Gannon had stayed on, sinking his dollars in new tunnels and drifts.

Some whispered that it was not all his money that he dropped—that Lundy was backing him. But why such a shrewd one as the big rangeman should stick to Gannon was beyond Scotty. At least the man was one of Lundy's crowd, and Duveen hated him for that. So he took care to see that he cut down into the cañon far above Gannon's shack.

It was a wild, almost impassable country. Cedars and junipers choked the upper reaches of the cañon. Along the creek willows and cottonwoods barred the way. Halfway up the trail opened on a grass-covered flat. The little meadow had been grazed to the roots. Scotty knew that only sheep could have swept it that clean. The trail itself was deep in dust. Duveen came up with a start as he caught the clear-cut sign of shod hoofs. Whoever had made those tracks rode at a free gallop.

Scotty brought his horse to a walk and moved ahead cautiously. The other's trail led on, up and up; but though Duveen searched the narrowing cañon, he caught no sight of moving object.

The sun went down, and the graying mists of twilight settled upon the silent mountains before he made his destination. He had to bend low in his saddle to read those danger signals stamped in the dust. With a twitching of the muscles he realized that they were heading for his dugout. Gun in hand, he dismounted and followed them to his very door.

Was this a trap? Had Lundy got wind of his plan to come back to Lost Cabin Creek and settle down under the very nose of the XL? Surely, long since, Big Jim had recovered his horses. But there were other matters between them, as Scotty well knew, that weren't so easily squared. His eyes dilated as he stared at the dugout door. His animal instinct urged flight, but his courage rose above the fear of the flesh. Some one had left a message there on the door.

It was just a dirty piece of paper, and the writing had been done with the burnt end of a stick; but he saw only the words, cryptic, grim:

YOUR TURN NEXT!

Scotty felt the perspiration break on his forehead. Never for a moment did he doubt that the message was for him. What it said he knew not, but it smelled of danger—death.

The door had no lock. Even now it swayed in the rising breeze. He poked it with his gun barrel and sent it flying back upon its hinges.

It was dark inside the dugout. He strained his eyes to see. Something moved on the floor—or was it just his nerves? He listened, tense, a tingling at the roots of his hair. Plainly then he caught the unmistakable sound of a moving body.

" Freeze!" he muttered in dreadful tone, his body steeling for the expected attack. " Or I'll bust you!"

The noise stopped. Whatever lay on the floor obeyed. Duveen's eyes were growing accustomed to the darkness. Clearly now could he see the crawling thing before him. It was a man, bound and gagged, his face battered and blood covered.

Scotty dropped to his knee beside him. " A Basque kid," he muttered aloud. " He's been banged up!"

He got out his knife and removed the gag from the boy's mouth.

" What happened to you, *muchacho?* It looks as if a mountain had fell on yuh."

" Man—beeg man—jomped me, *señor,*" the boy said wearily. " He keeck me; put hees boot in my face. *Madre de Dios, señor,* that man keeck hard."

"Who was he?" Scotty demanded impatiently.

"*Quien sabe?* Who knows? Me, I'm sound asleep when he comes. Hees boot wake me up; but right away eet put me back to sleep."

The boy rubbed his jaw and felt the swollen side of his head where the boot heel had cut deep.

"Looks as though you'd been livin' here," Duveen said, not too well pleased.

"*Si.* Señor Ingalls say hee's all right to live here. Nobody ever come back to thees place."

"Señor Ingalls? You herdin' for him?"

The boy nodded his head.

Duveen got to his feet with an unpleasant laugh. He understood that sign on the door now. It was meant for old Salem.

"Where's your sheep?" he demanded.

"In the Basin, *señor*. That ees, before thees man come. I hear heem shoot—*bang, bang*—many times. *Por Dios!* who know where those sheep ees now?"

"You say he was a big man—was it Lundy?"

The boy spread his hand beseechingly. "But how I know, *señor?*"

Duveen turned away angrily, knowing the boy would not dare tell the truth even if he knew to a certainty that Lundy was the guilty one, such was the fear Big Jim had implanted in the Basque heart.

The boy had untied the ropes that bound him. With muttered exclamations of pain he crawled to the bunk which stood in the corner of the low room.

"What's your name?" Scotty asked as he eyed him.

"Balano, *señor.*"

"Well, Balano, I suspect you're a damn coward."

The boy shrugged his shoulders protestingly.

"But no. The Señor Ingalls, and the *señorita,* they say good word for me. I fight for them. But boy weeth no gun can't fight weeth beeg man weeth gun. The *señor* say hold the herd here in the Basin; Monday we run them on the Reservation. Some mens not like that. But who"—he shrugged his shoulders again—"how I know that?"

Scotty turned away unconvinced. A thought struck him, and he wheeled again on the frightened herder.

"Whoever he was," he exclaimed, "he's still in the Basin. I aim to have a look at him."

The boy called as he reached the door. "Don't leave me! He say he ees come back here before he go. He keel me, *señor!*"

Duveen stopped. "Are you lyin'?" he demanded.

Before the boy could answer Scotty caught the patter of hoofs.

Balano stiffened.

"Get under the stove or the bed," the other warned. "I'll run this show from now on."

The rider came abreast the dugout. Duveen heard him stop. A moment's pause then, in which Scotty heard the metallic click of shells slipping into the magazine of a rifle. He crouched beneath a window, waiting, ready.

Bang, bang, bang, came a fusillade as the man outside shot out the windows. Balano screamed. Duveen heard the stranger chuckle.

"Tell it to Ingalls!" he shouted as he rode off.

Scotty stood up to catch a fleeting glimpse of the marauder, who was already some yards away. He called to him to stop, but the stranger put spurs to use and sped on. Scotty raised his rifle then and fired. A mocking laugh floated back.

He had, however, shot away the man's hat. He found it some minutes later, and brought it back to the dugout. Lighting a candle, he examined the sombrero. Stamped in the sweatband were three initials.

Balano had crept from his cover and was peering at the hat also.

Scotty laughed. "You read?" he demanded. The boy shook his head. "Well, you got nothin' on me. But I'll git 'em read. You git your stuff together and git out of here. Don't whine about it. You ain't anywheres near dead. Drift up to the Basin and stay with your pests. I'm goin' up there now and have a look. I'll git over the hills then and go down to

Ingalls's place. And remember this, if you're at all fond of livin', keep your mouth shut."

CHAPTER V.

THE FIRST LESSON.

SCOTTY rode up to the Ingalls place by the way of the barn, and was about to knock on the kitchen door when he caught the sound of a voice raised in saying good-by. He recognized it for Gannon's. He had no desire to meet the man, but he quite forgot himself as he circled the barn to wait for the miner to leave. What he could be doing here was of far more interest to Duveen than his own possible danger.

Gannon and old Salem stepped out in a few minutes, and the former rode away.

Faith came to the door when Scotty returned. She was visibly surprised at seeing him.

"Have you tired of Lost Cabin Creek already?" she asked banteringly.

"I never found it quite so interestin'," he replied. "That man who just rode away a friend of you-all?"

"I guess I might call him that," Salem answered. "Fine man, Gannon—my idea of the old-fashioned prospector; always cheerful, never wanting to give up." Salem stopped at the look in Duveen's eyes. "No reason why he shouldn't be here, is there?"

"No, I suppose not. He's too thick with Lundy to suit me, though. Miss Faith speakin' of Lost Cabin Creek thataway reminds me that there's been merry hell to pay up there this evenin'. Your sheep's up there, ain't they?"

"Of course!" the old man exclaimed excitedly. "What's happened?"

"Balano's been put through the ricketts, and about fifty head of sheep shot full of holes."

Faith was by far the calmer of the two as Scotty told them his story. Salem paced the floor angrily.

"Who do you think it was?" he demanded excitedly.

"Well, I got a pretty good idea. I pumped a little lead at him as he rode down the cañon. Didn't git him, but there's his hat." He handed it to Faith. "What does those letters say?"

"J. B. L." Faith's face whitened. "Why, that's Lundy!"

"That was my guess."

"Fifty head killed, eh?" Salem cried. "He'll go to jail for this!"

"I wouldn't bank on it," Scotty told him. "You ain't got no way of knowin' how strong Lundy is in this country."

Scotty had not mentioned the notice on his dugout door.

"He's trying to intimidate us," Faith said wisely enough. "He'll find we don't quit so easily."

"If you insist on buckin' Lundy," he said, "I'll stick to the finish; but my hand ain't goin' to be seen. Lundy 'd not be so crude with me. What you figurin' to do next?"

"Move my sheep Monday morning, as I said I would. Once I get them on the Reserve, Lundy won't be so free and easy. That's Federal ground. The rangers will back me up."

"Lundy will take care to see that he stops you before they get there. To-morrow's Sunday. You can send your herd in at midnight. That may fool him. Do you want my advice?"

Faith did not wait for her father's consent, but spoke promptly. "Of course we do. Lundy knows we are green at this business. Father will be glad to have your help."

Salem looked at Faith in some surprise. It was hard for him to realize that this purposeful, determined girl was the shy, sheltered daughter he had brought West a year ago. Her liking for Duveen did not seem amiss. There was something about the man that radiated confidence, the sort of easy-going mixture of smile and steel that he had been wont to ascribe to an old statue of the heroic Sheridan, back in Ohio. Therefore, without reluctance, he urged Duveen to speak.

"Well, you and Miss Faith go up to see Balano to-morrow. Stop and chin with Gannon. It won't do no harm. Just let on you're up for the mornin' only; that you're goin' to move onto the Reserve, come

Monday. No matter how honest you think he is, it don't hurt to lie a little—not when you're expectin' trouble. I'll go back now over the hills. Don't say anythin' about me to Gannon. That old dugout of mine will hold the two of you for the night. I'll have it cleaned up a bit by the time you git there. That all right, so far?"

"I don't mind the trip," Salem said. "Sorry, though, that you're suspicious of Gannon. He's been showing me a piece of rich ore he got the other day. I'm anxious to see his mine. But where is all this scheming going to bring us?"

"It ain't really what you'd call schemin'," Scotty laughed. "Ain't sure enough to be called that. But once you git there, we'll get your herd into the pass above the Basin and hold 'em there. If nothin' happens, we'll shoo 'em into the Reserve on the dot of midnight."

"There may be sense in what you say," Salem admitted. "We will be where we can watch our sheep."

"It ain't the sheep that need watchin'," Scotty said insinuatingly. "It's Lundy! When you get to the dugout I'm goin' up in the Basin. Can't nobody git in there without comin' by you. With Miss Faith there Lundy may hang back. But don't you git to thinkin' for a minnit that he won't be on Lost Cabin Creek, representin' for all he's worth by sunup Monday mornin'."

"We will be there by noon," Faith assured him. "You're not thinking of going back to-night?"

"Better had. Ridin' at night is sorta soothin' to me."

It was mild out. The girl walked as far as the barn with him.

"You haven't forgotten the promised lessons, have you?" she trilled pleasantly.

Scotty shook his head. "Not me, ma'am." He laughed softly.

"And thanks for keeping your word about the horses," Faith added. She was sorry almost instantly for having reminded him of the fact, the straightening of his mouth not escaping her eyes.

"Shucks," he said. "I hadn't figured on bein' thanked for keepin' my word."

"I know you didn't. I'm sorry I said it. But I do want you to know that I'm proud of you."

From the security of his stronghold on Lost Cabin Creek he could properly appreciate this statement, and most undoubtedly would; but he was too near the divine presence at the moment to be anything but nettled and harassed by her interest in him.

Faith suspected his embarrassment and enjoyed it. When he was in his saddle he surprised her by asking:

"How long 'fore I can spell?"

"That 'll all depend on you, Scotty, won't it?" She gave him a delicious smile well calculated to add to his misery; but she forgot that he now had the safety of his horse between them, and he just sat and looked at her, trembling under the intimacy of his name on her lips.

"Good-by," she whispered.

"Good-by," came his answer in flat, almost plaintive tones. "You mind tellin' me how to spell your name, ma'am?"

A mellow, liquidly soft note broke from her throat and hung on in the stillness. Quickly then she spelled it for him.

"F-a-i-t-h."

He sighed as he rode away, and she heard him murmur to himself more than to her: "I reckon I won't forgit that."

Thoughts of her stayed with him as he covered the long miles, but before he reached the dugout Ryley Gannon's visit came to torment him. What was that old juniper doing? Was this some new plot of Lundy's to snare Salem? That the man could have found gold in paying quantity was almost unbelievable, and yet he had convinced the girl's father.

"'Nice old prospector'!" he snorted as he recalled Salem's words of praise for Gannon. "He ought to be in a nursery."

CHAPTER VI.

LUNDY'S ANSWER.

A MAJESTIC stillness rested upon the fastnesses of Lost Cabin Creek as Faith and her father followed the broken trail that led to Scotty Duveen's dugout.

The ragged rimrocks high above the floor of the cañon seemed softened—unreal against the turquoise blue of the clean sky. Only the merry cadence of the gurgling, foam-flecked creek broke the stillness. It was as though the inanimate ledges and the brooding trees recognized that this was the Lord's Day.

It was chastening. Faith was reminded of many churchgoing Sunday mornings back in Bellefontaine, Ohio. Old Ryley Gannon, who knew of their presence long before they came abreast his cabin, was not similarly affected. In fact, he cursed most loudly. He wanted Salem to see his mine, but the mine was not yet ready for a formal " at home."

Ryley had plenty of time in which to make up his mind as to what he wanted to do, before the Ingalls came within sight of his place. He decided to get himself gone, and so, when Salem and his daughter arrived, they found his cabin deserted.

" Gone to Paradise, no doubt," the old man said to his daughter. " Just as well. Won't have to stretch the truth about our visit. He'd be sure to be watching for us on the way out. He'd know, well enough, if we didn't go back down this afternoon."

Faith smiled indulgently. She wondered if her father wasn't a bit too easily swayed in his judgment of men. She said nothing, however, and they continued up the cañon to the dugout, where Scotty awaited them. He was clean shaven, a care-free smile lighting up his face.

Faith was conscious of an urge quite new to her as she gave him her hand and felt the answering pressure of his fingers. This wild, rugged land fitted him. In her eyes he measured up to it.

" Fine, large mornin', ain't it?" he grinned. " Knew you were comin'! Heard your horses half an hour back."

" Came right along," Salem answered. " Gannon's place was deserted."

Scotty's forehead wrinkled into a frown. " Funny, him bein' away like that," he mused. " Never heard of him goin' out except for grub. Wouldn't go for grub on Sunday."

" Serves our purpose," the old man assured him. " Just as well that no one knows we came up to-day."

" He'll know, if he happens to git back. He can read signs."

" I'm ravenously hungry!" Faith exclaimed. " Don't tell me there isn't bacon in the pan."

" Sure is, ma'am. And a blue grouse to go with it," Duveen added, as he led them inside. " Mite early for grouse, accordin' to the law, but her chicks were flyin' or I wouldn't 'a' shot her."

Scotty lost no time in saddling his horse, once the meal was over.

" You two stay here," he announced. " I'll be back by daylight, or maybe before that. If any one comes, which is pretty likely to happen, you see that they turn back. If Lundy or Remsen show up, and insist on going into the Basin, you follow along. I'll help Balano get the herd into the pass as soon as I meet him. We'll hold 'em there until it gits dark. We'll give 'em the run then.

" Uncle Sam won't be hurt none if we make the Reserve an hour or two before midnight. If you git into trouble before dark, shoot. The sound will carry as far as the pass."

He had mounted his horse as he talked, and was in the act of leaving when he reined up.

" One thing more," he warned. " If you have visitors, don't let on that there's any one but your herder above you."

He had said this several times already, and Faith was unfortunate enough to place the obvious construction on his concern.

" Surely you have no reason to mistrust me," she murmured as her father turned back to the dugout. " Not after the other night."

Duveen sensed her thought.

" It isn't that," he said, his face reddening. " I'm not runnin' away from anythin' that's comin' to me. I'm through with doin' that. It's you I'm worryin' about. If Lundy comes, you do the talkin'."

As the day wore on Scotty's misgivings seemed to have been without cause. Faith busied herself with cleaning the dugout, the while her father either slept or wondered about inspecting Scotty's old tunnels. But,

as is so often the case, it was only the lull before the storm.

Gannon had returned to his cabin soon after the Ingalls had passed, and there, some half hour later, he was joined by Lundy. Ryley's news infuriated the big cowman.

"We got to get them back here!" he cried. "Goin' to be on hand to run them in first thing in the mornin', eh? I'll spoil his little game for him. At that, I'd bet it was the girl's idea."

Lundy cursed and pulled his mustache, but he was not put to any great effort in deciding upon what to do.

"You ride up to that old dugout where their herder's been campin' out. They'll be there. You tell the old man you saw his trail and— You know what to tell the old fool."

Gannon nodded his head.

"Leave it to me," he grumbled. "He don't know nothin' 'bout gold. He's keen for minin', too. I'll flash a piece of that quartz I picked up at the Big Ben, and tell him I just made another strike. I'll get 'em back here, both of 'em. Don't suppose it's any good askin' you what you're goin' to do meanwhile?"

Lundy grinned. "You'll know soon enough, Ryley. If this fails we'll try somethin' else a little more personal."

Later Gannon's hearty greeting awakened old Salem from a sound sleep. Even Faith was impressed by the man's seemingly honest excitement over his own good fortune at his mine. There was no talk of sheep, other than they were waiting for Balano. So when Gannon begged them to come have a look at his mine they had no valid excuse to offer. And Gannon, wisely interpreting a glance between father and daughter, hastened to remove their one misgiving in leaving the dugout.

"If that Basque is down the cañon," he argued, "he'll have to pass my shack on the way up. Ain't no danger of you missin' one another."

"Balano is in the Basin," Faith answered. "He will come here and wait. Maybe one of us ought to stay here."

"Ain't no need of that!" Gannon exclaimed. "Waitin' is one of the best things a Basque does." He stopped dramatically and gave Faith a shrewd glance. "You—er—ain't expectin' no trouble from any one, be yuh?"

He had put her on the defensive so adroitly that, think what she might, she could do naught else but say no to his question. Faith, however, turned the tables on him rather neatly.

"What made you think we might be expecting trouble?" she asked lightly.

Ryley's brows lifted in some surprise at this. For a brief moment he was puzzled about his answer. His thoroughly disarming smile saved him.

"Always trouble," he said, "where there is sheep and cattle fightin' for range. Not that I've heard anythin'. Don't be frightened. It's the way of old fools like me to go round scarin' folks 'bout nothin'. Jest a habit, I cal'late."

Lundy, from his perch on the high rimrocks, smiled his satisfaction as he saw the little party head down the cañon. Once they were out of sight he began picking his way back to the trail.

The very neatness which Faith had contrived in the dugout angered him. He took a savage delight in turning the place upside down. It was some minutes before he had vented his spleen in full. His eyes were red with hate as he came to the door and tested the wind with his finger.

"Blowin' strong enough right now," he muttered. "No use wastin' any more time."

Fifty yards above the dugout the sagebrush and greasewood grew rank. Rain had not fallen in any quantity in weeks. Everything was dry, parched. Lundy was playing a sure thing this time. Five minutes after he had applied a match to a tiny pile of dry sage the flames were racing into the Basin.

The oily greasewood roared as the flames reached it. Faster than a man could walk the line of fire traveled. Clouds of black smoke began to rise to the sky. The freshening wind did the rest.

"That 'll hold you," Lundy cried. "You can graze your sheep in hell now."

By the time he had reached the hills, following the trail Duveen had used to

reach the Ingalls place the night before, the entire Basin was a flaming, smoking inferno. Lundy sat on the crest for ten minutes, watching the result of his handiwork.

"That's my answer," he growled as he turned away. "Ain't no sheepman going to crowd me out."

CHAPTER VII.

THE FIRE.

OLD Salem found Gannon's mine, and especially his talk of the values at hand, of absorbing interest; but Faith, who knew nothing of mining, and recognized the fact, was frankly disappointed. She had expected to see coarse stringers of gold. Maybe this black, silver-streaked quartz held rich values, but it carried no thrill to her eye.

Ryley talked at such length that she felt herself guilty of suspecting his motive. Due to her urging, they came to the surface. Words froze on their lips as their nostrils dilated to the acrid smell of the fire raging above them. Dense clouds of smoke shut them in. Salem's face went white.

Faith stared at Gannon, searching his eyes for sign of guilt, but old Ryley was too good an actor to be surprised in that fashion. In fact, he became their champion, and led the mad flight to the dugout.

"All my fault," he wailed as he berated himself. "Didn't have no business runnin' round gittin' folks to listen to my troubles. Now, sure as fate, some skunk has set fire to the Basin and trapped your herd. As if there wa'n't room for all in this country."

Faith glanced nervously at her father. He was crushed, silent in the face of this blow. She was worried, too, about Scotty. If he was waiting for them at the dugout, what would he say about Gannon's coming? She knew he had been to some pains to avoid meeting the man.

Her thoughts, therefore, rested upon old Ryley as they rode at what speed they could. In the last few minutes she had come to share Duveen's distrust of the man. He was too interested, too servile. Prompted by a sudden feeling of alarm, she spurred her horse beside Gannon's.

He saw that she wanted to speak to him, and he grudgingly pulled up his pony.

"I wish you'd let us go on alone, Mr. Gannon," she began. "It is kind of you to offer to help us, but we are too late to do anything. Whoever our enemies are, they are powerful and unscrupulous enough to stop at nothing. There's no need of involving you."

Ryley's eyes narrowed as he surveyed her. She seemed guileless. He made a show of insisting on sharing their troubles, but the girl's determination soon convinced him that he had best go back.

Salem had drawn ahead, and arrived at the dugout some seconds before Faith. The old man was wringing his hands as she dismounted. Before them spread a smoldering, blackened plain.

Impulsively the girl placed her arm about her father's shoulders. "Don't give way, father," she pleaded. "We can start over again."

"I know, Faith," he answered slowly. "Duveen warned us. We shouldn't have gone with Gannon. Chances are the entire herd is dead. You know how panicky sheep are. And the boy, and Duveen—they may have been trapped, too. It 'll be some time before we can get our horses across this ground. I didn't think Lundy or Remsen would go this far."

Faith did not hear this last. She had not realized Scotty's danger before. Was his body lying up there in the Basin, a charred, unrecognizable thing, because of his devotion to them?

Her father felt her body go limp in his arms. He became by turn the strong one. "There's nothing to do but wait here," he told her. "Soon as the smoke rises we'll move."

Faith stumbled inside the dugout, where she fell to her knees and lost herself in prayer. Perhaps her thoughts lent strength to the man for whom she prayed; certain it is that he never toiled with more determination than at that moment.

Scotty's first labor on reaching the Basin had been to find Balano and move the herd. By the time Lundy's fire had gained head-

way old Salem's sheep were flowing up the pass that led to the Reserve. The boy's old collie had scented the approaching death long before the men had become aware of it. Balano had wanted to run, but Duveen had held him to his post at the point of a gun.

For two hours now he had been fighting fire with fire. Without shovel or ax to aid him, his task was well-nigh a hopeless one. Balano's difficulties increased, too, as the smoke and flames sent the herd wild.

Scotty's backfires grew, but the perverse wind kept starting new ones in back of him. His clothes and body were now burnt, forbidding things; his eyes mere slits of blood. The heat began to drive him mad. The fires he had started and the onrushing furnace that swept toward him met now. With reeling brain he dragged his weary body to the rock wall at his back and fell to his knees.

There, in a crevice between two huge bowlders, he curled his arms about his face and waited. The roaring came nearer and nearer. Red-hot coals dropped on his unprotected neck and hands. He knew he was facing the test. Either the two fires would fight each other until they burnt themselves out, or the flames would circle past him and jump up the pass and on into the timbered Reserve.

He must have lain there for forty minutes as the battle raged about him. The smoke hung as heavy as ever, but the flames were dying down. He tried to smile, but his cracked, bleeding lips refused to answer. He raised his head as a draft of cool air struck him.

Thankfully he drew the fresh, life-giving air into his lungs. He found time now to wonder how Lundy, or whoever it was, had slipped by Faith and her father. He had heard no shooting. Had the girl and old Salem been taken prisoners? He knew Jim Lundy's way with women. Painfully he struggled to his feet, but, once erect, he found that he could walk.

How he made the five miles to his dugout always remained a mystery to him. Staggering, stumbling forward, he approached the spot where the girl and her father waited. Faith saw him first, and with a cry ran to his side and took him into her arms. Tears filled her eyes as she pressed her face to his blackened cheek.

"Scotty, Scotty," she murmured, "it was all our fault! We went to Gannon's mine. Somebody slipped past us. Father, father!" she called. "He's here—alive!"

Duveen seemed to pay little attention to her story about Gannon. He wanted to lie down, to rest, to drink. She was safe. What else mattered?

In a daze, he knew that he was put to bed, his burns treated, and that cold water was pressed to his lips. They were seated beside him when he awoke.

He stared at them for some minutes before speaking. "What happened?" he finally asked.

He tried to sit up, but Faith insisted on his lying down as she told him what she knew. Scotty shook his head sadly. It was all too pat, too easy to be anything but Lundy's work.

Salem felt the rebuke in the man's eyes. "Is the boy dead?" he asked uneasily.

"No, he's all right. I got the herd and him into the pass before the fire came. He'll stay there until it gits dark." Bit by bit he told them of his fight. He was hungry, famished.

Faith got supper for him. Salem kept walking to and fro, undecided as to what to do. When Scotty had eaten, and Faith had succeeded in rolling a cigarette for him, he began to act like himself.

"Best thing to do is for you folks to go home," he told them. "Gannon will be wonderin' what's happened to you. Tell him anythin' you please. It can't matter now. Balano will move the herd before trouble can come. I'll stay here. If I'm able I'll go up and stay with the boy a while to-morrow."

Salem protested against leaving him there alone, but Scotty would not hear it. "Ain't nothin' more you could do for me. I'll be all right to-morrow."

Faith and Scotty were left alone for a brief moment.

"Why did you do this brave thing for us?" she whispered as she knelt beside him.

Scotty looked away, strangely mute.

The pains and aches did not matter. "Guess it was just because I wanted some one to believe in me," he said at last. "Some one like you, ma'am."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TRAP IS BAITED.

JIM LUNDY'S chagrin on learning that Salem's sheep had escaped the fire, and that they were now feasting upon the succulent grasses of the Reservation, was something not to be measured in words. His fury and resentment increased with the passing of each day.

Scotty had seen nothing of Faith since the day of the fire. He made it a habit to go into the Reserve by the way of the Basin each afternoon. There he had met Salem once or twice. The old man had appealed to the rangers for protection, but they promptly declined to become involved in the feud between Lundy and himself. They were within their rights in this. They argued that Lundy knew the law, and that if he violated it he would be arrested, but they were not going to delegate themselves guardians of any man's stock.

Duveen had foreseen this sentiment, and he was not surprised when Balano began reporting the nightly killing of from five to ten head. Salem and he spent several nights with the herd in an endeavor to find out who was sniping the sheep, but on those nights nothing happened.

This guerrilla warfare began to have its effect on Salem. The glamour of quick money on the high wool market began to dim. Duveen felt this, rather than gathered it from any spoken word that Faith's father had uttered. This nightly killing of his stock was destroying any future profits, but the old man's pride kept him to his word.

Scotty wondered just how great a part Faith had in keeping his determination alive. That Lundy would be content to limit his activities to this waiting, patient game of bushwhacking was unbelievable.

When the killings ceased for a night or two Duveen felt more certain than ever that Lundy was about to strike in a new quarter. Acting on this intuition, he fell to spying on Gannon's cabin, for the trail on Lost Cabin Creek offered Lundy the best means of attack.

The very first night of his vigil rewarded him with the sight of Lundy riding up to old Ryley's place. Scotty became obsessed with the desire to learn what was being said in the cabin. With some patience he made his way down from the rim of the cañon until he came to Gannon's shack. The night was cool, and Ryley or Lundy had closed the door, but the window was half open.

The talk was all of Salem Ingalls. Lundy convicted himself in a sentence of the nightly killings, but he swore that he was sick and tired of waiting for that to drive out the old man.

"I tell you, Ryley," he went on, "I need that grass those damned sheep are ruinin'. Come steer shippin' time, I won't have nothin' but a lot of skeletons to sell. You got to help me out."

"Well, but you've got somethin' on your mind," Gannon answered with a chilling laugh. "Say it."

"That suits me. It's my way to be frank. What about this mine? Can we sell it to him? He's got money. If I can git him where he hasn't a lot of loose money to fall back on, he'll sell his sheep in a hurry. You say he don't know nothin' 'bout gold. Can't we dress her up so that she'll pass an assay test? Salt it, I mean.

"I can buy enough high grade from Starr to spread around here. Those assayers down in Winnemucca admit you've got the same quartz that Starr is gittin' rich on in the Big Ben. And Starr will keep his mouth shut."

Gannon scratched his head speculatively. "Men go to jail for things like that, Jim Lundy."

"Humph! *Some* men, you mean. Ain't no man goin' to jail that sticks with me and Remsen. Didn't we always count on unloadin' this elephant on some sucker? You don't think Ingalls is suspicious of you?"

"Not him; but that girl of his ain't no fool. She'll have somethin' to say. How much money do you think we could git out of him?"

"Oh, it's the price that's worryin' you, eh? That's better." Lundy laughed insolently. "Why," he went on, "I hear he's got about ten thousand dollars in the bank. If you play it right we'll git it all. Sell him a half interest. That 'll sound better, too. He'd wonder about your lettin' go of all of it if it was as good as you say."

Lundy got to his feet and walked to the door and back several times. Old Ryley smoked on in silence.

"I'm right about this, Ryley," the big man said suddenly. "I can't improve it. You'll be sellin' because you ain't got the money to work the mine as it needs to be. Let him pick his own assayer and choose his own samples. Don't be too anxious; don't urge him, whatever you do. I tell you he will fall like a duck in a pond. What do you say?"

Gannon cleared his throat cautiously.

"I'm waitin' for you to say it, Jim," he said. "I ain't heard no talk of how we're goin' to split it. God knows, there may be gold here on this property. I've stuck with it a long time, thanks to you; but I ain't givin' it away."

"And you'd have starved if it hadn't been for me. But I'm no hog. We'll divide it two ways. Does that satisfy you?"

"I reckon that's fair. You do the arrangin' with Starr. I ain't got no way of bringin' the stuff here from his mine. You'll have to do that."

"Certainly. Maybe I'll bring it tomorrow night. Soon as I do you beat it for town, hell bent. Go by Ingalls's place. Just be mysterious with him; that 'll git him."

Lundy made ready to leave.

Gannon came to the door with him. "Jim," he said slowly, "don't you double-cross me like you did Lefty McFarlin or Duveen. Prison wouldn't appeal to me at my age. I reckon I'd kill you before I got took."

Big Jim got into his saddle without replying. In fact, he was sorely put for an answer. Gannon watched as he moved away. This cold scrutiny forced Lundy to speak.

"Talk like that won't git you nothin', Ryley," he warned. "You keep your mouth shut and we'll have no trouble."

Scotty could hear Gannon moving about for a few minutes after Lundy's departure. A short while later the light was put out. Duveen stole away then, to go back to his dugout and toss sleeplessly, trying to digest what he had overheard. His first thought had been to warn Salem, but morning found him of a different mind. The cards were all in his hand now, and for the first time he began to believe that he could square his score with Lundy.

That evening the rancher arrived at Gannon's shack with a buckboard. The two of them then carried sack after sack of rock to the mouth of old Ryley's main tunnel, where Lundy worked the windlass and Gannon went down below.

They were engaged in this work for some time. Duveen heard the old man call for Lundy to hoist him to the surface. A brief conversation ensued, and Big Jim left.

What they said was of no great moment to Scotty. He knew that early morning would find Gannon dashing past Ingalls's place with his news.

It proved to be more than a dash. Ryley rode at such a wild pace that his horse was covered with foam by the time he came within sight of Salem's house. He had sold himself his own story, and his confidence was a thing to wonder at.

The perverse fate that watches over some men must have smiled at the dénouement of the morning flight. Salem had been in the act of riding away from home when Faith caught sight of the rapidly moving dust cloud to the south.

It approached so rapidly that it could only betoken danger or excitement of some sort. This feeling grew on the watchers, and when Salem recognized Gannon he jumped to the conclusion that something of importance had transpired on Lost Cabin Creek.

Ryley pretended not to see him as he flayed his horse with arms and knees. Salem called to him.

"No time for talk," the other shouted. "I'm rich! Rich, do you hear?"

Even Faith caught his half insane satisfaction with the world. Old Ryley was truly mad. He had slowed his horse as he cried his announcement to them. He acted

now as if it had been a waste of precious seconds. He began to kick and pummel his jaded horse.

"What is it, man? Your mine?" Salem shrieked.

"Mine? Course it's mine. I got to git to town, I tell ye!"

"You fool!" Salem snapped. "What do you want to do that for? What's the sense of blabbing this story up and down the land?"

Ryley was too far gone in his delusions to feel any sense of triumph as Salem asked him for his story. Gannon, bar any doubt whatsoever, believed he had a bonanza—the thing he had been hunting for forty years. Faith pitied him as she saw his jaws working convulsively, his eyes wild looking. Shrewd old fraud that he was, he capitulated slowly. In the end the three of them went to Lost Cabin Creek.

Scotty, from his perch on the rimrocks, knew that they came, and that they spent the early afternoon in Gannon's tunnels and drifts. That night he found excuse to take him to Ingalls's home.

A glance at Salem was enough to tell him that the deadly virus of gold madness had swept the old man off his feet. When he spoke it was of Gannon's mine, or rather "our mine," that he talked. His herd seemed to have lost all interest for him. The old, beaten look was gone. He was younger, refreshed, and running over with hopefulness.

Scotty chose his words with some care, but, even so, Salem took exception to them, and when Duveen persisted he became indignant.

"There's no reason for your distrusting the man," he said hotly. "You've proven yourself a good friend, but remember that you're suspicious of a man that you avoid. I've said nothing to Gannon of your presence on the creek. What there is between you I don't know or care. It's not my business; but I won't listen to your wild talk about a fine old man like Ryley."

"That's your privilege," the impetuous Scotty answered self-consciously. "I won't say no more."

Faith tried her best to heal the breach. "Oh, father," she begged, "don't let us have a misunderstanding. Mr. Duveen's been such a good friend."

"It was my fault," Scotty interrupted. "I didn't have no right turnin' you against a man I won't meet face to face. I'll go home and mind my own business."

Faith tried to dissuade him, but he was set on leaving. Her distress softened him enough to risk another warning.

"When they drive into town to-morrow, as they will when they've got the samples they want, you insist on him gittin' an engineer to look over the mine before he puts any money in it. An assay don't prove anythin' if you're dealin' with a crook. He ought to listen to you."

"I'll make him do that, Scotty. You're not angry?"

"I'll git over it if I am," he murmured in better nature. "Ain't nothin' I wouldn't do for you folks. You run in now, and don't have no words on my account. If somebody steps on Mr. Gannon's tail all of a sudden don't you be surprised."

CHAPTER IX.

PHANTOM GOLD.

DUVEEN'S parting words were prompted by something most definite in his mind, or else he would have told the girl what he had overheard at Gannon's cabin. He had gone to the Ingalls place absolutely determined on what he would do, but Salem's seeming ingratitude had made him waver.

Resentment still rankled in his heart. Scotty had so seldom worried about other people, or gone out of his way to fight for them, that he could not understand the old man's unthankfulness. Proud, sensitive to a degree one would not have suspected—surely he was to be forgiven for sulking. Morning found him quite himself, and of a mind to do as he had first planned.

He saw Salem come for Gannon. They went into the mine, where they remained some half hour. Later he watched them drive away in Salem's rig. Duveen knew it would be night, or even morning, before they came back from town. If Faith had

persuaded her father to bring out an engineer it would most certainly be a day before they returned.

Duveen was not foolish enough to suppose that their going left the coast clear for what he intended doing. Lundy was to be reckoned with. Scotty sat in his doorway, cleaning his guns, as he brooded on Big Jim's whereabouts. He took to the hills finally, and scoured the length of the cañon. Far across the open desert he could see the tiny dust cloud Salem's horses kicked up as they loped along.

Nothing else moved in the wide waste. If Lundy were watching Gannon's mine he was doing it from cover. Scotty decided to risk the chance. Lundy and he would have to settle things some day, anyhow. If it fell that this was the day he was ready.

Having come to a decision, he lost no time in reaching the mine. All morning he toiled there; lowering himself in the ore bucket, and reaching the surface, whenever he found it necessary, by the simple method of hand-over-hand climbing of the rope that was fastened to the windlass.

In the course of three hours he had made the return trip some ten or eleven times. In each instance he brought to the surface part of the precious ore with which Gannon and Lundy had salted the mine. No one came to stop him. Scotty spent many minutes in searching the distant hills and rimrocks. Raucous-toned magpies sailed in the sky. Proof enough that no one moved below them.

By noontime the last of the high grade had been brought to the surface. To the unpracticed eye the drift in which Ryley had made his alleged discovery remained as it had been. Duveen ventured a smile. He knew that if any values remained they were ones that nature had placed there. He had obliterated any sign of his presence.

All that he had to do now was to hide the rich quartz. The choosing of the spot in which to conceal it revealed diabolic ingenuity of such a high order that Duveen was unable to control his mirth. His own abandoned mine was the place he selected. What a grim joke that was! Even Lundy would have smiled.

The erasing of his trail consumed much more time than the carrying of the ore. An hour spent in the turning over of the old tailings from his shaft completed his work. He was ready for Lundy's next move. His patience received a severe test as he waited.

Big Jim made himself conspicuous in Paradise that day. It was the finest sort of an alibi. Old Salem ran into him three or four times. Lost Cabin Creek might never have existed, for all his apparent concern.

Faith had won her point with her father, and when Salem and Gannon returned to the mine Ry Blodgett, the engineer, went with them.

Morning brought the calamity.

"Nothing — absolutely nothing—here," Ry told them when he had finished. "If you got those samples here you must have tapped a pinched-out stringer."

"But this stuff that I broke off yesterday? You mean to tell me it ain't full of values?"

Gannon picked up piece after piece of rock from the floor of the drift. His face began to grow a sickly white. He was a miner; he had no need to pass them over to the engineer. The mine looked as it had when he left it, but it wasn't the same. Some one had dusted it.

He wanted to cry out "Thief!" Some thread of intelligence remained to him, however. He ran to the windlass to look for sign, but realized all too soon that the three of them had destroyed any evidence the thieves might have been careless enough to have left.

Ryley knew that he had talked a lot in town. Some one might have dashed here from Paradise. Or Lundy— Had he talked? Whoever it had been, he or they had gotten away.

If he could only rant and tear his hair, curse the fiends that had robbed him, then he could stand it; but this inaction was smothering him, driving him mad. He did not care what old Salem thought. Salem was a fool and a dupe, but Blodgett was no tyro.

Ryley knew that the engineer was eying him mysteriously. In a very fury of impo-

tence Gannon broke into tears. With unseeing eyes he stumbled away, muttering to himself.

Salem and Blodgett completely misunderstood his conduct, seeing before them only an old, broken man who had let his enthusiasm run away with him.

Gannon realized that not only was this present enterprise a failure, but that any future selling of his mine automatically became an almost certain impossibility. Blodgett's word would be accepted. All that remained to him was a hole in the ground.

Salem was downcast, morose. Although he had never admitted it to his daughter, he was heartily weary of the sheep game. This mine had opened wonderful vistas. He had seen himself as he wanted to be—a rich, picturesque Westerner—a booster of its untouched resources, a philanthropist who would send the story of Nevada's greatness ringing up and down the world. Never for a moment did he mistrust Gannon. The two of them were old men—men who had had a dream. The rainbow had faded. He, at least, could go back to his sheep, but what was Gannon to do?

"Better go home with me, Ryley," he said miserably. "No good leaving you alone here."

Gannon was unmoved by this solicitude. There was nothing in the world that he wanted so much at the present moment as his own company. There they left him to give vent to his long-pent-up agony.

Lundy came at nightfall and delivered himself of a torrent of words, but, once assured that the mine had been stripped, he wasted no time in lamentations. They searched for the trail of the party who had bested them, but found no clew.

"Let it go," Big Jim growled. "Sellin' the mine wasn't the big *alce*. It was just a way of gittin' rid of Ingalls. The old fool's got somebody workin' under cover. We ain't been able to git within range of his herd in two nights now, without gittin' fired on. Well, it ain't over yet. No use tellin' you to keep your mouth shut. Time you git to be two or three hundred years old you'll savvy the sense of lettin' other folks do the talkin'."

"Don't pick on me too hard, Lundy," Ryley drawled.

"Don't pick on yuh? I suppose an angel came down and carted away that rock? You stay here and keep your tongue in your mouth!"

Gannon made no retort. Lundy was miles away before he even moved. Ryley was drinking the dregs of failure. He saw how little he figured in Lundy's plans. The failure of their scheme was only a setback to Jim—something that to-morrow could right.

It was not that way with him. He was left high and dry, his days of scheming at an end.

"Jest a useless old bag of bones," he muttered aloud. He seemed to study the effect of his own words, for he jumped up after a few minutes and answered himself. "Ain't, neither!" he exclaimed. "I reckon there's somethin' left, 'way down under the rust." He knocked the ashes from his pipe and marched to the door. "Hey, you, Daisy," he called to his horse, "me and you is goin' to travel. You stay nigh till we're ready."

Old Ryley had looked up and down Lost Cabin Creek ten thousand times in his day, and the impulse to do it now was strong in him, but he resisted it. "Reckon it ain't changed none," he grumbled. "Been lookin' at it too long as it is."

An hour later he had packed his horse, and with the lead rope in his hand they set off. To where? Even old Ryley could not have answered that. Some distant ridge or cañon would claim them. And so he passed from Lost Cabin Creek as he had come to it forty odd years ago.

CHAPTER X.

AMBUSH.

FAITH INGALLS knew before her father had spoken a word that Gannon's mine had proven a disappointment. She curbed her curiosity, however, and waited for him to speak. Nothing was said of Scotty Duveen, but Faith drew her own conclusions. It was plain enough that he had saved them a second time.

All of her tactfulness was needed to restore her father's poise and determination; this, too, without any hint of Duveen, for she knew that any word against Gannon would only upset things. By morning she had him in a new frame of mind and worried about his herd.

It was a hopeful sign. Three days had past now in which they had had no word from Balano. No news was good news, and so, with something of his former fighting spirit, he started for the Reserve.

Duveen had left his dugout, realizing that the following day or two would most likely bring a search for the missing ore. His old mine was some three hundred yards below the dugout, and from a ledge some twelve feet above the mouth of the tunnel he could see down the cañon for two miles. He took his blankets and some canned stuff there, and camped.

His horse had wandered into the Basin, where he could be found when wanted. The night passed, and morning wore on without anything happening. Scotty's thoughts strayed to Faith. He wondered just how a man might make himself worthy of her. Surely not by the riotous living he had indulged in. But, then, she was so far removed from any future plans of his that he was spared the torture of feeling that he had found her only to be denied. And yet, manlike, he was unable to forget her, or even want to.

Thinking of her left him unhappy, his life a series of regrets. There were so many little things he would have done differently had he known he was to meet her. Undoubtedly the chief cause of his present dissatisfaction with himself—a fact which quite escaped Duveen—was that he had never before indulged in introspection of this sort.

His punishment, therefore, was only in exact relation to his ego. Enough that he perceived, with a sigh of relief, the approach of a man on horseback.

The newcomer's movements were calculated to arouse instant suspicion. He did not pick his way up the cañon, but traveled the edge of the high rimrocks. Duveen saw him get out of his saddle when he came abreast Gannon's old place. The man seemed to know what he was about, for presently he was descending to the shack.

Scotty saw him enter it. A minute later he reappeared, looking up and down the cañon excitedly. Some of his excitement communicated itself to Duveen. Scotty had not seen old Ryley this day, but he had no way of knowing that Gannon had departed for other shores. That the man below him had come expecting to find the old man was apparent.

Scotty strained his eyes in an effort to recognize the stranger. As he watched he saw the man head toward him, but keeping to the hard rock, carefully avoiding the easier way of the trail.

This in itself would have put Duveen on guard, and when a short time later the man had come close enough to divulge the fact that he carried a rifle Scotty was all attention. He understood that stepping from rock to rock. The man was intent on leaving no telltale trail behind him. It gave him an unnatural gait and destroyed those peculiar body movements by which Scotty might have recognized him.

A projecting ledge hid him from view for a space. When he next came into sight he was within two hundred yards of Duveen. Scotty's fingers went to his gun. The man was Lundy.

With the passing seconds he came nearer and nearer, and the man lying flat on the ledge above held him covered. A movement of the hand, and Big Jim's hulking body would have crashed to earth.

No least suspicion of Duveen's presence entered Lundy's mind. Scotty sensed this, too. The cattleman's one concern seemed to be in back of him, for he kept turning and staring in the direction of Gannon's shack.

A small, moving speck threading its way through the lower cañon caught Scotty's eye. Evidently it was for this that Lundy looked. He was so near, by now, that Scotty could hear his angry muttering. Duveen's hatred of the man flamed up. The impulse to stand and blaze away at him almost overcame his good sense. Lundy was scrambling uphill, coming toward him. Scotty thought he was making for the very

ledge on which he lay, but to his relief he saw Big Jim flatten out on the tailings at the mouth of the tunnel.

Not more than twelve feet separated them as they lay, watcher and watched. Lundy's every movement was open to the man above him—the raising of the sights on his rifle, the click of the lever as he shot a shell into the barrel, the training of his gun on the figure moving up the cañon. It was murder, cool and deliberate.

"Gannon!" Scotty whispered to himself. "He's goin' to bump him off!"

This explained Lundy's stealthy approach to the cabin. But why did he come here to lay for him? Why didn't he hide at the shack? Old Ryley would be sure to walk right into his arms there.

That they had fought about the disappearance of the high grade was the most likely reason for Lundy's ambushing the man. Duveen felt no sympathy for Gannon. That the two of them were at each other's throats made him smile. One was not a cut above the other. Gannon was hardly fool enough to be off his guard. He had stopped but for a minute at his cabin, and then headed directly for the spot where Lundy lay. He made no effort to move under cover, but rode boldly up the trail. It was as if he were daring the other to shoot.

Duveen had been studying Lundy the while, and now he saw the big man's rifle go to his shoulder. Scotty's eyes roamed to Gannon; he was within range. Duveen's jaws sagged as he stared ahead of him. The man on the white horse was not Gannon.

It was Salem Ingalls!

Lundy's rifle was at his shoulder; a second, and he might fire. Duveen did not wait to use his own gun. Much as a panther does, he gathered himself and sprang through the air.

Square upon Lundy he landed, knocking the breath from the big fellow with an audible *whoosh!*

His head swam from the force with which he struck; a violent pain stabbed at his stomach. Groggily he raised his head. Lundy had not moved; to all appearances he was dead. Blood flowed from a nasty cut across his temple, where his head had struck a jagged piece of quartz. Duveen reached for the man's gun, but it was gone —knocked out of his hand by the impact of Scotty's body.

Satisfied of this, the latter sank back, content to have Salem pass unnoticed. If Lundy lived, the old man would be only in the way. He had no further concern with what went on in the mouth of Duveen's tunnel. That matter touched only the two of them.

CHAPTER XI.

FACE TO FACE.

SALEM had passed the Basin before Scotty was able to stand with clear-seeing eyes. Lundy still lay inert. Duveen pushed him over with his foot. He had known for some minutes that the man lived. He was in no hurry to bring him back to consciousness. He had waited so long to square his account that a few minutes more or less mattered not.

What his feelings were as he gazed upon the white face of the man who had put a price on his head can be imagined. Lundy moved slightly, and Scotty tossed away his guns. Both of them were unarmed now.

It was the way in which he had always wanted to settle things with Lundy. Catlike he squatted, waiting for the other to recognize him.

The big man sighed heavily then, and sat up. A film seemed to fog his eyes. He rubbed them savagely. Dumbly he gazed at Duveen; seconds passed before his eyes became intelligent.

"You—Duveen!" he muttered brokenly.

Scotty nodded his head.

"You called it, Lundy," he answered grimly. "Ain't no good huntin' for your gun. Won't take no guns to settle this. You tell me when you feel all right."

Lundy smiled contemptuously, but he was far from feeling the security he sought to impress on the other.

"Still a kid, ain't you, Scotty? You want to grow up before you cross me."

Duveen made no reply to this taunt. His silence tempted Lundy to further ridicule.

"Jumped me from that ledge, eh? Why didn't yuh call, if you're so damn anxious to settle things with me? We could 'a' shot it out with none of this grand-standin' bein' necessary."

Scotty continued to keep his silence. It began to exasperate Big Jim. "Too bad," he snarled, "that you couldn't 'a' waited till I finished that old fool. Suppose you figure you got it on me forty ways now. Sorta evens up the inside stuff, eh? We got it on each other, so to speak."

"I reckon I'll change your mind about that in a few minutes," Duveen warned. "But you have your little fun, Lundy; it 'll be some time before you enjoy yourself again."

"Yeh? You make heap big talk, Scotty. When you turned my stuff back I allowed you'd lost your nerve. I must 'a' been mistaken. Shows how old fashioned I'm gettin', never to have suspicioned you would be hidin' out so close by. I suppose you know that old gent I was drawing the bead on?"

"Ingalls? I've been workin' for him up in the Reservation."

Duveen made this admission from choice. Lundy whistled.

"You didn't stop at nothin' when you fell, did yuh? Herdin' sheep! That's the low-down on you, Duveen. Well, I guess you got an eye full up there. Why didn't you do somethin'?"

Duveen's eyes grayed until they were ominous, cold, soul-searching. Lundy shivered. He knew that look. It was the stare of the killer. His ugly mouth lost its stock grin as he listened to the man's talk. Duveen was holding up his clenched hands.

"What I'm going to do to you, Lundy, I'll do with these. I don't want no law or guns. When I came back here I didn't care what happened to me. I just wanted to get you. If I swung for it, or was sent down to Carson, it was all right with me. Well, somebody changed my mind for me—I ain't goin' to jail for killin' a skunk like you. And I ain't runnin' no more, Lundy. I'm goin' to beat you till you'll be worse than dead; but that ain't all. You're goin' to do one or two things for me first."

For the life of him Lundy could not have told why his hands shook. He had bullied his way through the years, taking what he wanted, and, contrary to most critics, he had proven himself no coward. And yet, as he listened to Duveen, he knew that the man spoke the truth.

The big man could, and would, fight; but in the back of his brain was the persistent whisper that he was going to defeat. Never before had such a fear gripped him. The sneer was gone from his lips. He was ready to grasp any little advantage that might come his way. He gaged his words as he said:

"That's pretty hostile talk for a man that's wanted, Scotty. I'd rightly figure you'd be thinkin' of that."

"I am!" Duveen snapped back at him.

"What?"

"You heard me! Listen to this."

Scotty brought forth a soiled paper in which was wrapped a smaller and even more disreputable-looking piece of the same material. This latter piece was covered with words scrawled in a bold hand.

"I ain't runnin' any windy on you that I can read, but I know by heart what this paper says. It was wrote by Lefty McFarlin."

The mention of that name sent Lundy's throat dry. He started to his feet.

"Sit down!" Duveen commanded. "Listen to this:

"SCOTTY:

"It was a frame-up. They've got me. I'm dying. Lundy sent us down here to get rid of us. We knew too much about the killing of those Basque kids. These horses didn't belong to him. He knew some one had been running horses in White Pine and that Mac and the others would be laying for us. If you get away get that ——— for me.

"LEFTY.

"Well, you dirty whelp, say somethin'!"

Lundy drew back as Duveen came closer to him.

"You were always quick with the talk," Scotty rasped out. "Why don't you try some of it now? You ain't anythin' to say, eh? You thought they'd git both of us, and failin' that you let them brand me. You don't deny it, do yuh?"

Lundy made a gesture as though to push him back as Duveen forced the paper into his face. Scotty brushed his hand away. "You're goin' to write somethin' on the bottom of this letter, Lundy," he cried. "You're goin' to say, 'This is the truth. Jim Lundy.'"

"I'll see you in hell first!" the cattleman snarled, grabbing at the letter.

Duveen backed away, and taking a pencil from his pocket he deposited both paper and crayon on the side of the ore dump, weighting them down with a piece of rock. Straightening, he faced Lundy.

"Git up!" he ordered. "When you've changed your mind, sing out."

Lundy hunched his body and brought up his fists as the other came toward him, his eyes mere slits of flaming hate. When he was near enough Duveen shot a blow to his jaw. The big fellow took it fair. It rocked him, but he smiled. It gave him courage. If this was Duveen's best he had nothing to fear. Round and round they circled then, Lundy content to wait and Scotty seeking an opening.

The big man thought he caught his opponent off guard and sent a smashing hook for his heart. Duveen, though, was out of the way when it fell. Lundy was encouraged to try it again, and once more Scotty stepped out of danger; but this time Big Jim hung on to him. Duveen rained a shower of blows on his face. They cut it, but they lacked the power to damage severely. And while this went on Lundy clung to him, letting him drag his weight back and forth.

He wasn't fighting. He was just waiting, and wearing down the smaller man, seeking a chance to raise his hairy hands to Duveen's neck and throttle him. So he had always fought. Scotty sensed his intention, and cursed himself for letting the fight come to close quarters.

He had Lundy's face cut to ribbons, his left eye half closed. His spirit soared with every blow that he landed on that pulpy, blood-covered thing that had such a short while since been a face, but he realized that he fought a losing battle if he continued.

He had stepped backward, and Lundy was slow in meeting the step. Their bodies drew apart at the waist. Duveen leaped at the opening. With riflelike quickness he shot a blow to the stomach. Lundy winced. Another jab followed it. Again the big fellow grunted. He couldn't stand these body blows. Raising his knee, he pried himself free.

Duveen strove to steady himself, and as he did so Lundy kicked. Scotty could not escape it, but he did manage to catch his boot and twist Lundy's leg. With a thud they both went down. Cagily they got to their feet.

Big Jim was heaving, blood trickling into his good eye. He was hurt, tired, but in no pressing danger. Duveen bore no marks of battle, but of the two he was showing the strain more. As they came together he tried his best to keep out of the embrace of those big arms.

Feinting with his left, he would draw up Lundy's guard and send crashing blows to the face or body. Soon, however, they began to sap his strength. Proving again the wisdom of that wise old saw that a good little man can not beat a fairly good big man. The endurance was not there.

Lundy had come to the battle mentally whipped. That feeling was gone now. His torn lips drew back from his teeth in a horrible smile. He had won such fights as this in the past. He knew his strength. He would be on his feet when the other was unable to lift his hands. Optimism made him bold.

For a time he became the aggressor. Duveen let himself be chased round and round the level place on which they fought. Lundy seemed to change tactics, and Duveen paused. In that moment the big, hairy arms caught him and drew him close.

Lundy hugged him until their faces came together, and Duveen felt the taste of the other's blood on his lips. The revulsion it caused within him gave him renewed strength. He wanted to kill the beast that held him. The memory of Lundy's trick with the knee came to him. Savagely he raised his own and sent it into the pit of the big man's stomach. Lundy drew back in pain. There was a space between them. Big Jim's arms were out of the way. Scotty

closed his eyes to summon every atom of strength he possessed as he steeled himself for this last chance to win.

His right hand was not more than eighteen inches from Lundy's jaw. It was not far for a blow to travel, but into it he put his very soul—a crashing, body-breaking uppercut. It caught Lundy on the very point of his chin. He seemed to leave the ground, to grow limp, his face white under its coat of blood; and then he was sagging, crumpling to the ground unconscious.

Scotty stood above him swaying crazily from side to side. A child could have pushed him over. He fancied he felt a sustaining arm around his waist. A trick of the imagination, he told himself. But, no! Some one was talking to him.

"Well done, Scotty," he heard some one saying.

Slowly he raised his head and turned his blinking eyes at this strange phantom. His mouth sagged as he stared.

"You? You?" he mumbled.

It was Faith.

"Yes, Scotty. I've been here for fifteen minutes. I don't believe I've breathed in all that time. He'll sign his name on the dotted line now."

CHAPTER XII.

THE WINGS OF CHANCE.

FAITH'S presence on Lost Cabin Creek was easily explained. She had watched her father until he disappeared in the first low hills. With an attempt at gayety she had returned to her household duties, but as the minutes passed she had become obsessed with a presentiment of his impending danger. She was a level-headed girl, as a rule, but this thing weighed on her until it drove her from the house. Then, in an attempt to overtake her father, she had raced after him.

She knew now how well founded her warning had been. With a punishing effort she kept the tears from her eyes. She was in a fair way of knowing how well Duveen had served her, and the soiled letter which Lundy had signed made other matters clear. It was a fitting reward for her faith in him.

"I'll repay you for this some day," she whispered.

Scotty answered without looking her.

"If you mean that, ma'am," he said, "git your father to sell out. This ain't no game for him. It ain't quittin'. It's just admittin' that you can't play it square and win, when you're up against skunks like this. Will you promise me that?"

"It's not going to be easy to make him see it, but I'll try. I promise that."

Lundy still sat hunched over, but his ears served him well. Scotty was aware of the fact. In truth, his words were keyed for the man's benefit. Neither Faith nor Lundy, though, caught a hint of guile in his voice as he asked the girl if she was able to ride to town.

"Surely," Faith answered.

"Well, you take this letter; give it to Doc Hughes; tell him to put it in his safe. He'll know what to do if I happen to be found some mornin' with a hole in my back. When you git done there, go to the recorder's office and file on these claims above and below this one. We'll put up the monuments before you go. Lundy can witness them."

Lundy shared Faith's evident surprise at this talk.

"Meaning what?" she demanded incredulously.

"Meanin' that my days of hidin' out and keepin' this secret are over. I'm rich! There's gold here galore. I want you to have that claim below me. Everythin's in order on this one, assessments paid and all. You put the one above in my name, too."

"And you've been sitting here, knowing this for days?"

"What could I do?" Duveen demanded. "They'd 'a' locked me up if I'd 'a' put my face in Paradise. Don't talk when you git there. I ain't hankerin' to have an army campin' here by night. And that's what 'll happen if it gits out."

Scotty had recovered both his and Lundy's guns, and with them in his arms he moved about the work of building the rock monuments the law recognizes as proof of discovery. Lundy watched him furtively. He picked up piece after piece of quartz

and examined them. There were unmistakable values present. Unbidden, he got to his feet and started to investigate the tunnel.

Duveen wheeled on him with gun raised. "Back up, there!" he cried. "Sit down! I'll tell you when to move. I won't feel called upon to yell, either."

Lundy obeyed, but though his body was a battered wreck, his eyes glittered with something of their old spirit. Covetousness was in them, greed, and the smoldering hope that this was not the end.

When Faith was ready to leave Scotty assured her that she was in no danger from Lundy.

"I'll keep herd on him," he said. "Your daddy will be comin' back this way some time to-day. I'll tell him where you are."

The spirit of this adventure, this play for a fortune, had crept into the girl's veins. She forgave her father for having succumbed to the lure of hidden gold. The weakness was more universal than she imagined.

It was torturing Lundy. He wanted to be off, to get action, and here he was, a miserable, impotent spectator. The thought poisoned him. He even turned away as Faith sent her horse down the cañon. He had no desire to hear their good-bys. Cursing, fuming, he drank his cup of bitterness. The girl had been gone a long time before Duveen addressed him.

"Here's your gun," Scotty drawled. "And empty, too, in case you want to know. You git back to your range, Lundy. You heard what I told her; Ingalls won't bother you much longer. I don't want no thanks for that. You just walk wide of me. I reckon your little stinger has been pulled. You'll find your horse up there on the hills in back of Gannon's shack. You git him, and fan it."

Lundy needed no second telling. Climbing was a hard, aggravatingly slow way of getting out of the cañon, but he had no choice, and at least it set him in the right direction. Once he had recovered his horse he would put miles between himself and the creek. If Harmon, the ranger, were at home, Big Jim figured there might be ways of sharing Scotty Duveen's good fortune. There was a telephone at the ranger's cabin.

The thin strands of copper wire proved faster than Faith's mare. When she arrived in town she found things in an uproar. Lost Cabin Creek was on every man's tongue. Her errands were soon accomplished, and in the late afternoon she started for home.

Duveen had told her not to bother with coming back up the cañon that night. Still, she had a long ride ahead of her. Whenever her horse asked for his head she let him have it, and they soon began to see signs of fellow travelers on the little used road—men on foot, at first, carrying their packs on their backs; later she passed teams, wagons, out-of-date contraptions on wheels that had been pressed into service.

They were all heading in the same direction. Lost Cabin Creek had become the seeming goal of the universe. The men and women who had answered this first call had a pleasant word for Faith as she passed them. Every one seemed in good humor. This rush took on the aspect of a picnic, a lark. Most of them had made similar treks in the past. This might be another fruitless journey, but one never knows. This might be the time; there was the answer.

Faith left them behind in the course of an hour, but she saw that many others had passed on. The road was worn deep with the marks of automobile tires and shod hoofs. The madness of this stampede began to go to her head. It was all she could do to forego turning into the cañon. It was just as well that she kept on for home. She would not have enjoyed the wildness of the story being enacted on the once quiet creek.

Night had come on as the stragglers poured in. The good nature of the afternoon had vanished. It was cold on the creek; most of them were unprepared for it. Only a few had adequate food or utensils for cooking it. And then, too, the early arrivals had settled upon both sides of the creek for half a mile above and below Duveen's claims.

Scotty was taciturn in the face of all this. Lundy had done his work well. Men came to see his strike, but he was deaf to their

entreaties. Rifle in hand, he slept, or squatted, at the tunnel's mouth. No one questioned his right to do this. It is the way of new camps. The law of the gun was the only law at present.

He was glad that Salem had returned home before this rush had engulfed him, or else the old man would have fallen before its madness. Faith must have reached the ranch soon after her father's arrival. They were safe, far removed from this orgy; Lundy's hands were tied. Scotty rejoiced. It left him free to move as he pleased.

The little fires blinking in the darkness along the creek showed no intention of burning out. Bits of conversation floated on the air. The high-pitched laughter of a woman jarred on the ears. Impatient cursing followed when a mule pulled down a tent by kicking over the end pole. And yet Duveen enjoyed it. It was primitive, unlovely, but full of the stuff of life.

No wonder Ryley Gannon tossed in his sleep as he lay beside a purling stream in a lonely cañon far to the north. His troubled spirit must have been back here on Lost Cabin Creek, where he had been the first to drive a drill.

CHAPTER XIII.

RAW GOLD.

MORNING came, and with it bedlam. Lars Svensen's call echoed up and down the cañon. He had sent a tunnel some three feet into a ledge of surface quartz and uncovered a vein of twenty-dollar ore. Prairie grass never flamed before the igniting spark in the brief time it took this news to travel up and down the creek. Faith in the creek's richness soared. Newcomers arrived to add to its fuel. Duveen heard the news with surprise such as a man feels but once in a lifetime.

"Svensen's got it?" he asked again. "Twenty-dollar ore?"

It was more than he could believe. The way in which these human ants were attacking the neighboring reefs and ledges was proof enough of this new find. What a grim twist it was! He wondered if Lundy had come to the creek. Chances were that he had. This thought made Duveen smile.

Luck had fallen his way at last. It remained with chance to say whether or not he succeeded from now on. Ten o'clock brought Faith and her father. Salem was a bundle of nerves. Never before had he thrilled to life in this fashion. The scene was beyond Faith's imagined picture of it. There was nothing good here. Greed, envy —all of humanity's worst emotions had come to the surface.

The sounds that smote the ear might be identified as distinct things, but taken in the whole they came under one head; they carried one mastering tone. It was the voice of the pack. They were running together, but each was waiting, watching for his neighbor to trip that he might devour him.

Scotty felt the girl's disgust. He wanted her to go home.

"What 'd he say," he asked, "about sellin' his stuff?"

"He promised me he would," Faith answered. "But who is to buy the place? Buyers are not waiting around for ranches such as ours."

"I aim to provide the buyer, ma'am. Or else all this is without sense." He spread his hands to take in the scene before them. "It was a hundred to one shot when I started playin' it yesterday. The odds ain't that now."

Faith looked at him in a manner that said she did not comprehend. "You choose to be mysterious always, don't you?"

"It's usually best," he said rather sadly. "Maybe you won't notice it so much in me after to-day. Best you go home. I ain't promisin', but just the same I may be at your house after dark. If I am I won't be alone."

Faith felt herself dismissed, but she smiled. Whatever he did, he did for her best interest. She was certain of that, and it sufficed. Duveen's face lost its scowl as she said good-by. The searching look in her eyes made him smile at himself. Truly he had been evasive.

He would have spent the rest of the morning thinking of her had not his neigh-

bors called him back to the turbulent present. Ed Peters and Rance O'Doul had settled upon the claims adjoining the one which Faith had filed on. They were old acquaintances of Duveen. They sent some inquiries his way regarding his past whereabouts, and if they were inelegant they were to the point.

Scotty met them with a laugh. He could afford to smile. He would have been doubly assured of the wisdom of this had he known that they were there on Lundy's orders.

Scotty began to suspect as much when he saw Miles Rodeer join them. Rodeer's activities since the passing of his saloon had been varied. If that big country recognized any such thing as a political boss, he was that.

Rance said something to Rodeer, and the latter turned and waved to Duveen. "Howdy, Scotty? Comin' over to see you."

Duveen took this sign of friendliness for what it was worth—nothing. But the man's presence held more than passing interest for him. He knew that Rodeer was close to Lundy. The fact that Big Jim had not appeared argued that he had a lieutenant on the job. It was beyond belief that the cattleman would turn his back on this excitement.

The logic of this may not be apparent to those unacquainted with Nevada. Be assured that his reasoning was excellent. He knew from experience that in that land of cattle and gold, gold was the master. A buckaroo might punch cattle for ten months on end, but the breath of a new find had but to reach him to make him its slave. Cattle meant the daily bread; gold was the romance and adventure of life.

Therefore, when Rodeer came up to him Scotty met him with no sign of ill will.

"Went and got yourself a fortune this time, didn't you?" Rodeer began. "Ain't nothin' like money to make folks forget the past. Doc Hughes tells me those White Pine people have taken in their horns. Glad of it, Scotty."

"Seein' you're so glad, Miles," Scotty answered, "suppose you admit that it was Lundy, and not Doc Hughes, who told you about that change of front over in White Pine."

"I reckon it might have been Jim," Rodeer laughed. "No odds on that. But, say, you really got it here, Scotty?"

"I'm satisfied. Have a look."

"My God, man, this is the kind of rock they uncovered in the Big Ben. Don't look as if it was goin' to dip out of all findin', either. What you goin' to do?"

"Sell it—when the price is right."

"Had an engineer to see it?"

Duveen shook his head. "I'll gamble without any fuss-budget tellin' me what's here. I ain't no hog."

Rodeer was at some trouble to conceal his pleasure in this statement. "What you askin'?" he demanded.

"I ain't askin'. But I know what I'll take—thirty thousand cash."

"That's too much, Scotty. Twenty-five would be nearer it."

Scotty favored him with a grin, but his voice lost its pleasantness as he suddenly demanded:

"Why you so interested? You ain't got bank roll enough to fade me."

"Right you are, my boy; but I've got friends."

"Who—Lundy?"

"What difference does that make to you? His money is just as good as the other fellow's."

"Is he on the creek now?"

"No. Won't take me long to git him, though."

Duveen took a turn around the mine to conceal his satisfaction.

"You git him this afternoon. Lundy can buy this mine, but there's a string to it. He's got to buy out old man Ingalls. You tell him that. I don't want no check. You show up with the cash."

"How am I goin' to do that? The bank closes at three."

"That's up to you, Rodeer. Take your time. If I change my mind, that's my business."

When Rodeer had gone Duveen's one prayer was that Lars Svensen's find did not pinch out before nightfall. His hope of unloading on Lundy rested on that.

More from a desire to ease his nerves than from anything else, he began sending a drill into the rock wall at the back of

his tunnel. It was hard work, but whatever he took out of his body was returned to him in mental comfort. It was good showmanship, too. Scotty felt that the two men below him were watching him.

The afternoon wore on as he worked. Only two of his freshly sharpened drills remained. He set his time for quitting upon them. When they were worn out he would stop. In the hours that he had toiled he had sunk a hole some three feet. The rock was not hard going for a practiced man.

With regular, free-swinging blows his sledge rang on the steel drill. *Clang, clang, clang.* There was a crude sort of rhythm to it. The drill seemed to jump as he hit it. Another blow fell, and Duveen's eyes bulged. He had broken through something. The drill had gone in almost to its head.

The thrill of the madness going on about him crept into his veins. Up to now he had been playing—staging an effect. He was as nervous as the most foolish of them now. With shaking hands he withdrew the drill and put in the powder and fuse to blow out as much of the wall as he could. Before the smoke had cleared away he was back in the tunnel straining his eyes to read the exposed quartz.

In that instant he became a stark, raving mad lunatic. With an unintelligible cry he fell to his knees, clutching a fortune in his arms. He had blown out a pocket of almost pure gold—a yellow honeycomb of precious metal. There was no estimating its value. It was the sort of find that had made millionaires of the brothers who had located the great National Mine.

Reeling, sick at the thought of how close he had come to handing this fortune to Lundy for a paltry few thousand, he staggered to the surface. His feverish cry brought a dozen men to his side. A moment of silence, and then the unleashing of all sounds that man can utter. What had passed before was dwarfed to nothingness. This was the opening of the floodgates. Lost Cabin was established! Its values were real now. Each one of them was—for the time being—made rich. Men who had once been content to dream of hundreds now talked in thousands.

Work ceased. Lars Svensen was forgotten. Duveen's name passed from lip to lip. He was the hero, the apostle who had led them to the promised land. Crowds came to look and wonder. With the others came Lundy and Rodeer.

Scotty pushed away the money that the latter tried to force on him.

"You're too late!" he cried. "Too late, Lundy. Git that? Have a look and see what you missed. Twenty-five thousand—Why, that wouldn't keep me in cigarettes."

A square-jawed, gray-haired man pushed through the crowd. It was Doc Hughes. "Good for you, Scotty!" he roared. "Serves him right. Tell him to get."

"That's pretty good advice, Doc," Scotty laughed. "Suppose you travel, Lundy."

The snicker that passed through the assembled crowd was evidence enough of his unpopularity. His scarred face was livid with rage as he moved away. He blamed Rodeer. By the space of an hour he had lost a fortune. Whatever his bitterness, he was saved the further ignominy of knowing that but for him Duveen would have been as penniless as ever.

CHAPTER XIV.

PARTNERS.

IT was evening before Scotty sent his horse in the direction of the Ingalls home. Doc Hughes was keeping guard at the mine. The fresh, cool wind of the open desert fanned his face and brushed away the nightmare he had lived that day. He surprised himself, later on, by whistling. It was good to be alone again. He even tried a song, his first attempt in weeks. Far off he caught the glow of lighted windows marking his destination.

He was the bearer of good news this time; the thought urged him to greater speed. When he was within some half mile of the house he thought something moved directly ahead of him. He stopped and called.

"That you, Scotty?" came the answer in Faith's voice. "I had about given you up."

"Better late than last," he said with a grin. "You might call this one of my busy days."

"Are you alone?" Scotty nodded. "Father will be disappointed," she went on. "Big things happening on the creek, I suppose."

"About the biggest there is, ma'am. I reckon your daddy won't be disappointed none when he's heard my talk. Guess you didn't figure who I was intendin' to bring along to-night, did yuh? It was Lundy. Yes—but he sorta walked out on me."

"There's something wrong with you, Scotty Duveen!" Faith exclaimed. "I can catch it in your voice. Are you going to tell me?"

"I just gotta tell you, ma'am. But I been lyin' somethin' scandalous to you—that is, about my mine. I guess I'd better begin tellin' you the truth. Did you ever wonder why Gannon fell down on that scheme of his to unload that old hole in the ground on your dad? Well, I'm goin' to tell you the up and down of that."

Faith followed him easily. Long before he had finished she was jumping ahead to the only possible conclusion.

"And you didn't have any mine at all," she told him. "You sent me to town just to throw dust in Lundy's eyes, didn't you? And all the time you were hoping to sell him his own high grade. Isn't that the truth?"

The merry twinkle in Faith's eyes was noticeable even in the moonlight.

"But that wasn't all," Scotty drawled. "I was goin' to make him buy out your dad."

"I'm glad you didn't succeed. I would not want to owe anything to Lundy. And it wouldn't have been exactly honest, would it, Scotty? It was giving him what he deserved, but that isn't enough to excuse one."

"I guess I don't know what is right or wrong," Duveen said disconsolately. "I was figurin' he'd done you out of all he could. I intended to give the money to you. But no matter—it fell through. Wasn't my fault, though. He just forced money on me this afternoon—twenty-five thousand for that mine."

Their horses were close together. Faith reached out and caught his hand. "I'm glad, Scotty," she murmured. "Glad that you refused."

"I had to," he answered. "Lundy ain't got money enough to tempt me—not within five hundred thousand of enough."

Both the look he gave her and the innuendo in his voice told Faith that he was holding something from her.

"Scotty?" she chided.

He laughed outright at that.

"Ma'am," he said, "I can't keep it from you no longer. An hour before Lundy came I sent a drill into a nest of gold, the likes of which ain't been seen but once before in this country. I don't rightly know how much it's worth—maybe a million. The vein is there, too. Chances are your claim is just as good."

"Scotty Duveen!" was all that Faith could say. She repeated his name several times.

He had to explain and describe the happenings of that afternoon before she could grasp the truth.

"Guess your dad won't have to sell now. If he's willin' we'll run herd together. No sheep, though. I was brought up wrong for sheepin'. I aim to git that learnin' we was speakin' about some weeks back. I got the money to do it with."

"Education?" she demanded. "You'd own the State if you had that."

Scotty had quite suddenly become aware of a warm, throbbing something he was holding in his fingers. It was Faith's hand. Now that he was conscious of it, he became embarrassed.

"But that claim, Scotty. I couldn't take it. The money is yours."

The spirit of some long-forgotten ancestor must have touched Scotty, because he answered quite brazenly:

"If you was Mrs. Scotty Duveen—that is, you wouldn't have to touch it. I could sorta look after it for you."

Faith's reply was a tinkling laugh. Leaning close so that her lips were near to his, she whispered:

"Now, I wonder if that is what I meant?"

Her red, sultry lips warned him too late

of his danger. He was about to be kissed, and, having no way of escape, he turned and became a hero.

The thrill of sudden rise to wealth had been his that day; but it in no way compared with the knowledge that this girl loved him—that she was to be his. Minutes passed before he released her from his arms.

Her sparkling eyes taunted him—dared him on as of old. With a warm little laugh she settled herself in her saddle for the ride home.

Mischievously she asked: "Have you decided on a name for your mine, Scotty?"

"I left that for you—seein' that it's our mine."

"Let's call it the Little Ben."

"Shucks, that fits, don't it? Lundy ought to appreciate that."

But Faith had not stopped to hear his answer. She was just a bobbing blur against the swaying sage. With a glad cry in his heart Scotty gave his horse the spurs and set sail after her.

Life was sweet to the taste at last.

(The end.)

HERITAGE

MY heart hears the call of the hills
Where the brook o'er rocks tumbles down,
Where hemlocks and tall, dark pines
From the rugged battlements frown.

Where Winter is long and is white
And the wind from the north blows cold,
Where young Spring is quick and alive,
And Summer is all green and gold.

Where Autumn lingers and dreams
In a crimson as deep as the sky's
At sunset, and stars seem near
Ere her last flame flickers and dies—

I turn from the languid air
Of the south and the city's street,
No bonds have they that will serve
To fetter my hurrying feet

For I feel the stir in me deep
Of the things that my soul will free,
As there trumpets down from the past
The call of the blood in me.

F. L. Montgomery.

The Unconquered Savage

by Richard Barry

Part II

Author of "Petroleum Prince," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

AT a football game between Cornell and Carlisle, Ray Custer and Theodore Jones battle their way to friendship. Jones is a full blooded Cree Indian, hereditary chieftain of his tribe. They go together to a dance, where they meet Philippa Norton, with whom Ray is in love. Next day Ray learns of his father's death and of the small legacy he has left. He goes to San Diego, to become an aviator under the tutelage of Glenn Curtiss, the then famous aëronaut. Later on a skillful flyer, he attempts a transcontinental flight, but is defeated by unfavorable air currents and lands by means of a parachute in the heart of a mountain country claimed by the Cree nation. Here he is found by Theodore Jones, known to his tribe as Surefoot, who tells him of the attempt of a half-breed called the Panther to sell out the Crees to unscrupulous white men. Surefoot leads Ray out of the Cree country, and puts him on the right trail. At the border, however, they see a pack train approaching, and two men and a woman. Ray leaves Surefoot and makes his way out, meeting the pack train and discovering to his surprise that Philippa is the woman!

CHAPTER VI.

COMRADES.

RAY took her in slowly. There she was in khaki riding breeches, leggings and a pongee silk shirt, with and orange scarf lightly tied about the neck, the rough and ready picture of a girl scout. Her face was deeply bronzed and her eyes danced ecstatically.

"How did you get here?"

"I can ask the same."

"It's a long story."

"Let's have breakfast first."

Whipple and Wood appeared around a rock whence they had gone for fuel, and soon the half-breeds came back from the river bearing water. For the moment Ray Custer thought life was quite correctly arranged. So did Philippa.

After breakfast came the explanations. Ray first told of his attempt to fly across the continent. The men listened with almost open-mouthed wonder, but Ray thought that in Philippa he noted a reserve as if she knew something the others did not know. Then he remembered the telegram he had received from her. That was only two days ago in Tacoma. It had been dated Denver, and here she was with a party which claimed to have been away from civilization for three weeks. He expressed his surprise.

"Well," said Philippa modestly, "I can explain that. Mrs. Ferndon, my aunt—you remember her—is in Denver. The day I

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for May 27.

left her, over three weeks ago, the newspapers printed the announcement that you intended to fly across the continent. You had not written to me, and I had lost touch with you, but—" She blushed and even the half-breeds smiled stolidly.

"But," Philippa went on, "I thought that was no time to stand on ceremony. So I told my aunt that she must watch the papers carefully and that the day you started she must send a telegram of good wishes in my name."

Ray bowed. "Thank you," said he. "The telegram was very welcome, but I am more deeply touched by your personal reception. Now, isn't it up to you to explain how you happen to be here?"

"That's simple," she laughed; "Uncle Dan — he's my mother's brother — and Cousin Harvey have a gold mine—"

The big voice and the forbidding black beard of Dan Whipple interfered. "Not so fast, Philippa," he cautioned. Then he turned, with what seemed to Ray a forced smile, and addressed the aviator:

"It's not what we've got, but what we'd like to have, eh, Harvey?" He turned to the second white man for confirmation. Wood gravely nodded.

Custer realized there was much they did not say about themselves and their purposes in the wilderness, but he attributed this, at the moment, to the natural reticence of the pioneer. He was so absorbed in Philippa that he paid little attention to the men. Evidently they noticed this. Presently he caught a glance exchange between Whipple and Wood. Instantly his suspicions were aroused. He waited a convenient moment and sought an excuse to talk alone with Whipple.

"I have been with you now a day," said he, "and have been waiting for you to say something about the shots that interrupted your march day before yesterday."

The prospector visibly started. "What shots?" he blustered as if in resentment.

"I was above you in the trail," Ray continued, "and could look down and see your movements. I heard three shots. I saw them strike the dust near you. Then I saw your party deliberately turn tail and go back. Why?"

Instead of laughing, as Ray had expected he would, Whipple became furiously angry. "What in the tarnal blazes do you mean," he shouted, "by spying on us?"

"I wasn't spying."

"Who are you, anyway?"

Ray was swept off his feet, figuratively. However, he managed to stammer, "J-just who I t-told you."

"That don't go with me, young man. Come, this is dangerous business. Declare yourself. Which side are you on?"

"W-which side?" Ray was more bewildered than ever.

"Yes—and be quick about it. If you're with us say so and be declared in. If you're with them be frank about it and we'll see you safe out—no more."

"I don't understand."

"You can understand this!" A heavy blue-barreled Colt leaped from the prospector's hip pocket and Ray stared down its glistening barrel.

Then he laughed immoderately, although he still failed to see the reason for suspecting his own motives. "I was held up over there," he replied, "and now I'm held up over here."

The laughter did not move Black Dan Whipple. "Well?" he sternly insisted while the blue barrel did not lower.

By that time Ray thought it best to tell everything, and he did, beginning with his football friendship with Surefoot, and including his dramatic entrance upon the scene of the Indian's ancestral home a few days before. He did omit, however, any reference to the gold he had found in the river bank. In that sense, perhaps, he was an unconscious confederate of the determined Cree.

As the narrative went on Whipple apparently became partly mollified. At length he pocketed his gun. "Why didn't you say so in the beginning?"

"Because I wanted to find out if it is true, as Surefoot said, that you are entering the Cree reservation lands on a prospecting tour."

The black Whipple eyes flashed. "What business is that of yours?" he demanded.

"None, except that my interest in Philippa gives me the right to know, at least."

"Oh, it does, eh?" Whipple sneered. "Well, then, let me tell you this. No blankety-blank Cree is going to keep Dan Whipple from getting the gold that thirty years of prospecting have taught me the way to get. The Indians are a set of childish fools. They want to keep these lands idle for their lazy selfish purposes. What do they want to do with them? Work them as farms? Not at all. Mine them? Oil them? Graze them? Timber them? Nothing doing. They just want them to go to seed. They can't do it, that's all. We've got the white man's right to develop waste lands. We're not going to steal anything. Be assured of that. It 'll all be regular and legal when the time comes. Meanwhile, I'm going to find out just where the gold is located, and no degenerate, shiftless son of a prehistoric Cree, on whom a white man's education has been wasted, is going to stop me. Do you get that?"

"In a general way," Custer admitted, "but you are vague in your references to 'legal' methods. What do you mean by that?"

"You'll see soon enough."

"If your methods are legal," Ray insisted, "why not bring in the soldiers to protect you?"

This drew another flash from the overbearing Whipple. His answer was an attack on the flank of his opponent. "Mr. Custer," he asserted with vehemence, and over-politeness, "my sister has laid you out to me as the orneriest, peskiest, most good-for-nothing young college cub in all of New York State. Now I see she was right. And my answer to you is this: keep your eyes off my niece, and get back to your white man's country where you're safe."

He started toward the camp, and as a parting shot, said, over his shoulder, "This is a *man's* country."

Despite this little passage of arms between them Ray and Black Dan apparently got on well together for the balance of the day. They broke camp and began marching, as before.

"Where are we going?" Ray asked

"Out," said Whipple.

"Out where?"

"Out of the wilderness."

"Seems to me as if we were going right into it."

Whipple and Wood exchanged glances and laughed.

"Tenderfoot," was Whipple's comment.

Philippa broke in. "Uncle Dan," she said, "are you really going to give up finding the gold?"

"For the present," was the laconic answer.

Ray had been watching the sun and reckoning his directions by that primitive method for some days. He knew that Ogden was in the general direction of south-southwest. He knew that if they were really going back they must be keeping in that general direction, for the valleys did not lie transversely.

However, the party was heading in the general opposite direction, despite a short detour which took them to a lower trail, a detour made early in the day.

As they went on the day became warmer, and lost in a deep valley, pursuing a trail that was visible only to the half-breeds who led the way, Ray became more and more conscious of the fact that they were penetrating more deeply into the Cree country.

Looking above him he saw the mountains rising higher and higher toward distant peaks, many miles away, and he became obsessed with an uncanny feeling that those mountains had eyes, and that every movement the little party made was fully seen and carefully recorded. He did not want to communicate this feeling to Philippa, as he had not confided to her the revelations made by her uncle. Before nightfall he was convinced that Whipple was leading them both into something whose nature he did not care to discuss.

The party was using little triangular tents. They had three; one each for Philippa, Whipple, and Wood. The Indians preferred the ground and the open, and this was a method of sleep that became necessary for Ray, as he had not had the forethought to bring a pup tent with him out of the sky.

When they camped for that night Ray lay down in a blanket which was loaned him, not far from the fire. He rolled his

coat around a stick of wood, and used that bolster for a pillow. Across the fire Philippa's tent was erected, and beyond him the tents of Whipple and Wood.

After a while he saw the flap of Whipple's tent move. The moon was low and he could see only indistinctly, but he was sure that presently another person also emerged from Wood's tent. He rolled over cautiously. The two figures were not more than ten feet away. At length he overheard:

"This kid 'll spill the beans unless we get rid of him quick." It was Whipple's voice.

"How you going to do it?" was Wood's reply.

There was a silence, very eloquent, punctuated by some gesture Ray could not detect. Then he heard a protest in Wood's voice. "Don't start anything like that. Just send him back—pronto. Start to-morrow. He wants it, anyway."

"But there's Philippa."

"Send her, too."

"They're too soft on each other."

"That's no affair of yours. Send 'em back."

"Maybe you're right. The kid's playing Surefoot's game."

Ray was so startled at this accusation that he moved and made a sound. The two evidently heard it, for they listened gravely a moment. At length, satisfied that all were asleep, they continued in even louder, more confident tones:

"We've got to shove on without any more delay," Whipple insisted to his lieutenant, "for I calculate that bill is just about through Congress now. The moment the papers carry news of it there'll be a horde in here. And we've got to spot that gold land before any one gets a peep at it."

"Aren't you 'fraid Surefoot's seein' us now?"

There was a loud grunt of disdain from the ponderous Whipple. "I've got the Panther on his trail. Don't worry. Now get to sleep."

"Then you pack them kids off in the morning?"

"Yes."

The two indistinct forms crawled back into their tents while Ray lay looking into the black night.

The next morning Whipple announced to Philippa and Ray that he wanted them to take the back trail. He felt he must go on and the way might be dangerous. He would give them two of the half-breeds as guides.

Ray protested. Where he had earlier been eager to regain civilization he now was as determined to stay and go through with the party. He tried to prevail on Whipple to live up to his earlier word and take the entire party back.

They argued back and forth, and while they argued, Wood was active a few rods away in a freshly exposed ledge of earth which overhung the path. The young aviator and the bearded prospector seemed on the verge of blows when they were drawn from their dispute by a yell from Wood.

"Here she is, Dan!" he cried, and rushed feverishly toward them, holding forth his two hands filled with dirt. Under the fascination of his excitement both Ray and Whipple forgot for the moment their threatened rupture. They looked into the outstretched hands and beheld black loam speckled with streaks of yellow.

Black Dan felt of the flaky particles with cautious and caressing fingers. He smelled of the earth apologetically. He seemed relieved as he replied: "Looks phoney enough to be salted. But there's no smell of the gunshot wound."

"You're raving, Dan!" cried the ecstatic Wood. "You know there's not been a white man here—ever—and no Indian knows anything about salting. This here's the biggest deposit of clear gold—surface gold, mind you—and ready for the hydraulic in its cheapest form—the biggest I ever seen, and I worked the Tonopah country and at Goldfield when both of 'em was young."

Whipple and Ray were spellbound as Wood expatiated on the land's probable value. "Why, this here forty we're standing on," he protested, "is likely to go into the millions. Might be worth anything—that is, if she holds out as you go down—if it ain't a pocket. What's that?"

As he spoke and while the three were gazing eagerly at the gold, a rifle shot rang out from the mountain cleft above them.

Then another and another. The bullets—three in rapid succession—struck the ground at their feet in a careful line.

They looked from one to the other in quick fear.

"It's the warning!" muttered Whipple.

"Surefoot!" cried Wood disgustedly as he dropped the earth, as if it had suddenly lost all value.

CHAPTER VII.

BATTLE.

WHIPPLE stooped hastily to pick up the gold-streaked loam which his partner had dropped in sudden fear. In itself this bit of earth had little intrinsic value, but Ray realized that Black Dan was acting automatically and as if in realization of its symbolic importance. That little bit of earth meant fortune—not to be sacrificed for any warning from any redskin.

However, in a very few seconds, and before any of the men could so much as turn on his heel, a rifle cracked again from the dense growth in the far ledges. This time Black Dan dropped the earth as though it were molten and not loamy gold. A spasmodic cry of pain burst simultaneously from his lips and he seized his right wrist in his left hand. Then he held it forth to look at it with horror.

Blood dripped down over his fingers. The bullet had passed through the fleshy part of his palm. He started to speak. Anger suffused his cheeks. Evidently he thought better of it and looked from one to the other of his companions, neither of whom had moved. Moving seemed so useless with that uncanny, invisible force evidently overseeing them. They all realized instantly that there had been no mistake about the placing of that bullet. It was not by chance, but by careful design that it had gone through the itching palm stretched out to reach the Cree gold.

In another moment, however, they lost all thought of any significance in the situation except its immediate danger, for the half-breeds down the trail had begun firing and were being answered from the upper ledges.

Ray alone remained inactive for the moment. To him it seemed folly to attempt either to run or to fight.

Except for Philippa. She had remained only a few paces away during the colloquy that ended with the attack. At first eagerly curious at sight of the gold she had stepped back in dismay at the firing. As her uncle rushed past her, evidently to get his rifle lying near his tent, she caught him by the sleeve.

"Uncle Dan!" she cried. "Please don't make a move."

"What do you expect—that I'll stand to be shot down like a dog?" he cried, tearing loose.

"But it's no use fighting."

"Huh!"

He barely heard her as he reached for his weapon. She bounded after him, Ray close beside her, heartily in accord with her thought, but unable to speak, so swift was the action.

"Uncle Dan! Uncle Dan!" The girl persisted. "Don't you see you'd better not fight? Give up quietly or you'll get us all killed."

As if in illustration of her argument one of the half-breeds, who had been crouching in the brush a few hundred yards away, pumping his rifle as rapidly as possible at what he thought were moving specks in the upper ledges of the overhanging rock, uttered a piercing shriek of agony, rose to his full height, tearing at his throat, and then plunged headlong to the earth.

"There!" Philippa exclaimed, starting towards the fallen Indian.

Uncle Dan paid no attention to her, having difficulty in finding his rifle, but Ray did. The young man pelted along after her, calling, "Philippa! Listen to me!"

"Not now, Ray!"

"But you must!"

"Wait until I see what has happened to this poor fellow."

He was alongside her by this time and took her by the shoulder. She tore herself loose. He seized her in his arms, while she struggled unsuccessfully to get free. Apparently neither was conscious that his arms were about her while her breath mingled with his.

"Surely," he protested, "you will take your own advice."

She was frantic with the excitement. "What do you mean?" she demanded.

"I mean you have no business in this. Keep out."

"I'm not going in."

"Yes, you are. What is good for your uncle is even better for you."

Evidently she listened but did not hear. He felt that reason had departed from the girl, for she could make no answer but tug at his arms and beg to be freed. For the moment apparently she personified the enemy in him. This look of horror and anger in her countenance, directed toward him, filled him for the moment with an intense excitement which he little understood.

"Philippa," he pleaded, "come away from this—come back into the woods with me. I know what I'm saying. This is the Indians' battleground. We have no business here. If we are hurt here it is our own fault. Come!"

Even as he spoke she broke from his clasp, and this time succeeded in reaching the side of the stricken red man. Ray arrived at the same moment and together they surveyed the corpse—for corpse it was.

The half-breed was lying on his back with a demoniac face searching the leaves of the trees that rose over him, while his clawlike hand was embedded in his throat. It seemed as if his last act—a futile one evidently—had been to strive to make a contest with some one who had him by the throat. Yet both Philippa and Ray had seen him fall and no one else had been visible.

It was uncanny. They both recoiled. Philippa covered her face with her hands and a deep moan escaped her lips.

Ray leaned down and tried to pry loose the Indian's hand. Then he saw that the bloody fingers clutched the shaft of an arrow whose point was embedded in his throat. Near by on the ground he picked up the broken shank of the arrow. It was tipped with feathers colored black with one tiny tuft of red startlingly alive in the sable center. The wood was bloody where it appeared that the stricken man's hands had clutched it in his death agony.

Wondering if this could cause death so instantly Ray leaned over the body for a closer examination. Thus he saw a bullet wound in the left breast, over the heart. He pointed this out to Philippa, without a word. Then he rose, profoundly impressed and led her away.

When they were a few paces off Ray said: "They finished him with a bullet but they put that arrow through his throat. It must be a warning. Even a dummy like me can see that means not to talk."

At this moment Philippa swooned. Ray caught her in his arms and carried her a few rods to the spring which had been the center of the camp they had chosen for this spot. He deposited her on a fern-brake and brought some water. After a few minutes she revived.

"A warning!" she muttered. "Warning for what?"

"Search me," Ray answered. "But I don't think it need really concern us."

"Why?"

"I don't think it's for us."

"Who, then?"

"Indians."

"Oh!" Her eyes, which had been filled with horror, became thoughtful.

"It's for the Crees—telling them not to use their tongues for the benefit of white men, or I'm very much mistaken."

"I don't understand."

He remembered, now, that she knew nothing as yet, from him, of the animating motives of the opposition of Surefoot, if indeed Surefoot was responsible for that ghastly sight back on the trail. He hesitated. Should he try to tell her now, or should he wait and let events enlighten her, as he was sure they must.

A heavy fusillade of firing that broke out directly in their front answered him for the moment. She shuddered and drew close to him. He placed his arm about her and her head nestled on his breast. He drew her quickly back into the protection of a clump of trees, and there they hid while the battle went on.

Black Dan and Harvey Wood, meanwhile, during the few minutes in which Philippa and Ray had been examining the first casualty and deciding it was their part in the

fight to get back of the firing line as near headquarters as time and space would allow, had secured their rifles and were piling on down the trail to join their red cohorts.

These cohorts, already deprived of the valuable services of one member, consisted of only three now. The three had scattered into the bushes, and when the two white men came up there was no one visible.

"Harvey!" called Dan. "I don't like this."

"Nor me," countered his partner. "Seems like they got us spotted and we can't see them."

"Precisely."

Two rifle shots sounded almost together. Again a piercing shriek rent the air. The whites plunged in its direction, rifles on the hip, ready for instant use. In a short run they came upon another Indian, face up, his face wreathed in the final agony, a bullet through his heart, an arrow through his throat.

Wood slipped his rifle butt to earth, disgustedly.

"It's danged aggravatin' the way they do that," he protested.

Black Dan, at his side, but with his rifle sighted, scanned the neighboring hillsides. Directly in front a ridge ran up from where they stood. On both sides deep gulches slipped away, like great dark gashes, thick timbered and mysterious. The sides of the ridges were almost impassable because of the brush and chaparral which clothed it like a garment.

This ridge ran straight up from the little valley in which they stood and formed a high gap at the top. It was an ideal shelter and runway.

"Seems 's if they picked off our boys like rabbits in a shootin' gallery," Wood commented dryly.

"'Tain't lawful!" Black Dan protested, as if the argument had force. Yet the two white men stood as puzzled and as helpless as were Ray and Philippa in their cozy nook back behind the spring.

Somewhere beyond, out of sight of either, were still two of their own scouts, and they knew not how many of the enemy.

"I reckon we'll have to give up this prospect and stay out of the Cree country," Wood at length commented, for lack of something better to say.

"Never!" Black Dan exclaimed, defiantly. "If we don't get through on this trick I'll go after the Panther. He'll make it straight as Main Street in Butte."

He mopped his brow, for the sweat was thick there, although the day was cool, and the sift of the sunlight through the trees, the stillness, the breeze lifting the leaves gently and the sound of a rushing stream not far away should have soothed and uplifted.

Now the battle, if the conflict could be so dignified—"slaughter," Black Dan always called it—came to a crisis. Half of the white men's reserves having been wiped out, two remained. Neither Whipple nor Wood knew where they were, but they stood peering into the chaparral and along the line of an elderberry patch that lifted ahead, for thence had come the late firing. Neither was a coward, yet somehow each felt that to move on into that mysterious thicket, along that ridge, meant almost certain death.

A puff of white smoke lept from one side of the ridge; then another from the opposite side. Dan lifted his rifle and fired in the direction of the first puff. Even as he fired a bullet struck him in the shoulder and with an oath he dropped his rifle. At the same moment Wood's weapon was shattered in his hand. One bullet struck it in the breach. Another tore off the trigger guard.

A score of shots rang out. Both sides of the ridge seemed alive. As Wood went to the help of his partner he cried, "There they are, Dan! They've disarmed us and now they're coming to get us."

Dusky figures could be plainly seen now darting down the ridge, leaping through the chaparral, pelting on as if unafraid of any opposition. At the same moment the bushes stirred at their feet and a man fell through, tumbling at their feet.

Wood reached down to turn him as he gasped his last breath. Through his throat was an arrow. Its shank was feathered with black, tipped with red. He seemed to have expired in the desire to speak.

Before either Wood or Whipple could say a word, half a dozen men appeared as if from the earth. Each was clothed alike, in the moccasins, khaki trousers and woolen shirt of the reservation Indian, but each wore in his hair the historic black feather of the Cree tribe.

Swiftly and silently the two white men were seized and bound. Black Dan winced with the pain of his wounded shoulder, but said nothing.

Then, while the Indians stood obediently to one side, there strode as if out of the mysterious mountain, a figure clothed precisely like the others, except that instead of one he wore three black feathers in his hair.

"Surefoot!" Black Dan muttered under his breath.

CHAPTER VIII.

FACING THE RED MAN.

"GOOD DAY, Mr. Whipple. How are you?"

This clear and well modulated greeting came from the feathered stranger who advanced until he stood a few paces in front of the two white men. He did not offer his hand, but his manner was as suave as his voice. Each had a cultivated distinction that seemed to set him apart and above all present, his own followers as well as the two captives who defiantly faced him.

"Is your name Jones?" Black Dan leered.

"The government of the United States has so listed me," the imperturbable bronzed man replied.

"Huh!" commented the white man as he winced under the pain of his wounded shoulder. "Surefoot's a better title."

The Indian smiled, very slightly, and very gravely. "Thank you," he said, simply.

"Sureaim 'd be better yet," interposed Harvey Wood.

Surefoot turned politely to the second captive. "Reserve that for my good scouts," he commented, and at the same time passed to one of them the rifle which he was carrying. This left him unarmed save for a knife whose handle protruded from his waistband.

The party was interrupted at this moment by the sudden appearance of two more Indians wearing black feathers, who bore between them the fourth and final redskin member of the Whipple party. His shirt was covered with blood and he was evidently in an exhausted condition. Before Whipple or Wood could say a word, either of comment or greeting, an arrow whizzed through the air, coming apparently from the rearmost member of Surefoot's party.

With unerring aim this arrow entered the throat of the half-breed who could only feebly raise his hands, being apparently already nearly done with rifle bullets. He clutched spasmodically a few times at the arrow and then subsided with a soft gurgle. The black feathered shank, with its tiny red emblem, protruded on one side of his neck while the flint head reached through the other.

Rough frontiersmen as they were, Whipple and Wood both turned their heads aside in unconscious revulsion at the horrid sight. The Crees dropped the half-breed's body as if it had been an empty meal sack. Then, at a nod from Surefoot, they kicked it aside, out of sight, into the bushes.

"Never mind that, Mr. Whipple," Surefoot went on evenly to the two white men. "Their methods need not concern you, unless it be indirectly. We reserve arrows for our own race. The significance is readily known to all Crees, even if of mixed blood."

Whipple started to speak but found his utterance choked. Wood was able to mutter: "It's a rotten savage trick, Jones, and you'll be likely to smart for it."

"And your name, if you please?" Surefoot inquired.

"Wood—Harvey Wood—and a citizen of the United States. You'd better know that there's a big army out there ready to get you if anything happens to one of us white men. But I reckon you know that—that's why you pick on the poor Crees."

"These are not Crees." Surefoot gestured contemptuously toward the bushes where had recently disappeared the bodies of the late half-breeds. "The mingling of

the blood produces a mongrel that is neither white nor red."

There was an impressive pause. Surefoot himself ended it by adding: "However, that does not absolve them from paying the penalty due to traitors."

The Indian approached Whipple and examined his shoulder. The blood was clotted and obscured vision. He saw that he could not easily remove the shirt. Therefore, without a word of explanation, he drew the knife from his belt and slit the sleeve.

For an instant Whipple thought that perhaps his last moment had come, and he braced himself bravely to meet it. On his discovery that Surefoot was attending him in the capacity of a nurse and not as an executioner Black Dan could not help heaving an audible sigh. Surefoot smiled comprehendingly.

"Don't fear, Mr. Whipple," said he. "You are of considerable importance to me alive—at least for the present." He turned to one of his followers and spoke swiftly a few words in Cree. In a moment a roll of linen and a birchbark receptacle of an ointment that looked like axle-grease, smelled like peppermint and soothed the raw flesh like ether, were produced and Surefoot was applying both to the torn ligaments.

"There!" said he at length when he was satisfied that the wound was properly dressed. "You'll be right in a day or two. Only a surface cut."

He turned to the two nearest Crees and spoke in their tongue. They replied with a gesture indicating the clump of trees to the rear behind the spring where Ray and Philippa were hiding. Seemingly satisfied for the moment Surefoot gave orders which indicated that the two young people were not to be disturbed immediately, and turned again to Whipple.

"You are aware," said he, "that this is Cree land?"

He gestured with a sweep that was one of loving inclusiveness, taking in the far mountains, the sunlit valley, the mysterious ridge and the gashed hillside from which the gold specks had been removed.

"Maybe—maybe not," the white man doggedly returned.

"You know it is," the Indian asserted with even calm. "Else why come in with your half-breed spies? Why sneak in if you did not know the land belonged to us?"

Black Dan realized with whom he was dealing and evidently resolved to talk man to man. "Look here, Jones," said he. "You're an intelligent fellow, especially considering you're a redskin."

"Thank you," dryly responded Surefoot.

"And there's no use why we should buck one another. Now you know very well you can't go up against old Uncle Sam. He's going to protect me, one way or another, and you're going to get the worst of it in the long run."

The white man paused. There was no response. "Well, Theodore Jones," he insisted, "ain't I handin' you straight goods?"

Surefoot looked him squarely in the eyes. "Your opinion of your own people is lower than mine," he responded.

"What the—"

"I mean," Surefoot went on, "that I believe the government of the United States will not uphold any one who comes into the reserved lands of the Crees against their protest. And when it is known that you are digging for gold—" The Indian paused, shrugging his shoulders.

Whipple changed his tactics instantly. "Come now," he wheedled, "I may as well tell you that this part of the Cree land we're on this minute is going to be lopped off the rest by Congress. But that needn't worry you. There'll be enough left for all the Crees, and you'll be paid for what's taken—paid enough to make you all rich. The days of grab-without-paying are gone. You Crees 'll get a square deal all the way round—see?"

"If your entrance was legal, why come with renegade Crees? Why sneak in, if your purpose is honest?"

Surefoot spoke with judicial calm.

Black Dan smiled insinuatingly.

"You know well enough, the same as I do—don't you—huh?"

Surefoot did not move a muscle or utter a syllable.

"If you don't know, take a guess."

This was evidently Whipple's ultimatum, and he lapsed into a silence to match the Indian's.

" While I am ' guessing,' Mr. Whipple," the captor continued, " you and your friend will kindly step aside. Whatever your plan is, I think I see the way to turn it against you. And you will not be long in doubt."

He motioned to his followers. They seized Whipple and Wood and led them aside into the bushes out of sight of the clump of trees about the spring and the camp with its tents and paraphernalia. At another sign they closed in on the hiding-place of Ray and Philippa.

For some time Ray had been listening for further sound of firing. Hearing nothing, he was becoming alarmed. He was just beyond earshot of the colloquy which was occurring between Surefoot and Whipple.

Philippa, in the security of his arms, apparently lost all further interest in the proceedings. If Uncle Dan couldn't see her safely out of the mess, surely Ray would. Such was Philippa's momentary mental horizon.

However, this was rudely shattered by the appearance of Surefoot's braves, who broke into the clump of trees, without warning, and seized them.

Philippa shrieked. Ray tried to soothe her, for he recognized at least one of the Indians as belonging to Surefoot's group. He tried to tell her that all was well, but she heard nothing. The fact that her arms were held by two red men, although they did wear the habiliments of semicivilization, seemed to shock her into a state of unreasoning terror.

They were led into the clearing near the camp. There Surefoot in a few minutes came to them. At a sign from him his scouts stepped back, freeing Ray and Philippa.

" Teddy!" Custer exclaimed, while Philippa, looking from one to the other, gradually lost her terror-stricken appearance. Very slowly the identity of the newcomer was impressed on her.

Custer completed her consciousness of the fact by saying:

" You remember Teddy Jones, Philippa. It's old Surefoot."

He didn't know whether to go forward and offer his hand or not. He felt like upbraiding his old college companion and adopting the excessively exaggerated haranguing methods of the football field, but something in the gravity of the situation deterred him. Solitude was all about them; death was in the air.

Moreover, the indescribable poise and certainty of that alert, moccasined figure put a quietus on any attempt at familiarity. Ray forced a laugh as he insisted:

" Come, Philippa, buck up! There is no danger."

In the long pause as she faced the three-feathered figure on the greensward of the leafy glen in the Rockies Philippa again saw, as in a dim glass, that evening at the promenade when Ray had brought the dusky warrior to her; had left her alone with him in the conservatory.

The repugnance she had felt then returned now, only with trebled and quadrupled force. All the race aversion of her Anglo-Saxon ancestors leaped to the surface of her skin as she blushed deeply and instinctively stepped back.

Nor was the Indian unaffected. He who had faced the rifle of the white man, and whose calm was undeterred by any hazard of the wild, now felt the condemnation of the paleface girl. There was a slight tightening of the lips and a slight closing of the eyes as he waited for her to speak.

Her first words seemed irrelevant.

" Where is my uncle?" she asked.

Surefoot found his tongue. His manners were those of the Ithaca drawing-room.

" Your uncle is waiting."

" Take me to him." She started forward.

Surefoot held up his hand.

She stopped as if she feared she might get so near he could touch her.

" Not yet," said he. " Your uncle is required to remain where he is. I am sorry, Miss Horton, but my plans do not permit you to go to him."

Her eyes blazed wrathfully, but she turned on Custer.

" Ray," she demanded, " is this the *Indian* who attacked us?" In her intonation of the word " Indian " she voiced intense disgust.

Custer nodded his head.

She turned on Surefoot.

"You know what happens to Indians who attack white men?" she demanded.

Surefoot was graven in silence.

"You'll be arrested and tried—and condemned for this!" she exclaimed.

Still he was silent.

"And I tell you this, even though I am here helpless in your hands," she still protested, as though striving to convince him of his own iniquity.

Surefoot smiled ever so slightly.

"Your sense of melodrama, Miss Horton," said he, "is doubtless influenced by the story-book Indian whom you know in legend. That is not strange. I would like you to understand, however, that I am a chieftain of the Crees, duly elected by the tribe, and that all my acts are strictly in accord with tribal law."

Slightly reassured, even against her own better judgment, she unconsciously took a step forward. "Then what do you intend to do with us—with Ray and me?" she asked, but with a shade of conciliation in her voice.

"That," said Surefoot, "is a matter upon which I have not yet had time to deliberate. However, I will inform you before the sun goes down."

CHAPTER IX.

HOSTAGES.

WHILE the Indian chief stood before his two latest captives his followers brought up Whipple and Wood. Ray and Philippa stood unbound. Each of the two white men had his hands tied securely behind his back.

Philippa rushed to her uncle with a little cry of sympathy. She hovered over the rough prospector with affectionate concern while he assured her that the pain was gone and that the wound was slight.

Before further words could be spoken a distant sound broke the silence in the forest. It might have been the whir of a partridge's wing; it might have been the distant rumble of an airplane motor. It received instant attention from the Crees; they glanced from one to another with quick assents and drew themselves into stricter attention. All turned toward Surefoot.

The chief uttered a few words in his native dialect, to which his followers listened intently. The last of these then stepped aside and drew the bow with which he had been shooting the arrows. Rapidly he fitted another arrow to the bow; then, instead of firing it, he twanged the string against its feathered end.

The resulting sound was precisely like that just heard. It might have been the whir of a partridge or the far-off whiz of a high-flying motor. Evidently a signal, it was promptly answered, but this time from near by.

In a moment there appeared, coming down the ridge from the mysterious gulch, a file of Indians. Each wore two black feathers in his hair. Ray counted them; there were six. He wondered about the feathers, as Surefoot was wearing three and his followers one each. Apparently the newcomers were of intermediary rank.

This was promptly indicated by the manner in which they were greeted by the Crees guarding the four whites. They stepped back, extending their hands, palms up, but neither offered for shaking nor uplifted in the formal Indian manner. The newcomers turned toward Surefoot with a similar greeting, which he acknowledged gravely with a bow of the head.

He then swiftly uttered a few words to his followers and left them to join the newcomers. Leading them aside, he disappeared behind the clump of trees which had previously sheltered Ray and Philippa.

This left the whites in charge of the Crees, who stood off a few paces, silently on guard.

Whipple spoke to Wood. "It's the council the Panther told us about."

Wood nodded his agreement.

"What council?" Ray asked, coming nearer to them.

The Crees evidently did not mind a conference which excluded them. They appeared to be satisfied if the four remained in their sight. It was not certain that they understood any but their own tongue.

"These red devils imitate their white betters and make out to do things by committees and spokesmen and that sort of thing," Black Dan explained.

"From what I have always heard," Ray commented, "their parliamentary methods antedate the white men's."

"Nonsense!" Wood ejaculated.

"They go back several thousand years." Ray found himself involuntarily championing the dusky warriors.

"Not them teetotalest savages of 'em all. Maybe the Utes went back a little bit, but not these Crees. Why, they eat with their fingers," Whipple insisted.

"Just the same whatever they do will be according to the law and the prophets—their own law and their own prophets."

"This Surefoot is no prophet—he's a blamed tough customer, a tarnal, cruel, sneaky savage—nothin' else." Black Dan looked around to see if his remark was understood by the guards. They evidently gave no heed.

Philippa, heartened by her uncle, gave reply to Custer. "I don't see how you can endure anything they say or do," she protested. "They're so—so—creepy!" She had exhausted her vocabulary and shrugged her shoulders in disgust.

While the whites were discussing them the members of the Cree council, a few rods away, were settling the fate of the four. There was a judicial calm and a judicial majesty about the gathering. Surefoot sat in the center, while the six squatted about him, on their heels, in a semi-circle. He was a few feet removed from the others and on a slight eminence. Each spoke guardedly and with grave concern for the opinions and gestures of each of the others. Only the guttural, monosyllabic Cree was employed.

After the six had expressed their opinions, during which Surefoot said nothing, but weighed calmly all that was uttered, the three-feathered chief delivered his argument. It was received in the spirit of a decision from the bench by the six councillors, who promptly accepted it as final.

Accordingly Surefoot nodded to the farthest of the six, who rose and went to the group waiting outside. Presently he reappeared, leading the bound Whipple by a reluctant arm. The prospector was thrust into the center of the group.

Surefoot spoke.

"Whipple," said he, "the council of the Crees has duly heard your case. Our one purpose is to defend our lands from white invasion. We have no desire to harm you, but if it becomes necessary to take your life to achieve our object we will not hesitate."

He paused to observe the effects of his words. Whipple stood stolidly silent.

"We know who you are. We know your methods. We know your confederates. Until this hour we have taken judgment against none but men of Indian blood. All men of pure white blood can still be spared if you follow our directions. Do you understand?"

Surefoot waited for a reply from Whipple, who finally said, defiantly: "How do I know what you're driving at?"

"Then I will tell you more plainly. The council has decided to release the young white, Custer, and the white girl, Miss Horton. They will be escorted in safety to the edge of the reservation and then given safe conduct back to their own people. You and your confederate Wood will be held here."

"Huh!" grunted Black Dan.

"It will then be the purpose of Custer," continued Surefoot, "to proceed to Washington and there to confer with your political agents, who will be informed that unless the bill you have placed in Congress is withdrawn you and Wood will be killed. Now do you understand?"

Whipple had winced at the stilleto directness of the Indian's announcement, but he tried to laugh in reply.

"You've a romantic imagination, Surefoot," he responded. "I haven't any power with Congress, and I don't know that there's any bill there such as you say there is. Besides that, your whole idea is absurd. The best thing you can do, if you want to save your neck, for the soldiers ain't more'n fifty miles from here, is to let us go quick as God 'll let you."

"You have the power," Surefoot went on, quietly. "And unless you use it to

stop that bill, you and Wood will never be seen again."

"Huh!" snorted Black Dan. "Holdin' us as hostages—eh?"

"There," Surefoot replied casually, "you have expressed it—hostages is the word." He spoke to the nearest Cree, and, in another moment Ray was brought before them.

Surefoot informed Ray in the fewest possible words of the council's decision. Ray turned to Black Dan bewildered. The prospector shook his head. Ray was unable to make out just what was meant. He turned to the Indian protestingly.

"I can't do it, Teddy," he explained. "Why, don't you see, I don't know any of Mr. Whipple's friends in Washington? I never met him before yesterday. And would they take the word from me—a word so important as this? And is it wise in your own interest to force this matter? Wouldn't the Washington people have the military down on you here, on the run, once they got wind of what was doing?"

"I have no fear of that," Surefoot blandly replied. "But perhaps you are right about your lack of acquaintance. In that event we will turn to Whipple's confederate." Again he spoke a single Cree word and one of his followers leaped to obey.

In a moment Wood appeared, led as had been Custer.

Wood was informed of the scheme, and of his duties. He looked slyly toward Whipple to see if he could get a line on the action he should take. He caught the forbidding look in Black Dan's countenance, and turned to the redskin.

"Can't prove it by me," was all he said.

Surefoot merely darted a single glance toward one of the members of the council. In an instant Wood felt his wrists twisted as if in a vise. An involuntary cry burst from his lips. As swiftly his hands were released, and he stood free.

"Looke here, white man," said Surefoot. "I want no more of your nonsense. I shall not ask you whether you will or whether you won't. You will be conducted to the edge of the reservation. There you will be freed, together with Custer and the girl. You will then be given two weeks in which to make the journey to Washington and return. If you are not back in two weeks with word that the bill is dead, then Whipple here—" He finished the sentence with an eloquent gesture of passing his forefinger across his windpipe and casting his eyes heavenward.

"And do Philippa and I go out, too?" Custer demanded, looking toward Surefoot without the slightest question of his authority.

"Yes."

"I am afraid she won't go without her uncle."

"Her uncle will tell her that he is obliged to stay and stake out his claim, and to assure her that all is well. If he refuses to do this he will, anyway—"

Again the gesture, again the eloquent silence.

Surefoot beckoned him aside. When the two stood alone, out of sight and hearing of both Indians and white men, the Cree chief said: "It is best that the woman be out of this quickly. Don't you understand?"

"Danged if I do!" Custer expostulated. "I'm willing to protect her with my life, but I feel like a babe in these woods. If she leaves her uncle, and you—if I leave you I feel we are lost."

"While I live"—Surefoot continued, closing his eyes, so that their inner meaning might not be read by the inquisitive white man—"while I live she is in no danger, but—"

Now he looked at Custer directly and intently. "I am only mortal," he concluded, "and my post is hazardous."

Ray, still unconvinced, said nothing, until Surefoot added, in a whisper: "My successor may not be so generous."

Was Surefoot the noblest or the most cunning of selfseeking men? This question now began pounding at Ray's brain. It was destined to be uppermost there for a long time. He decided, however, to accept him at his own valuation, as a friend. What else could he do, under the circumstances?

"Very well," said he. "When do we start?"

"At once."

Whipple evidently was thoroughly im-

pressed with the gravity of the situation and with the necessity of playing convincingly the part he had been assigned by the Cree chief. He told Philippa that she must go back with Ray and Harvey Wood while he remained to stake out the claim he had come to secure.

At her fluttering apprehension about the Indians he laughed, asserting now that Surefoot was his friend. "He's a good Indian," Black Dan stoutly proclaimed. "Of course he never should have shot up our guides, but, after all, that was their private misunderstanding. No reason why we should carry it on. Be a good girl, now, and Harvey Wood 'll take care of you—if that young rapscalion of a city feller don't know how."

In thirty minutes they were ready to go. Surefoot accompanied them in person a short space on the way, sending two of his men on to guide them all the journey back.

When they came to the parting of the ways Surefoot stood aside in the trail for the party to pass. Ray and Philippa came last. She tripped along the way lightly, while he gazed gravely on her as she went and barely inclined his head. A few rods further on she turned impulsively. There he still stood, gazing silently after them. She waved her hand. He made no further move until they were lost to sight.

An hour later Philippa said to Ray: "What an uncanny man is your Teddy Surefoot! I'm not sure yet whether he is a good or a bad Indian."

"He's the biggest man I ever knew!" Ray replied.

"Anyway, he's an Indian," Philippa concluded, as if that were the last word.

"A full blood!" Ray proudly punctuated, as if that was the unanswerable argument, and one which he had unconsciously assimilated. "A full blood—and a chief!"

CHAPTER X.

THE END OF THE TRAIL.

THEY traveled rapidly for the rest of that day, five in the party — Ray, Philippa, Harvey Wood and the two Crees. Their course was along a valley floor over which towered the seamy gulches of the Rockies.

They were still rather high in altitude, for the timber predominated in spruces, balsams, pines and firs. Thus the air was impregnated with vitalizing odors, and they proceeded as if on wine laden currents.

Perhaps the presence of Philippa had something to do with the happiness of Ray. He felt that the supreme moment of his life had come.

For several hours they proceeded, thus, without comment. One Indian led the way. Then came Harvey Wood, followed by Philippa and Ray, usually walking together except when the trail narrowed so as to compel them to go single file. The second Indian closed the rear at a distance discreet as well as respectful.

Some strange alchemy was at work within the girl. Something had caused, or was causing, her to change in her attitude toward Ray. Until this very moment he had never felt other than secure in the thought that she liked him. During their school-days this had been manifest on many occasions. Later he had never been permitted to doubt it.

The only doubt in his mind, up to that moment, was one concerning himself. Had he the right to care for her? Could he permit himself, with his ambitions, and intending to pursue the perilous career of an aviator, the luxury of linking his life with hers? Until recently the answer had always been in the negative.

The previous twenty-four hours, however, had easily placed a period to the only time of doubt and perplexity. Fate seemingly had solved their problems, and while she lay in his arms in the little clump of trees neither had said a word. She had merely lain like a tired babe on his breast, while he felt that he could defy the world for one moment so precious. It seemed that she had been his and must continue his forever.

Yet he had not said any of this. Somehow it did not seem necessary. Circumstances said it; words were superfluous.

For a time during this blessed morning he felt that the same unspoken accord held them in a bliss of union; a union of senti-

ment, of aim and of purpose, just as circumstances had combined their fortunes of life and limb for the moment.

Along in the forenoon, however, he noted a change. She no longer brushed against his side as they walked. When his hand sought hers her hand was not there. Several times when he spoke her thoughts seemed wool-gathering and she did not promptly answer.

At first this baffled him; then he was nettled.

Once abruptly he broke in on her. "A penny—" he coaxed.

"I was thinking how that mountain peak seems so near and yet it has been the same distance ever since we started," she replied; too quickly, he thought.

"I'll bet it was something else, and I can guess it."

"No." She shook her head sturdily.

"You were thinking that your aunt will be astonished to hear how we met again—and wondering if she will approve."

Again she shook her head.

"Then what was it?"

She shrugged her shoulders, disdaining a reply, ignoring the fact that he had impeached her word, accepting the recognition of an infidelity in thought.

He had no method of defining the cause of her attitude. The day was the same day of cerulean blue and white. The birds sang the same songs; the woodchucks scampered the same scampers; the breezes were as soft and the sunlight as golden.

Yet now he wondered if they would ever escape alive. He looked at the Indian in front and saw in him a renegade. He looked at the placid redskin closing the rear and saw in him a designing villain. The broad plodding back of Harvey Wood became suddenly an obstacle to happiness and freedom.

He said nothing to reveal that such were his feelings, and there was a long silence, when, finally, Philippa ended with a remark that may have been at random, and which may have been in answer to Ray's unspoken doubts.

"He must be a strong man among his own people or he wouldn't be a chief," she said, irrelevantly.

"Who?"

"Surefoot, of course."

"Oh!"

"Teddy Surefoot!" she added. He thought wistfully.

"Have you been thinking of him all this time?"

"Um—huh!"

"I thought you said it was the distance of the mountains."

"We-ll, ye-es, and of the Indian who is like them."

Ray felt baffled. Unaware of any of the subtleties of the feminine likes and dislikes he really had no actual interest in Philippa's feelings toward Surefoot, but the rift in the conversation seemed to offer a point of contact as they jogged along. Neither seemed aware of any danger.

"But you didn't like him yesterday."

"We-ell?"

"Nor this morning. What has changed your mind?"

"I guess it's because he is like those mountains. Yesterday I was near him, and this morning, too. Then he seemed rough, unpleasant, ugly. Now I'm away from him and—well— Aren't the peaks lovely as the sun falls on them across that valley?"

There was a saucy gleam in her eye as she laughed in Ray's perplexed countenance. Even the Indians turned to observe her gravely.

"I like old Surefoot. I've always liked him. I haven't changed, but, somehow, it don't seem right for you to hate him one minute and turn around and idolize him the next." The aviator spoke seriously.

The answer was a very merry laugh. "Don't you think it's safe for me to like him now that we're going away from him?"

"Of course. Why not?"

"It is you who objected."

This angered Ray. "I didn't object. I never objected," he protested.

"It seemed to annoy you."

"Nothing annoyed except that we seemed so happy an hour ago until you brought him into it."

"But we've left him," she insisted, lightly.

"Oh," he grumbled, "in your thoughts, I mean."

"But you wanted to know what I was thinking."

"I wanted to know what had occurred to mar the most perfect morning of my life."

He said this with a despair almost tragic. It caused her instantly to relent, and to place her hand affectionately on Ray's arm. He seized the hand in his and drew her tensely to his side. His other arm slipped around her waist. She did not resist, and, for an instant, they stood still in the path, until they realized that the Cree who had been coming along at a distance of fifty yards was almost on top of them.

Then, without a word, they resumed their march.

Almost at the same instant two rifle shots rang out from a neighboring copse of trees. The Cree behind them dropped to the earth. Ray and Philippa, hand in hand, paused, bewildered.

The broad back of Harvey Wood, visible just ahead of them as it strode on through an elderberry patch, suddenly heaved forward and disappeared.

From farther on in front, evidently from the leading Cree, came pouring a succession of rifle shots. The direction of the smoke indicated they were aimed at something in the mountainous growths stretching above.

It seemed strange that neither Philippa nor Ray should be singled out in this attack, for they were in the most exposed position of the five members of the party. It happened that just then they were in a cleared space where the juniper weeds stretched on all sides of them, while the Cree who had fallen in the rear had been partially concealed by a cottonwood tree round which he was proceeding when he fell. At the same time Wood and the Cree in front were almost obscured by tall timber.

Ray realized that they were easy targets for any one concealed in the woods, and that if it proved to be an ambush which had surprised them they had no hope at all of escape. Yet the only thing to do was to rush for cover as quickly as possible. This he proceeded to do, dragging Philippa after him by the hand.

"Quickly!" he said. "This must be some of Surefoot's men who don't know we are under his protection."

"But he promised us no harm would come—" she protested, as if unwilling to believe there was any danger.

"You heard the shots!" Ray exclaimed.

"They may be from hunters."

"We'll see."

The forest was again silent, but with an ominous dread, as the two plunged on in the direction of the disappearance of Harvey Wood. They came to the point where he had last been seen. There was no one visible, nor apparently any means of knowing just where he went. Ray raised his voice and shouted. Echo was the only answer.

Then Philippa shrieked, and Ray rushed to her side. Well she might. She had stumbled and had fallen over the body of the foremost Cree. Ray stooped and felt of his heart. It was still fluttering, but in that moment ceased, and was still.

"Dead!" said the aviator as he drew the shuddering girl aside.

Then they heard a moan from a ledge that spread below them under a declivity down which the trail plunged at that point. Peering over Ray thought he distinguished the form of their companion. He was for leaping quickly down, but Philippa pleaded not to be left alone, so he helped her down, from rock to rock, from tree root to tree root, until they had reached a creek bed perhaps thirty feet below.

There they came upon Wood, his head lying near the stream. He was rolling in agony.

"Are you shot?" Philippa inquired as she pillowed his head in her lap while Ray brought some water. Curiously her fear and nervousness had quite disappeared. It seemed to require only this hurt of her companion to bring her to her senses and to make her forget the possibility of danger.

"I d-don't know," Wood feebly muttered. "Dang them Cree beggars. I'd 'a' got 'em if the root hadn't give under me."

Ray swiftly examined the white man's body, and shortly announced that there was no evidence of a wound. Instead there was a gash in the head and already the right leg, near the thigh, was swollen enormously.

"Broke!" was the only comment that came from Harvey Wood.

They managed to get from him that at the first shot he had turned to follow the direction from which it came, his rifle ready, and expecting a fight. But, on the crest of the gulch, he had stepped on a dried root which broke with his weight and precipitated him to the creek below. The fall had wrenched and broken his leg and had also stunned him.

The hardy prospector recovered swiftly under the ministrations of Philippa, who made him comfortable on a mound of moss, though he soon announced, after examining his leg: "It'll be a month 'fore I can walk. Now, where're them skunks of Crees? Boy, go an' look!"

Ray obeyed, and found the second in the trail, just where he had seen him drop at the first fire. He was as dead as his mate in front. Both had been shot through the heart. No bullets had been wasted. In each case the aim had been unerring. Ray hastened back to Wood with the news.

"Now what 'll become of Black Dan?" he demanded. "With me in this condition—can't travel—and bound to get to Washington an' back inside o' two weeks?"

Philippa looked at him wide-eyed. This was the first time she had heard of her uncle's peril, yet she seemed not to make any note of the revelation.

"But how will we get out—without a guide—and who knows but they'll fire on us at any minute?"

"They could have done that earlier if it had been their plan," Ray remarked. "They have evidently reserved a more exciting finish for us. What do you think of your friend Surefoot now?"

Philippa's eyes flashed. "It was not Surefoot!" she asserted. "I know that!"

Ray laughed. "Oh! You believe in him now—eh?" he said, slowly. "I wonder what brought you to that frame of mind?"

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

TO Christine it seemed that she had never heard "La Bohême" sung so gloriously as it was that night. The début of a new soprano sent a vibrant current of passion coursing through the veins of the familiar music, renewing its lyric message of love. The brilliant audience forgot its own brilliancy, and surrendered itself in one of those rare moments of emotional tumult—one of those outbursts of enthusiasm which transform the Metropolitan from a fashionable opera house into a shrine of music. Christine's slim fingers fairly tingled when the parted dun-colored curtains fell after the third act, with repeated calls and volleys of applause. How many calls had there been? She had only the vaguest idea; she only knew that she had been quite carried away in enthusiasm.

Even now—as the footlights grew reluctantly dim, and the gilt and crimson cañon of the Metropolitan emerged from the fairyland created by the music—she was scarcely aware of her surroundings. She sank back in her chair, her breath still quickened, and her dark eyes glowing with excitement.

" Wasn't it exquisite?" she murmured at last, turning to her companion, clasping her gloved hands in an ardent little gesture, more expressive than any words could possibly be.

Ralph Marklin nodded without emotion.

" Charming," he admitted.

Ralph was not given to enthusiasm. When he said " Charming," he had gone about as far as his vocabulary ever carried him. It was an extremely well-groomed word, and for that reason he used it frequently, making it serve for all occasions. Excessive emotion and superlatives of speech were rigorously avoided in the Marklin code. Ralph's applause had been restricted to the first, third, and fifth curtain calls; anything beyond that he would have considered for himself a glaring breach of correctness—a touch of plebeian excitement of which he would not for worlds be guilty.

His carefully manicured fingers, at which he had glanced with approval several times during the preceding act, were far from tingling at the present moment, and he saw no reason why they should. Of course, he was generous enough to concede, it was different with Christine; she was a girl. Women were not held to such strict account in matters of feeling. They had to have a certain amount of emotional thrill —and especially Christine.

" Charming," he repeated.

Secretly, he had hoped his companion wouldn't be quite so carried away; it always made her so much more difficult when it came to the intermissions, and he had to maintain his end of the social exchange. Ralph never knew, on such occasions, just what kind of conversational tangent Christine might take during the fifteen-minute interval, particularly if she had been captivated by the music, or by a certain singer, or by a colorful costume, or any one of a hundred details in connection with the performance which chanced to appeal to her. From previous experiences, Ralph realized that he was in for another difficult quarter of an hour; it made him uncomfortable. Why couldn't the girl simply follow his example—accept opera because it was the proper thing, and not make it the excuse for an emotional orgy? Why couldn't she hold herself aloof, as he did, instead of being swayed like an Italian bootblack, saturated with frenzy and garlic?

Ralph sighed a sigh of resignation, because he knew—also from previous experience—that there was no answer to his questionings.

Well, anyway, Christine looked her loveliest to-night. That was something! He drew back a little in the comfortable chair of their parterre box—it was his family possession—gazed across at the opposite tier, and got more of a thrill out of the consciousness that Christine's radiant beauty drew many an admiring glance in their direction than he had contrived to extract from all the operatic exaltation of a lifetime. The sorrows and the love of *Mimi* and *Rodolphe* seemed very remote, but a pretty girl was close at hand, and Ralph's immaculately starched bosom swelled with a touch of masculine pride. Perhaps if Puccini had known Christine, and known that she was to listen to his exquisite strains, he would have done a better job—a job that even Ralph Marklin, of the old New York Marklin family, would have capitulated to.

At any rate, he was Christine's escort, and he was pleased to bask in the radiance of her presence. If only she wouldn't insist upon bringing up intellectual subjects—which frightened him even more than they bored him!

" By the way, Ralph, did you ever read a society romance? I really think you ought to—now and then."

Christine's sudden question brought him face to face with his apprehensions.

" Should I?" he asked, lamely, and paused to adjust a cuff with its correct pearl and platinum link.

Nothing had been said about romances so far that evening. But such was Christine's characteristic way of launching a conversation. Ralph's brows were puckered. Oh, why did he ever take her places—even if she was beautiful? He was forever getting beyond his depth, and he didn't enjoy the sensation. Once, in a burst of confidence, he had as much as told her that she wasn't quite his ideal, because she " made him use his brain when he was with her." He couldn't understand, at the time, why

she laughed so merrily; she hadn't seemed the least bit annoyed at his frankness. But, he reflected, it hadn't done the slightest good—that friendly tip.

Ralph looked up when the cuff was arranged to his satisfaction.

"I always rather fancied, you know, that society romances were quite stupid," he observed cheerfully.

Christine shook her head emphatically, and a stray lock of hair circled over her forehead. To Ralph it looked like an enticing little question mark.

"Not all of them are," she said. "But even a stupid book might surprise you."

"I dare say," Ralph agreed tentatively. "But aren't society novels—well, aren't they written more for people that never get into society?" He looked up hopefully after voicing this implied exemption.

For a moment he thought himself safely past the unwelcome conversational vista which Christine had opened up. He adored her, of course, but he did prefer conventional talk—especially at the opera. Opera was chiefly tolerable because of the pleasure of sitting beside her, close enough to touch her, even when she was—as she seemed to be now—mental miles away.

But Christine was not to be diverted from the subject.

"If you were to take a course in society fiction, Ralph," she went on, giving her words captivating emphasis by laying the tip of her feather fan upon his sleeve, "you'd quickly discover that this box—your family box, all these boxes, in fact—are haunted!"

Ralph suppressed an involuntary shiver.

"Haunted?" he repeated vaguely. Then added, with a burst of ardor: "Well, I'd haunt a box myself, Christine, if I thought I'd find you there."

"I don't mean that they are haunted by the spirits of real people," the girl went on, ignoring the flattery. "They are haunted by the ghosts of the novelists' heroines. Nearly all the society fiction I remember ever having read allows the heroine at least one evening at the Metropolitan—one night of opera. As a rule, the girl passes through a great emotional crisis while occupying one of the parterre boxes on a gala night. It's strange—but all sorts of things can happen to her while she's here. Ostensibly listening to the music."

Marklin laughed—perhaps sympathetically.

"You mean they really don't listen?"

"Not any better than some of the actual box-holders."

Ralph shifted the subject.

"What do they talk about?" he asked.

Christine was silent a moment.

"A great many things," she said at last. "Love, life, destiny—all in tense, copyrighted conversations. Strange, too, there is always a box at the disposal of the society novelist; he can bring his heroine into a parterre box without a 'by your leave' to any one. Whenever he happens to require an opera setting the Metropolitan awaits him. It's a wonderful arrangement!"

Poor Ralph's brain had passed the point of saturation, but he still vainly sought to follow the thread of Christine's fancy—a pursuit which was all the more difficult because of the distraction which he found in watching the exquisite effect of contrast of Christine's bright-hued fan, resting for a moment against her white throat.

"Sort of a beastly intrusion—all that, eh?" he ventured, feeling he ought to say something intelligent.

"Perhaps—but I hope you don't resent it." The girl's eyes twinkled.

"Not in the least," Ralph replied magnanimously.

"After all, Ralph, the novelist simply bends the golden horseshoe to his own devices. Perhaps he doesn't differ much from you and me in that respect."

Marklin was trying so hard to decipher her meaning that he blinked.

"Well, Christine," he plunged, "all I can say is—if the novelists are as happy bringing their heroines here as I am in bringing you—"

"Sometimes"—she shattered his half-uttered compliment without remorse—"sometimes I think the heroines of fiction get a great deal more out of life than we do."

"That's the trick of the novelist," Ralph announced, confidently.

"In a way—yes," she agreed. "But the

point is: they are made to appear really alive. Something is always happening to them, emotionally. They don't come here simply to be seen; they come for some sort of emotional experience."

"But you always seem to have an emotional experience," Ralph protested.

"A thrill—that's all. Something that comes from the music and the voices and the lights—not from life itself. But these heroines of romance—you never are made to feel that they are just here because it's the correct place to be at this hour, digesting their dinner fashionably so that they'll be hungry enough for supper afterward at the Ritz."

"Oh, well, we can pass up the Ritz tonight—if you'd rather."

Ralph waited for some recognition of his spirits of accommodation, but none came. For a moment he entertained the idea of another flattering speech, but the disaster which his previous attempts had encountered made him pause. Before he could work out the problem to a real solution his inspiration had vanished. He shrugged his perfectly tailored shoulders, and followed her gaze across the dull red distances of the Metropolitan.

She was not looking at the boxes opposite, he discovered, but was observing with dreamy eyes the thick fringe of humanity standing three deep behind the rail. These were the nightly lovers of opera who paid for the privilege of wedging themselves into positions of vantage, drinking in the music with their elbows pinioned by others as eager as themselves.

"I wonder," said Christine in a low voice—"I wonder if there are ghosts down there, too."

"You mean—in that jam?"

"Yes."

Ralph laughed.

"Not much, I imagine."

"Why not?" She turned momentarily flashing eyes in his direction.

"Not enough romance in that crowd to suit your society novelist, I fancy."

"I should love to know," the girl murmured almost in reverie.

"Charming!"

Ralph uttered his pet word with satirical intention, but it didn't appear to penetrate its goal. Christine went on speaking as though she had not heard him.

"I wonder what it would be like—to stand up all evening in that throng, listening to music. That would be touching elbows with humanity, wouldn't it? And I believe I should like to do that!"

"Not really!" came from Ralph in a shocked voice.

"Why not?" she insisted.

"I never heard of such a thing," declared Marklin, as if that answered her question. Christine had never been so erratic, he thought to himself, and now she had topped it all off with this wild idea. "Besides," he went on, "that's not your set, you know. They're not your kind."

She was unimpressed by this line of reasoning.

"It would be worth while, wouldn't it, even if they're not my kind? Anyhow, I'm not really certain just what my kind is, and"—her eyes brightened with a flash of decision—"I'm going to try it—and find out!"

Ralph grew almost pale.

"Good Heavens, Christine! Not now!"

He had visions of her rushing headlong from the box, down the carpeted stairs, and crowding into the thronged aisle. And what made the picture all the more terrifying he couldn't think what would be the proper, the correct, thing for him to do in such an emergency. His code didn't cover such unaccountable actions.

But Christine only laughed.

"No, I'm not going to disgrace you," she said. "I'll save it for another occasion."

He sighed his relief, and breathed a thankful prayer as the next act began immediately, cutting short any further discussion. As for the girl, her customary absorption in the music, her earlier interest in the voice and personality of the new soprano, were mingled now with other thoughts. With a curious thrill she found the spell of the opera dissolved in formulating a plan—

She found herself mentally selecting from her wardrobe a certain plain, inexpensive blouse, and a certain tailored walking skirt. Yes, those would be just the thing! And

there was that last year's turban with the blue band of ribbon—

Christine's thoughts wavered from the pathos of *Mimi,* and at times she scarcely heard the music. Even Ralph, with his poor undeveloped powers of observation, was vaguely conscious of her abstraction.

II.

On a crisp evening early in the next week, Christine set forth for her adventure. She had had her dinner in her room, to save the bother of dressing for it, and dismissed her maid. To her mother she had given some plausible excuse to account for her absence during the evening, and Mrs. Todway—who was quite as puzzled, but not quite so alarmed, over Christine's peculiar interests as Ralph Marklin—accepted it with a sigh of resignation. Perhaps Christine was going to a radical lecture, or perhaps to some outlandish musicale—she often did such things. Mrs. Todway was too accustomed to these things to let them worry her. Even when she met Christine in the hall, and found her so plainly attired as to be almost disguised, she merely said, "I hope you won't have to be out too late, my dear. And do be careful."

Christine gave her mother a kiss.

"Are you taking the car?" Mrs. Todway asked.

The girl shook her head.

"Too plutocratic for to-night, mother," she explained, and hurried out.

She boarded the Elevated, as being more in keeping with the spirit of the occasion. She stood on the platform going downtown—this was something which she seemed to recall that passengers were not supposed to do—but the air was so fresh and invigorating. She felt so overflowing with energy that a few more minutes of standing up counted as nothing.

She got off at Forty-Second Street, and threaded her way through the jostling, chattering theater-going crowds. She wondered how many of them had ever done what she planned to do. Most of them, she imagined, were more intent upon movies than music.

Christine took up her position at the end of the already much abbreviated line of prospective standees, hugging the wall on the Broadway side of the opera house. The doors had been thrown open to them some time before, and the throng of hardy opera lovers who secure their posts early in order to assure themselves of choice positions had already passed the door. Christine moved forward slowly, past the sharp eyes of several policemen whose duty it is to see that the doctrine of "first come, first served" is observed, until at last, with feet beginning to smart with the cold and cheeks reddened by the wind, she reached the window.

"One, please," she murmured, and it was all she could do to keep her teeth from chattering.

Surrendering her "general admission" ticket at the door, she found herself at last in the seething aisle. Already the crowd of standees had assumed surprising proportions, and for a few minutes she hung curiously on the fringe of the throng, wondering what was the proper procedure. She moved up and down the thick line, seeking a place where she might crowd into a more advantageous position. She smiled to herself at the thought of the picture she must be making, for all the world like that of a timid little animal trying to find an opening in a fence paling.

Suddenly, with a start that almost betrayed her, she came face to face with several of her acquaintances—brilliant in evening attire, and for once in their lives actually on time—making their way toward their seats in the orchestra. But they, intent upon themselves, failed to recognize the girl in the plain blouse and turban, and Christine, with a little sigh, averted her face until they had passed. Then she watched them as they moved down the aisle to their seats, a thoughtful little smile playing about her red lips. It was like seeing oneself in a mirror—and having one's reflection casually turn and walk away.

A sudden stir among those nearest the rail, a hush in the big auditorioum, as the conductor took his seat. Then the lights grew dim. With a little frantic squaring of her shoulders, Christine elbowed her way into a place which looked less formidable than most, and with a little murmur of

apology, stood on tiptoe for a precarious moment.

How strange a crowd this was!

At one side of her a foreigner jabbered excitedly. It sounded like Italian, but she could not be certain. He was dark-skinned and black-eyed, and his suit—which would have been disclosed as a shrill and ungodly blue in the sunlight—was ill-fitting and unpressed. Even in that packed crowed the fellow managed an occasional gesture.

On the other side a sallow-cheeked music student—a girl with lifeless eyes and hair that fell in untidy, straight wisps from beneath the brim of her hat—divided her attention between the stage and the boy who stood next her. In appearance he was as sallow and unhealthy as she, with dark circles beneath his eyes and that pinched expression which comes to those who dwell in dark, ill-ventilated rooms, cut off from the sunlight.

How different were these surroundings from those to which she was accustomed! Here were poverty and shabbiness—the visible evidence of real sacrifice in order to place a little precious silver upon the altar of art. Christine looked about for some one who might be there from some motive of curiosity, but she alone seemed to represent that type. For a moment she almost wished she hadn't come.

No one paid the slightest attention to her, however, and the feeling of self-consciousness soon wore off. After all, she was just a standee like the rest of them, intent upon seeing as much of the stage as possible, and with just enough determination in her pretty chin to hold her place, and not to be elbowed into a more disadvantageous position by some one else. The code of politeness was suspended by common consent, she quickly discovered. You had to assert your individuality with main strength.

At last the curtains parted.

Through some whim, which Christine hadn't stopped even to explain to herself, she had chosen another night of "La Bohême." Perhaps she wanted to compare her emotions under the stimulus of the same musical inspiration; perhaps it was an unconscious challenge to the familiar love story.

Caught in the surge of the music, and uplifted by the sustained eloquence of orchestra and voices, Christine forgot her surroundings. The exquisite beauty of the score touched her soul—as much, or even more, than it had the last time she heard it. Unconscious of the elbowing throng that wedged her about, unconscious of the feverish air and the oppressive deadness of the atmosphere, she was lifted on the wings of fancy. The lovely strains brought her a message of love more stirring than ever before.

How deafening the applause was!

As the first act came to a close, Christine found herself in the midst of a mad enthusiasm that quite eclipsed her own ecstasy. Here was none of Ralph's restrained approval—restricted to the first, third and fifth curtain calls, but a delirium of hand-clapping that thundered in her ears and made her head ring. She glanced at the energetic hands near her, and suddenly realized that gloves were a blunder. She jerked hers off impatiently, and thrust them into a pocket. Then she began to clap again, taking the Italian—yes, he must be an Italian—as her model. Seeing the ardor of her enthusiasm, he gave her an approving smile, in which his white teeth glistened.

The first two acts passed quickly. Christine was afraid to give up her position, although she would have liked a glass of lemonade—even a cup of cold water. But she didn't have enough confidence in her crowding ability to insure getting back where she stood, and so she decided not to risk it. There was a friendly post beside her, and she found its support increasingly welcome.

Glancing about with eager eyes during the second intermission she was particularly struck with the zest with which those about her were waiting for the next act. They seemed not even to require the physical aid which she had availed herself of in the form of the friendly post. Their joy in the opera sustained them; their anticipation of its further unfoldment was sufficient insurance against fatigue. The music student was talking to her companion animatedly, with a new light in her eyes. The music had brought a touch of color to her pale

cheeks, kindled them with an illusion of health. On the other side, the amiable Italian, with a comradely manner, was holding forth in animated discourse with one of his countrymen, evidently threshing out some technical point of difference involved in the first act.

Well, if all these people could derive renewed energy and kindled strength from listening to the music under these conditions, so could she! Perhaps it wasn't romance she was discovering, after all, but a lesson in common humanity—in the kinship of great music! That was something an interminable round of box parties had never even hinted at.

The third act.

Again the spell of the music absorbed her whole being. Again the magic of the opera—giving voice to the exalted moments of love. Christine's eyes grew dim, her breath caught in her throat. The exquisite, tender passages cast their spell over the vast, dim auditorium, and seemed to hold each individual heart in a responsive thrall. Christine scarcely realized when the act reached its climax.

The curtains fell.

Christine, too moved even to applaud, stood with trembling lips, her eyes bright with tears.

"*Bis!*"

The Italian voiced his approval in her ear; his broad palm came down upon her back with the velocity of a hod of bricks. Carried away by the music, the sunny Neapolitan had forgotten for a moment in which direction his enthusiasm was descending. The blow intended for his countryman had landed upon Christine's frail shoulders.

The girl's first impression was that she was going to faint. Seeing Christine's fright, the poor fellow apologized profusely. Christine rewarded him with a wan smile between gritted teeth. She was thinking desperately that she must not faint—and like a flash there crossed her mind the picture of herself being picked up by ushers, carried to the door, and dropped into one of those clanging ambulances that looked like grocery wagons, with a white-trousered interne—or something—dangling his long legs over the tailboard, and watching to see that she didn't fall out as they rounded the corners. The mere horror of this thought gave her strength, and at the same time made her realize just how exhausted she really was. Her head throbbed; her muscles ached, and her eyes seemed to be burning in their sockets.

Dizzy and weak, she forced her way uncertainly to the edge of the throng, and sat abruptly down on the carpet, leaning her throbbing head against the wall. Buoyed up by the music, she had not noticed her ebbing strength. Now she was too tired even to be angry over the impact with the Italian. Poor fellow, he hadn't meant it!

She glanced up at the opposite tiers of boxes, dimly visible. How remote they seemed, and how comfortable they must be! She smiled a little grimly as she thought of her conversation with Ralph Marklin. The ghosts in the boxes! Well, she felt very much like a ghost herself! Ralph had laughed at her fantastic idea—and now she was a little inclined to laugh at herself. Or cry!

Oh, why had she ever started out on this ghost hunt? She wished she were home in bed. She realized that her turban was disarranged, but she lacked the energy to lift her hand to straighten it. What did it matter? Perhaps her nose was shiny!

The intermission was dragging to a close.

One more act—could she stand it?

"I shan't leave!" she told herself doggedly.

She set her teeth and gripped her fists until the nails cut into the flesh, trying not to think of her utter weariness.

A flotilla of dowagers bore down upon her and swept past, their opera cloaks fanning her hot cheeks. She wondered if she had ever been guilty of such maneuvers.

She drew back out of the path of heedless heels.

"I guess I'll just sit out the last act," she sighed. "That is, if I can manage it without being stepped on." She closed her eyes to ease her throbbing temples, and must have remained that way for several minutes, when a man's voice, close to her ear, startled her, and she found herself gazing up into a pair of frank, friendly eyes.

"I beg your pardon," the owner of the eyes was saying, "but there's a vacant seat beside mine—the man who brought me here had to leave just now to make a train. Wouldn't you care to use it?"

He held out the ticket stub for her inspection, and like the drowning man and the proverbial straw, her fingers closed over it in a dazed fashion.

"Why, I—it's most kind of you, I'm sure."

She struggled to bring her scattered faculties back into service.

"Not at all," he returned, smiling.

"If you're sure I won't be robbing any one," she went on, with a little upward tilt of her chin.

"Quite sure—unless you're afraid it's not playing fair with the management."

She shook her head.

"No, I wasn't thinking of the management."

Christine's trained glance revealed that he was handsome and broad-shouldered. His evening clothes were correct, and he wore them gracefully, but with none of that insistence — almost painful—with which Ralph Marklin, for instance, would have adorned them. Christine realized that his appraisal of her was quite as detailed as was hers of him, and she found herself blushing furiously—not because of the incident, but because of her consciousness of a desire to prolong it.

"It must be fearfully tiresome—standing," he observed.

"Yes—and sitting, too, some places," she answered, as he helped her to her feet.

"The seats aren't bad," he said, as he led her down the aisle. "However, I didn't pick them. Tenth row, I think they are, and right on the aisle."

"It was awfully good of you to invite me," Christine answered as they sat down, and she removed her turban. She remembered that she was still the opera goer in disguise, and she dared not look to right or left, for fear of encountering the eyes of some friend who would recognize her in spite of the unaccustomed attire.

"I'm really cashing in on some one else's hospitality." The man gazed at her with a curious mixture of admiration and unaffected friendliness. "You see, I'm just in town on business, and to-day finished things up, and so I was brought here as another man's guest. But he lives out on Long Island somewhere, and was anxious to get home early. So I stayed on. Of course, he'd seen this opera lots of times."

Something in the way he finished caused Christine's eyes to turn upon him a puzzled look.

"And you haven't heard it—lots of times?"

He shook his head, laughing.

"I should say not," he replied. "I wanted to see how the thing ends, or I'd probably have gone when he did. You see, this is my first taste of this sort of thing."

Christine started. So this was the kind of adventure which came from standing up!

"You've never been to the Metropolitan before?" she asked, incredulous.

"Never."

The answer was cheerful and conclusive.

"New York isn't your home, then?"

"No—but even if it was, I could do with this rather far between."

It was not said with resentment or any other emotion; it was just as though he were stating a commonplace of experience. Three acts of opera had rolled off his back, like water off a duck's.

"You mean you don't care for music?" Her voice was almost pleading.

"Well, I always thought I did care for music, but opera seems so complicated, somehow. Perhaps it's a matter of getting used to it. Maybe it's an acquired taste, and I simply haven't had time or opportunity to acquire it."

"Maybe that's it," she agreed. This man took everything so coolly; nothing about him seemed to be for effect. Christine thought of Ralph and his cuffs — they seemed always to monopolize his time. And here was some one quite as well dressed, who was as oblivious of his clothes as a South Seas savage.

"With you it must be different," he resumed, after a moment of thought. "One would have to be very fond of opera to stand on one's feet for three or four hours, after—"

He caught himself, and colored slightly.

"You were going to say, I suppose, after standing on one's feet all day?"

He nodded.

"Well, something like that. Of course, you may not. I could only guess what you do."

"And what would your guess be?" she asked.

"Perhaps you're in one of the big Fifth Avenue shops," he ventured.

"Behind which counter?"

He looked down at her small, slim hands. Christine was thankful she had remembered to leave her rings at home.

"Gloves," he said.

Christine laughed.

"Am I right?"

"Not exactly," she answered. "But that's close enough!"

"Of course," he remarked, returning to the earlier topic. "I don't doubt that opera means a great deal to a great many people. The size of this crowd would prove that. Only it's rather a novelty for a Westerner, and I suppose I'm much more interested in people than I am in performances. I've been quite fascinated by all the glitter, and the wealth, and the richness of the scene. But I suppose even that is an old story to you."

"It is—but not in the way you might imagine," the girl agreed.

"How often do you come?"

"Oh, many times during the season."

"And always stand up?"

She shook her head.

"No, sometimes I sit down even a bigger proportion of the time than I have this evening."

"I'm glad of that," he said warmly. "You were quite fagged out, I could see."

"Just the same, I could have sat out the rest of it where I was." Christine was unconsciously defending her original determination. How had it happened? She had come to stand up, to rub elbows with the stoic music-lovers, and here she was, sitting comfortably and all her aches forgotten.

"I doubt it," the man spoke firmly. "Anyhow, I guess I was meant to happen along when I did."

Christine smiled.

"You called yourself a Westerner. Westerners always happen along at the right moment, don't they?"

"Well, I can't speak for the whole crowd. Personally, I always try to, however."

"Where in the West is your home?"

It was his turn to smile.

"Strictly speaking," he confided, "I haven't a little gray home in the West. You can observe from that, just the extent of my musical education, can't you? I've an office in Denver, but I have a long tether, so I roam over most of the Rockies. I'm a mining engineer."

"Really?"

"Yes, really—and real mines, too. The kind you get ore out of, and not the imaginary ones staked out to work with the rich vein of Eastern gullibility."

Christine was silent a moment.

"Denver must be quite civilized," she ventured at last.

"Yes, thank you. At least, as civilized as it can be without—this," and he included the Metropolitan from roof to orchestra pit in a gesture.

How very assured he was, and yet without the slightest trace of pose or conscious breeziness. Christine hated conscious breeziness almost as much as she disliked conscious reserve—the Marklin brand, especially. Stealing a little sideward glance, she verified her first approval of his appearance in more detail. His chin was square, but it was relieved by the suggestion of boyishness around his mouth. He had gray eyes, and a good nose.

"Sometimes I think all this is not quite as civilized as it pretends to be," Christine said in response to his last remark.

"Oh, it does very well," he returned. "A lot of veneer, of course, but some of the real stuff down underneath, I suppose."

The darkening of the auditorium for the last act cut short further exchanges. And for once in her life Christine wished that the privileges of the society novelist's heroine might be hers. She thought it would have been pleasant to keep right on talking to this big Westerner, even though Puccini soared to new heights beyond the footlights.

Gradually, however, the sense of her own adventure mingled with the sense of the music, and the girl in the plain tailored suit

and the inconspicuous blouse seated beside the strange man in immaculate evening attire, forgot the mad incongruity of their meeting. It seemed as if their being side by side in the vast assembly was so perfectly logical, so perfectly ordained.

And the man—what was he thinking? Ah, well, he was stealing his glances under cover of the darkness, feeling an unaccountable contentment in place of the restlessness bordering on boredom with which he had listened to the music earlier in the evening. He was strangely drawn to this dainty girl, with her low voice and frank eyes. Somehow, he found it difficult to think of her behind a glove counter—perhaps it was the music casting a glamour over the adventure But he instantly dismissed the thought, grimly aware that he hadn't been hearing a single sound, nor had he so much as wasted a glance upon the touching scene, the poignant tragedy of love, being enacted upon the stage.

As the curtain descended, Christine caught his arm with an involuntary impetuousness.

" Oh," she murmured, " how lovely!"

He nodded gravely, but in such a way that Christine knew he wasn't thinking of the opera at all. Her cheeks, already flushed with excitement and emotion, flamed a deeper red.

" I liked that last act much better than the others," he confided in her ear, as they made their way slowly up the aisle. " In time I wouldn't be surprised if I became quite addicted to opera," he went on, cheerfully forgetting that it was the last act which had penetrated into his consciousness.

" It didn't seem to have quite the same effect for me—the last act." Christine turned her head and gave him a radiant smile.

And although neither of them exactly understood why, they were both right. For both had heard the divine symphony of love toward which all the world's composers strive, but which none of them have ever really attained. And the young engineer from the West had somehow tangled it up with the opera, while the girl—more accustomed to music and to drinking in its inspiration—sensed more clearly than he did that it was not the opera at all. Like a flash, the conventional acceptance of music and her familiar response to it, emotionally, had become a thing apart. She thrilled to the divine music of the spheres.

In the outer lobby, they somehow detached themselves from the milling, chattering throng—the cloaked and jeweled and perfumed women, whose eyes drooped with make-up and weariness; the vacuous young men, masking their emptiness by making a fetish of correctness, and the dull old men, tagging along like the well-groomed escorts they were. Several of the dowagers glanced at them—he at ease in his evening clothes, and she equally at ease in her plain suit. Why were they standing there together—so oblivious of the tinsel show that elbowed past? Poor girl—why didn't he put her in a taxi and send her home?

And they—unaware of the stares of the curious—looked into each other's eyes unafraid, and each saw the message signaled there from the heart.

" Won't you let me see you home?"

She shook her head and smiled, a little wistfully.

" Or put you in a cab?" he ventured, as if he thought it rather preposterous himself. Once more she shook her head.

" I came down on the L," she explained. It was almost a boast.

" Maybe you're in the mood for a bite to eat?"

This drew a musical little laugh.

" It's not good for the complexion—eating late at night," she told him. " Besides —I'm not really hungry."

And all the while, exchanging these little commonplaces, the music which both had heard for the first time that evening—the eternal love song, which is always and never the same—reverberated more joyously in their hearts.

A gust of exhilarating air from the street swept over them. Involuntarily both drew back their shoulders and drank in its tingling vitality.

" That tastes like the wind from the mountains," he said.

" But it comes from the sea," she answered, almost inaudibly.

He caught her arm gently.

"Come!" he said, and drew her out upon the sidewalk.

Liveried chauffeurs edged their cars to the curb; taxi drivers yelled and held out grimy hands. The sounds of traffic—rushing machines, and clanging street cars, and the distant rumble of the Elevated—blended into their song—the song of a man and a maid—to which all other music is a hushed obligato.

Up Broadway they went, arm in arm—ignoring the angry shouts of chauffeurs, the importunities of newsboys, ignoring even the shrill signal of the traffic cops, who for once recognized some power more important than the police regulations and providentially held up traffic at the crossings.

At Forty-Second Street, they stopped before a flower-vendor with his tray held in front of him. He bought her violets. Their fragrance was lost on the four winds, and beneath the myriad merciless lights of Broadway even their color seemed to have faded. But they were violets—

On up the noisy, restless thoroughfare they went, and the divine music went with them. The gaudy restaurants gathered their nightly habitués; the dreary lunch-rooms disgorged their tired-eyed patrons. The midnight of a great city circled about them.

They walked up Broadway, leaving the twinkling lights behind, leaving the opera house in haunted shadow, leaving opera—hearing music.

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THE INSCRUTABLE CIRCLE

IN ages past, when this old planet cooled,
When shapeless masses, without form and void
Resolved themselves, as if by purpose ruled,
In moving, throbbing life, by force alloyed—
Where slept the restless souls?

What vast expanse, what unknown power held
Them, there entwined in embryonic state,
Till human love created, multi-celled,
A form wherein to ripen and vernate?—
So came the restless souls.

A day, a year, past unseen goals,
A transitory being, mystery-filled;
A love of life, the touch of kindred souls,
Unfinished growth and distant hopes oft stilled—
So struggled restless souls.

Then Death reclaimed the fragmentary shell,
Spread dust to dust, relentlessly, nor staid
The ordained journeyings; no force could quell
The circled flight, to earth but briefly strayed—
Where now, immortal souls?

Arthur Webster.

Brass Commandments

Part III

by

Charles Alden Seltzer

Author of "Riddle Gawne," "Beau Rand," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

THE cryptic message, "Come home immediately," has brought Stephen Lannon—known locally as "Flash"—from New York to Bozzam City, the station nearest his immense ranch. He is not recognized after five years' absence, but is quick to resent the sneering remarks of a former acquaintance, Bannack. Going to the only hotel he finds Gloria Stowe in charge during her father's absence; the father he had known. Lannon arrives just as Devake, a gambler, is making a familiar remark. Devake is forced to apologize. Learning from the girl that this incident is typical of many, Lannon discovers that of all the men only one, whom the girl has never seen, but has idolized from afar, could claim the name of gentleman; that one is "Flash" Lannon. She talks so freely of her hero that Lannon, whose name she has not yet learned, sees no way of stopping her without seeming discourteous. Meanwhile Ellen Bosworth, daughter of an Eastern capitalist who owns the biggest ranch in the vicinity, registers at the hotel for the night. Lannon introduces himself, and Gloria, overhearing, feels insulted and chagrined, wondering why he had not accorded her like consideration. That evening, at a barbecue, Devake, Campan, and others of his crowd decide to frame Lannon and send him out of town. A fight results, in which Lannon, unarmed, is victor. As he turns to leave he collapses; one of the shots has found its mark.

After his recovery, Flash Lannon is informed that during his long absence cattle rustling had grown from bad to worse. Slipping into his range costume and strapping on his guns he prepares to fight the thieves; immediately he posts a notice warning Campan, Devake, Bannack, and others of their crowd that he will shoot on sight. His "brass commandments" are cartridges. Bosworth, of the Lazy J, and Lannon have been the chief losers of cattle; before any move is made toward an alliance, Ellen Bosworth rides to the nearest neighbor, Clearwater, to ask his assistance. Unintentionally she overhears Clearwater in conversation with the rustlers, of which group he is a member. When she endeavors to steal away unobserved, she is caught and made prisoner by the man she had come to for help.

CHAPTER XI.

"WHO SHOT YOU, LANE?"

TOM YATES and Perrin were riding a sage-covered slope on their way to the Bosque Grand ranch-house when they saw Lannon, on Polestar, coming in from the east. Lannon was just then riding a ridge, and horse and rider were clearly outlined in the clear light that lay like a calm white sea above the horizon.

Yates and Perrin exchanged significant glances.

"Shore, he fits in hyar like a glove, Yates," said Perrin, referring to Lannon. "But I can't just seem to understand him no more. He's the same as he used to be, but a whole lot different. It's in the way

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he looks at a guy, I reckon. Before he went East them blue eyes of his had an insultin' glare in 'em, like they was darin' you to start somethin', an' sort of urgin' you. You let him look fair at you now an' you see he's sort of amused at you, sort of pokin' silent fun at you."

"He's got a grip on himself, Perrin. He's learned to control himself. Before he left to go East he was bad medicine runnin' loose. Now he's the same bad medicine, roped by common sense. But he's just as dangerous as ever."

"An' as slick as grease!" declared Perrin. "Him addin' thet 'one other' to thet notice he put up in front of the post office over in town has sure got every man lookin' with suspicion at his neighbor. Thar's men thet's knowed each other for years a-lookin' at each other like both was dead sure sartin' 'tother is a low-down hoss thief. Thar's wives thet are watchin' thar husbands, an' sons watchin' thar dads. An' everybody's watchin' everybody else. An' everybody layin' low—waitin'. Town's so damned quiet thet if a man whispers it sounds like somebody yellin'. Folks is goin' around with long faces an' lookin' behind them. Guys has taken to steppin' light an' high, like they was gettin' ready to run."

"The commandments still up?"

"Yore shoutin'! The notice is gettin' sort of yeller, an' the ink a little faded. But them thar commandments is a-settin' thar all neat an' straight, shinin' in the sun. So far's I could hear, nobody's thought of touchin' em. Seems like everybody's scared Lannon will think they're the other man an' throw his gun on 'em."

"Campan been to town yet?"

"Nobody's seen him, nor Devake or Tulerosa or Slim Lally or Bannack. Reckon somebody took 'em news of the commandments."

Perrin and Yates rode up to the corral fence and dismounted. While they talked Lannon rode up, threw the reins over Polestar's head and slipped out of the saddle. Lannon was tanned to a rich bronze hue; his face was leaner, his waist smaller.

"You're lookin' like you looked in the old days, Steve," grinned Yates. "Nobody would ever know you'd ever been East."

"Yates, I reckon you sent for me because you wanted company," smiled Lannon. "I've done nothing since I've been here. Nothing has happened. Town is quiet; there seem to be no rustlers in the valley."

"Hev patience, boss," said Perrin. "Them guys work in spells. I reckon just now they're respectin' them commandments a few, but if you hang around you'll find they'll break out plenty fast."

"I'm hoping nothing will break out, Perrin." Lannon moved uneasily; the sudden sharpness of his look made Yates and Perrin watch him wonderingly.

"Where is the main herd, Yates?" he asked shortly.

"In Bear Flat. We eased them down there day before yesterday. Ed Lane an' Les Chavis was hangin' around. The rest of the boys are scattered, lookin' for strays in the timber. They're due to move down to the main herd to-day."

"*Yates, look west!*" said Lannon sharply.

Yates and Perrin wheeled simultaneously, following the direction of Lannon's gaze. Half a mile or so westward, in the knee-high sage of the slope that Perrin and Yates had mounted on their way to reach the corral where they now stood, came a horse and rider. The horse was traveling slowly, the rider was drooping oddly forward, hanging to the pommel of the saddle.

No word was spoken by the three men as they swung into their saddles and raced toward the oncoming rider. Polestar, spurning the earth with mighty bounds, reached the rider in advance of the others. When Perrin and Yates came up, Lannon had the rider down on a clump of bunch grass and was loosening his collar.

"It's Ed Lane, boys," he said. "He's hit bad!"

Lane, a tall young man, slender, with a face made strangely boyish by its ghastly pallor, was unconscious. A bullet had struck him in the chest on the right side. Red stains on his gray flannel shirt showed where the leaden missile had gone in and emerged. He was limp, his breathing was sharp and shrill. Their faces pale, their lips set in grim pity, the three said no word as they carried Lane up the sage slope toward

the ranch-house. When they reached the house Perrin helped the others place Lane on a bed, stepped softly out to the gallery, leaped from its edge and ran to his horse to make the thirty-mile ride to Bozzam City for a doctor.

Inside the ranch-house Lannon and Yates worked silently over Lane. Twice in half an hour Lane opened his eyes, to gaze dully into the faces above his; and at the end of an hour he seeemed to realize what was happening.

"Lannon an' Yates," he said with a wan smile. "I reckoned I'd never get here." His eyes glazed; he seemed ready to relapse again into unconsciousness. Lannon's voice brought him back.

"Who shot you, Lane?"

"Well, I reckon—why shore I remember. I'm a heap tired, boss. I didn't see no faces. It was last night, I reckon—mebbe the night before. I've been a-comin' a long time. Me an' Chavis was playin' cards by the fire. We heard hosses comin' out of Salt Cañon. There ain't nothin' plain after that. I seen Chavis pitch out into the dark, like he'd stumbled, tryin' to get up. Shore he'd been shot—I been thinkin' it over. But I reckon I didn't hear no shot because I'd been hit at the same time, though I didnt' do no plungin' like Chavis did. I just set down sort of hard an' rolled over with a burnin' pain in my chest.

"Layin' there, I heard hosses; felt men around me; heard 'em sayin' they reckoned I was gone for good. Some of them laffed like they thought they'd played a hell of a joke on me an' Chavis. After that there was a spell when I didn't seem to know anything. I reckon it was the sun shinin' in my eyes that set me to seein' an' thinkin' again.

"Chavis didn't move none; I reckon he's gone. But I got on my hoss, knowin' I'd got to report. Seems I heard Devake an' Tulerosa. But mebbe not. I wouldn't want to—"

His talk grew incoherent; he closed his eyes.

Lannon stood erect and tightened the belt around his waist. His hands swept the black handles of the guns at his hips with a queer, jerky motion that made Yates look at him with a sort of cold fascination.

"Yates," he said shortly, "you stay here with Lane until the doctor comes. Then leave Perrin here and come to Bear Flat."

He ran out of the house, caught Polestar, leaped into the saddle and raced down the sage-covered slope up which Lane had come.

CHAPTER XII.

ELLEN RACES FOR HER LIFE.

AN hour after leaving the Bosque Grand ranch-house Lannon rode down the slope of a mesa into Bear Flat. While descending the slope he had seen some cattle grazing close to the western rim of the level, where some rugged hills threw ever-lengthening shadows into the hollow; he saw a number of horses near a tall cottonwood, and several men grouped around an object on the ground. He observed that the men all faced toward him when they became aware of his approach; that they were curiously motionless and silent as he rode near and dismounted. He recognized them as Bosque Grand men. Yates had told him he expected they would reach the basin to-day.

Lannon knew the men had found Chavis, and he strode among them, nodding shortly to several as he walked to where Chavis lay. A slicker covered Chavis. No word was spoken by any of the men until Lannon turned to them after a short, grim glance at the face under the slicker. Then a stern-looking cowboy spoke.

"Rustlers, I reckon?" he said. "Last night?"

"They almost got Lane," Lannon informed the other. "Barkwell, they shot Chavis and Lane while they were playing cards at their fire!"

The muscles of Barkwell's jaws corded, his face paled, his eyes blazed. The other men, seven in number, stood rigid, grim, attentive.

"We just rode in," said Barkwell. "Not fire minutes ago. I was figurin' to send word to the home ranch when I seen you comin'. Then I figured you knowed about it. Where's Lane?"

"At the Bosque Grand. Perrin has gone for the doctor. But I reckon Lane is done for."

"Damn their black hides!" growled Barkwell.

"Let two men take Chavis back," directed Lannon. "Yates will be there. Tell him we're going to track the rustlers."

"Borton and Culver!" called Barkwell. He and the men who were to accompany Lannon were in their saddles when the latter swung to the back of Polestar. They scattered, began to sweep around the rim of the flat, searching for hoof tracks. It was Barkwell who found them, far to the west, where a narrow gorge made a dark gash in the level.

Lannon and Barkwell leading, the men clattered down into the gorge, following the hoofprints of many cattle, distinct in the hard sand. As they rode the gorge widened, deepened. Half a mile farther on it became a cañon, with high, rugged walls. The floor of sand became smoth, white. The winds of ages had washed it, faded it. There was some verdure—scattered clumps of mesquite, a splotch of cactus, an occasional lance of ocatilla flaunting its scarlet blossom; and the yucca, pale, beautiful. Here and there were nondescript weeds, etiolated, stunted.

The hoof tracks went through the center of the cañon. A wide margin of uncut sand stretched on both sides, not a hoof touching the moraine at the base of the towering walls.

"They wasn't crowdin' them cattle any," observed Barkwell at length; "you'll notice they kept to the center, not spreadin'. They was runnin', though, but not fast. I reckon the rustlers figured that havin' done away with Chavis an' Lane there wasn't no call for hurry."

Smaller cañons began to intersect the main one. They were narrow, like tributaries of a river, and they seemed to follow the same irregular courses. Some intersected from right angles, others came obtusely, still others seemed to merge with the main cañon in almost parallel lines. But the hoof tracks kept to the main cañon except where here and there some refractory steers had attempted to slip out of the line. A cluster of hoof track showed where they had been turned back.

When Lannon and his men had traveled about two miles in silence they came to a recess where a narrow stream of water came tumbling down a cleft in the wall at the right. A white spume rose from the deep pool which had formed at the base of the wall; a gray mist floated like a land fog above the floor of the cañon.

"I ain't never been this far in this damned hole!" declared Barkwell. "Is that there water fit to drink?"

"I've enjoyed it many times," replied Lannon. "It has a sweet flavor, no doubt due to some chemical. But it's good."

Barkwell dismounted and drank from the pool. The other men followed his example; then the horses drank. Barkwell pointed to a dull, green-gray deposit in the walls of the cañon near him, smooth, flint-like in spots, flaky and porous-looking in others.

"Salt," said Lannon.

"Sure," said Barkwell; "I ought to have knowed it. This here's that salt cañon Yates has talked about."

They rode on again, refreshed. The hoof-tracks were still visible. They proceeded at a slow trot, for since the herd must have passed through the cañon during the night, and it was now mid-afternoon, there was little possibility of their catching up with the rustlers for some hours.

Also, there were many sharp curves in the cañon, big shoulders jutting out into the level of the bottom, numerous boxed walls, vast recesses and intersecting gorges where the rustlers, if they had been delayed and knew of the presence of riders on their trail, might arrange a deadly ambuscade.

But as they rode the danger from an ambush became negligible, for the cañon grew wider, deeper, the walls more solid. They came after a time to a point where another mighty chasm intersected the one they had been riding. A floor of sand, almost level, except where a narrow stream of water flowed close to the west wall of the main cañon, stretched fully a mile southward.

The level was flanked by the frowning, somber walls of granite and scoria, and the

sun glinting on it threw back purple shadows which bathed the faces of the riders and heightened their grim aspect. Solemn, weird was this place, pulsing with mystery, brooding, sinister, menacing.

The cañon continued to widen as the men rode. The rugged walls grew constantly lower until they seemed not more than two or three hundred feet high. The floor took an upward trend, the sand disappeared, a smooth, glassy lava hard as flint and of varying colors began to appear. It formed a grotesque mosaic, variegated, irregular, crude, of greenish black, slate gray or dull brown.

There were no more hooftracks; cattle in countless numbers could pass over here and leave no trace.

Smaller cañons still continued to intersect the main cañon, but there were no more sand floors to hold the hooftracks Lannon and his men sought. Granite and basalt, rotted red scoria packed to rocklike consistency by the elements, stretched into the smaller chasms.

Lannon brought Polestar to a halt.

"Looks like we're through, unless we scatter," he said. "The herd might have been driven in any one of a dozen directions."

"We'll scatter, then," said Barkwell.

He sent a man back to the left, another to the right. Lannon warned them to be cautious, and if they again picked up the tracks to return to Barkwell, who would wait in the main cañon.

The other men were sent singly into other chasms, while Lannon, leaving Barkwell standing beside his horse, rode straight ahead. Five minutes after he left Barkwell, Lannon rounded a huge granite outcropping which cut him off from Barkwell's view.

Half an hour afterward Polestar was clambering up a sharp acclivity to a level which took him out of the cañon. He crossed the level and went down a long, rocky slope to a gully, then upward to a barren ridge, where he halted in response to Lannon's command.

Sitting motionless in the saddle, Lannon shaded his eyes with his hands and stared over the vast sandy waste that stretched before him—the desert that marked the southerly limits of the Bosque Grand range.

There was no hint of movement in the silent, somber land, no hooftracks leading down into it over the rocky slope that gradually merged into the floor of the desert like an ocean beach leading to the water. The mystic haze that veiled the farther reaches of the sand was impenetrable, baffling. The cattle had not gone that way.

Lannon urged Polestar forward, down the long slope toward the desert. He knew there were other places where the cattle might have been driven into the desert—points where the intersecting cañons he and his men had passed must merge into the ridge that rimmed the desert.

He turned Polestar westward and rode along the edge of the waste, knowing that the other men were searching eastward of the main cañon. He rode fast, and in a quarter of an hour reached the mouth of a smaller cañon that seemed to make a wide sweep northeastward.

The floor of the cañon was hard and glassy like that of the main cañon, and though there was no possibility of his finding hooftracks there, he had an idea that perhaps he might find an outlet to another cañon where the herd had passed.

He rode for an hour without detecting any signs that cattle had been driven through. Then he rode up a gorge running north and south which took him into a big basin. There was sand here, and hoofprints of cattle and horses.

For an hour he followed them, trailing them clear around to the north side of the basin to the mouth of another cañon. As the hoofprints still went onward he followed them until he reached a flat, where a number of cattle were grazing. He rode through them, among them, to find them branded with a star—Clearwater's brand.

He had followed a false trail. The cattle here belonged to Clearwater; no doubt of that. The brands were clean; they had not been altered.

He had ridden far. He drew Polestar down and twisted in the saddle to get his bearings. The flat looked familiar, but it

was not for some time that he realized that he had seen it before from a ridge northward, near Clearwater's ranch-house. Though the time when he had looked down into the flat was before he had gone east, he recognized its salient features.

The sun was far down in the west. He knew Barkwell would be waiting for him in the big cañon, and that several hours would elapse before he could rejoin his men if he returned the way he had come. He knew of another trail to the cañon, one which would permit fast, steady riding for the greater part of the way, though in order to reach the trail he would have to get out of the flat and into a range of hills northward.

He wheeled Polestar and sent him at a sharp trot around the edge of the flat eastward, toward a slope. When he got out of the flat he rode a low ridge for a time until he reached a mesa. On the mesa he halted Polestar and gazed into a basin below him. At a distance of two or three miles he saw a group of buildings—Clearwater's. He urged Polestar on, but when the big gray horse had gone perhaps a hundred yards he halted again in response to Lannon's sharp command.

Down in the basin, at a point perhaps a mile distant from the Star buildings, Lannon detected movement. As he peered in that direction he saw a gray flash in a little wood, a dust cloud, and a horse scurrying northward.

Sitting motionless, he watched the horse. He saw it head straight for the edge of the basin northward, where a sand slope swept upward to the brow of the mesa. The animal slowed during the upward climb, and came to a halt after reaching the edge of the mesa. Then it went on again, running with amazing swiftness along the rim of the basin. The rider of the gray horse was evidently in desperate haste.

Lannon urged Polestar on again, only to halt almost instantly when his attention was again attracted by movement in the basin. He saw another horse burst through the wood in which he had previously seen the gray one and race through the basin toward the slope which the gray horse had climbed.

The second horse was black.

Lannon saw the second horse gain the edge of the mesa and come to an abrupt halt.

Then came a puff of smoke. The second rider was firing at the first. Lannon was at least two miles from the black horse and its rider; he had been that far from the gray horse.

But something in the appearance of the slim figure on the gray horse had stirred him, and now as he watched his face grew pale with wrath and horror.

"Ellen Bosworth!"

He spoke the name aloud.

Polestar leaped at his sharp cry, running like a feather in a gale along the rim of the mesa toward the two riders.

CHAPTER XIII.

CLEARWATER CONFESSES.

POLESTAR gained slowly. He had been about two miles south of the riders and slightly to the rear of them when Lannon gave him the word, and though his flying hoofs drummed furiously upon the matted grass of the mesa, he was still a long distance behind when Ellen's gray vanished in a cloud of dust on a distant slope, to be followed a few minutes later by the black horse.

When Polestar reached the crest of the slope the gray and the black were racing across the floor of a flat toward an upland that led into some low, barren hills. His gaze on the two riders as Polestar leaped down the slope, Lannon saw another smoke streak dart from the black horse, and heard a faint, whiplike report.

"Rifle!"

Lannon breathed the word through his clenched teeth. For the first time in his life Polestar felt the cruel sting of the spurs. He snorted in protest, lengthened his stride, and when he struck the level floor of the flat he closed the gap between him and the black horse rapidly. The level was three or four miles wide at the point where Ellen's gray was crossing, and the splendid animal was maintaining its lead. It was at least half a mile ahead of the

black horse when it reached the base of the upland.

There its pace slackened, though it vanished into the hills while the black horse was still some distance out on the level. Polestar had thundered his way across the level so swiftly that he was now not more than two or three hundred yards behind the black.

Ellen's horse reappeared in the hills while the black horse was climbing the slope. Lannon had recognized the rider of the black as Clearwater, and a great wonder filled him. Clearwater had always had a good reputation in the valley, but there was no doubt that now there was murder in his heart.

Clearwater caught sight of Ellen as soon as Lannon, for he pulled his horse to a sliding halt, steadied himself in the saddle, and raised his rifle. Once again the sharp report smote Lannon's ears. Lifting Polestar, urging him to supreme effort, he sought to reach Clearwater before the man could fire again. Ellen and the gray were still uninjured, for the girl was erect in the saddle and the horse was leaping like a cat up the slope of a high ridge.

Clearwater was sighting along the rifle when Polestar flashed like a silver bolt beside him. Clearwater wavered in the saddle, turned his head and threw a startled glance straight into Lannon's blazing eyes. Polestar lunged against the black; Clearwater threw up a warding arm, but the black handle of one of Lannon's guns, wielded like a club in Lannon's right hand, smashed with terrific force against the man's forehead. He reeled in the saddle, plunged outward and landed on his shoulders in the grass of the slope.

Lannon dismounted, threw the bridle rein and walked to where Clearwater lay. Clearwater was flat on his back, unconscious. There was a big gash in his forehead where the butt of Lannon's gun had struck him. Grimly, Lannon stood over him until he regained consciousness.

Clearwater's stare was wild, insane. He saw Lannon, started to get up and sat down again, fear, amazement and recognition in his eyes. He shrank from the intensity of Lannon's gaze.

"*Flash Lannon!*"

"You know me, eh?" said Lannon, grimly. "That's good. Maybe you can tell me why you're running around the country, trying to murder Ellen Bosworth. Talk fast, Clearwater."

Clearwater did not talk—he gibbered. Foul blasphemies rushed from his lips. All else was incoherence. Lannon could not understand him. He stood watching the man, wondering. Clearwater had always been mild and quiet-spoken; he had never been known to curse. In the days that Lannon had known him he had been a model of human perfection, as the inhabitants of the valley knew perfection. He had never betrayed viciousness, had been cool, deliberate, self-possessed. Had Lannon not known him to be a dependable man he would have shot him instead of merely knocking him out of the saddle. Now he stood watching the man, disgusted, pitying, wondering what malign influence had turned this former mild-mannered man into a babbling, cursing beast.

He reached out a hand, drew Clearwater's gun from its sheath, kicked the rifle out of his reach and pulled the man to his feet. Clearwater stood, swaying back and forth. The wildness was going out of his eyes; a sullen fear was coming into them.

"Clearwater, you're going to talk. Why were you trying to murder Ellen Bosworth?"

"She was gettin' away from me, Lannon! She's gone, now, an' the whole damned country will know!"

"Getting away from you, was she? Well, I reckon I don't blame her for doing that. Damn your hide, Clearwater, you don't mean to say you were holding her against her will?"

Clearwater sullenly nodded.

"And you were trying to shoot her because she was escaping?"

Lannon's sharp, cold voice was doing much to restore Clearwater's self-control; he could appreciate the menace of Lannon's icy composure. He had known Lannon in the old days and was aware that he was never more dangerous than when he kept his passions under control.

"I'd had her at the Star—since yester-

day." Clearwater's manner was now that of sullen resignation. "I reckon you'll know soon, if you don't know right now," he added. "She'll blab it all in town—she's headed that way. I reckon I done wrong; but the devil was in me. I don't seem to remember much of what I've been doin' since yesterday. Ellen Bosworth came to the Star yesterday. She was in the house. I didn't know it. Campan, Tulerosa, Lally, Devake, Bannack an' some more rustlers was settin' on the porch with me. I'd met 'em out a piece in the basin. Campan was dead set on runnin' off some of your stock. I was ag'in it, but Campan wouldn't let me off. Campan's got the goods on me. About a year ago I got mixed up in a deal with Campan an' his gang, not knowin' what they was. They said they was ag'in all Eastern owners an' they figured on playin' hell with Bosworth's stock, just to discourage him an' make him sell out. Bosworth's been crowdin' my range considerable, an' I throwed in with Campan's bunch just for the hell of it, I reckon. There's lots of the boys in the basin doin' it. When I found out that the bunch was rustlin' other stock—yours an' some more of the old-timers—I tried to pull out. But Campan wouldn't have it. I had to stick or suffer like the rest.

"Ellen Bosworth heard us talkin' yesterday. Bolton had seen her ride up, an' he put me wise. I went into the house an' found her. She told me she'd heard the talk. She told me she was going to squeal. I've always liked that girl; she's been over to see me a heap of times. I didn't mean to hurt her, but I reckon the thought of her tellin' what she'd heard, an' ruinin' me, was too much. I don't remember a lot about what happened after I grabbed her an' locked her in a room.

"I rode with Campan an' the bunch last night. We run off about three hundred head of your stock — took 'em through Salt Cañon. When I got back to the Star this mornin' I tried to get Ellen to say she'd keep her mouth shut about what she'd heard. She told me she intended to tell. I knowed she'd do it. I hung around, tryin' to think. It seems I couldn't think. I was goin' to turn her over to Campan, thinkin' that mebbe if he'd take her to the cache she'd change her mind. But I was scared Campan would treat her mean, because Bosworth fired him an' he's had a grudge against Bosworth. Lannon, I'd always been straight, an' I want to go straight now. But I reckon that first mistake got me in too far.

"This afternoon, while I was tryin' to make up my mind what to do with Ellen, she got out some way an' got her horse. I seen her. Mebbe I went loco, because I don't remember a lot what happened after that until I was settin' here an' saw you standin' here. I reckon it's over now, an' I feel mighty satisfied that it is. Some of Campan's bunch shot two of your boys last night, an' I reckon you'll be gettin' the whole gang for that. If you're aimin' to start now, get goin'. I sure feel some worthless."

Clearwater could not meet Lannon's gaze. He sat on the ground, his chin on his chest, his arms hanging limply at his sides. Plainly, he expected Lannon to shoot him. When he heard Lannon's voice he looked up in astonishment.

"Clearwater, I'm going to help you out of this scrape. You've been white and your one mistake forced you farther in. Stand up and listen to me."

Clearwater got up, amazed, incredulous.

"Lannon," he pleaded; "don't go to foolin' me. I ain't fit to live, an' you know it."

"Clearwater, you're going to live, if Campan's men don't get you. I've faith in you and I'm willing to back it. If you don't play square with me I'll come for you. Let Ellen Bosworth talk. It's likely she'll only tell her father. I'll have a talk with Bosworth and tell him that you were only pretending when you shot at her; that you have been working with me right along."

"Lannon, you don't mean it!" Clearwater's eyes were dim, misty; there was a catch in his voice.

"I reckon I mean it, Clearwater. The only question in my mind is whether you've got the nerve to see this thing through."

"Lannon, I'll do whatever you say."

"All right, Clearwater. You ride over to Salt Cañon and tell Barkwell I'm going to Bozzam City. He'll be waiting. You'll keep silent about what has happened. You'll go with Campan whenever you can. Then you'll report to me. If Campan plans another raid you send me word as soon as you hear of it. If you haven't been in Campan's confidence, get into it. Make him believe you are with him to a finish. Give me the names of the men who were with Campan last night."

Clearwater named the rustlers; five besides those he had already mentioned. Clearwater was now eager, his eyes glowed with a new light.

"Clearwater, where did they run my stock?" asked Lannon.

"Through Salt Cañon," replied the other. "We run 'em to that gorge that runs into the main cañon south of the waterfall. The first one on the right as you head toward the desert. After the sand stops. That there gorge runs west for about five miles, and then it swings south in a big circle an' comes out in the desert. There's a rock bottom all the way."

"Where are the cattle Campan stole last night?"

"Them last men I named drove 'em across the desert to Pardo. There's a shippin' point there, an' Campan keeps a man there all the time, doin' the sellin'."

"Where does Campan hang out?"

"In the cache most of the time. He's over in Pardo often. Pardo's mostly Mexican, an' Campan cuts considerable figure there."

"Where is the cache?"

"In a box cañon near the mouth of the gorge we run the cattle through. The entrance is hid by a growth of wild brush. There's two big red bowlders ag'in the gorge wall right alongside of the entrance. That's the way we know when we come to it. Otherwise you'd never know it was there."

Five minutes longer Lannon talked with Clearwater. Again listening to the man's earnest promise to be "square," Lannon rode on toward Bozzam City. He was now eager to have a talk with Ellen, for he wanted to learn from her recital of her experience at the Star whether Clearwater had lied to him.

CHAPTER XIV.

"A CLEVER TRICK, GLORIA."

THE sun went down when Ellen Bosworth was still many miles from Bozzam City. But the big gray horse did not falter once during the wild ride, and she clung to him, knowing that his strength and speed alone could save her from the horror that rode behind her. She had heard the rifle shots, she had felt the wind from the bullets, had heard their angry whine as they sped close to her. Silver, too, seemed to have heard them, seemed to have understood their significance, for at each report he had increased his speed.

Ellen had heard no more reports. The last one had reached her ears just as she had reached the crest of a high ridge above the long slope that led out of a flat. But she felt that Clearwater was still behind her, still close, and that he did not intend to shoot again until he could be reasonably certain he would not miss.

Silver raced along the smooth top of a low, wide ridge that ran east and west, Ellen leaning close to his neck to escape the terrific wind of his passing. Her eardrums were throbbing painfully, she got her breath in gasps even with her head bowed over Silver's mane. Her long hair had come down and was streaming behind her; she had lost her hat, and her lungs were full of the flint-like dust that swirled around her when Silver thundered over an occasional stretch of sand.

When she had ridden out of the basin near the Star buildings she had meant to ride westward, toward the Lazy J, where she would have been safe. But Clearwater had cut her off by reaching the mesa only a few minutes behind her, for he was so close to her that she dared not risk descending the east slope of the mesa. Now her hope of escaping him depended upon her reaching Bozzam City before he could overtake her.

Twice she had looked back. Each time the sun, sinking behind her, had blinded her, so that she could not determine how close Clearwater was. Then came the afterglow, with its shadows and its deep rich colors, which made all objects in the distance elusive; and now dusk was stealing over the land, spreading its mystery and menace.

Silver had sank with sinkening suddenness into a depression; as suddenly he mounted the opposite side and swerved wide around the base of a barren escarpment that angled off the ridge into an arroyo.

Ellen had long ago ceased trying to guide Silver; she was trusting to his instinct in the semigloom, and was merely hanging desperately to the saddle, trying to get her breath when she felt him slacken speed, swerve dangerously close to the edge of the ridge and come to a quivering halt.

Another horse lunged against her, striking her left stirrup. She cringed when she raised her head, expecting to look into Clearwater's wild eyes. Instead, she saw Gloria Stowe, leaning far over from the back of a big brown horse. One of Gloria's gloved hands was gripping Silver's bridle rein, the other was engaged in tucking in some stray wisps of hair at the back of her neck.

The smooth sureness of Gloria's manner, the atmosphere of quiet confidence that seemed to surround her, affected Ellen strangely. The calming effect of Gloria's sudden appearance brought on swift reaction. Ellen shuddered, bowed her head to Silver's mane and sobbed.

"Scared you, did I?" laughed Gloria. "Well, you scared me for a minute. What got him to running that way?"

"He wasn't running—away. I was d-driving him."

"Well, he sure seemed to be running. The reins were hanging on his neck. That's a might queer way to be driving a horse. What were you running away from?"

"From Clearwater." Ellen raised her head and cast a fearing glance back the way she had come.

"From Clearwater! Not Lemuel Clearwater? Lem wouldn't hurt you!"

"He tried to shoot me! He kept me prisoner in a room overnight—since yesterday. I—I escaped by prying a window open. I got the saddle and bridle on my horse and—"

"Well, of all the strange things!" interrupted Gloria. She peered closer at Ellen, saw how tense and drawn her face was, and how her lips quivered. Suddenly she was down from her horse and at Ellen's stirrup. She helped the almost hysterical girl to a flat rock and sat down beside her, hugging her tightly and patting her face reassuringly.

"It sounded mighty queer to hear you saying things like that about Clearwater," she said; "but if it happened it happened, and that's all there is to it. If Clearwater comes along hyeh I'll send him about his business mighty quick! Now tell me all about it, honey," she added.

Ellen's recital of her adventure was brief but complete, and when she finished she gave way entirely and sobbed on Gloria's shoulder, while Gloria mechanically patted her hair. After a time, when Ellen began to recover her composure, Gloria took out her handkerchief, wiped the dust and tears from Ellen's face, combed the tangled mass of hair that had become undone during the wild ride, weaved it into bulging coils and folds, fastened it with hairpins that she drew from her own hair. Then she drew Ellen to her feet and said calmly:

"I reckoned Clearwater was square. Him acting the way he did shows that you can't trust anybody any more. This rustling business has got to be a mighty general thing. Likely Clearwater figured on killing you to keep your mouth shut about what you heard. If I were you I would keep quiet. Maybe after Clearwater finds you haven't talked he'll not bother you any more. Don't get the notion that if you tell your father you'll be safe. Campan and the others hev got it in for all the Eastern owners, and you telling your dad would only make it hard for him. He'd want to punish Clearwater, and there'd be a fight in which somebody would get hurt. But you can think that over later. Right now you've got to get out of hyeh. You

couldn't hev got so very far ahead of Clearwater. You change horses with me. That brown suit will make you mighty near invisible, for my horse is almost the same color. You go to Benson's. It's right straight across that little stretch of plain you see down there. I'll ride in plain sight on this ridge, and if Clearwater sees the gray horse he'll think it's you riding him. And if he catches up to me I'll tell him a thing or two, darn him!"

Eagerly Ellen followed Gloria's instructions. Mounted on the brown horse she descended the slope of the ridge, waved a hand at Gloria, and rode toward the level stretch Gloria had pointed out.

Gloria mounted the gray horse and walked him slowly along the crest of the ridge until the distant shadows closed over Ellen. Then Gloria halted the gray, gazed intently westward into the dusk. Her lips stiffened, her eyes flashed, and she urged the gray horse on. Half a mile back on the ridge she had seen a horseman faintly outlined against the horizon.

She kept the gray horse going steadily, but slowly. Later, when she heard the beating of hoofs behind her, she let Silver out a little, for she knew that Clearwater must have seen her. The closer the horseman drew, the faster she drove Silver, so that when the other horse stuck his muzzle into view at Silver's withers, both horses were running hard.

Not until the horseman came alongside did Gloria seem to notice him. Then she turned in the saddle to carry out her threat to "tell him a thing or two." She saw Lannon riding beside her, smiling oddly.

The shock of seeing Lannon when she had expected to see Clearwater was so great that she almost dropped the reins. But she succeeded in steadying herself, and for a few yards rode on, strangely agitated. She was pleased, angry, suspicious, disappointed. She did not know which emotion dominated. Then came a surge of furious jealousy, which seemed to burn like a flame in her heart. Had Ellen lied to her? Was it Lannon who had imprisoned Ellen, who had pursued her? Had Ellen also lied about the shooting?

She drew Silver down—to a walk, then to a halt. She resented the wave of jealousy that had swept over her; she fought it as she sat motionless in the saddle, facing Lannon, who had also halted and was now riding back to her. She told herself that she did not care what had happened between Ellen and Lannon.

To her astonishment Lannon laughed lowly as he brought Polestar close to Silver, so close that he could see her flaming face and flashing eyes.

"That was a clever trick, Gloria," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"Your changing horses with Ellen Bosworth, of course. For a little while it fooled me, because there isn't another horse like that gray in the valley."

"Stranger, what do you mean?" In spite of her indignation she meant to be loyal to Ellen.

"Gloria, I reckon you can trust me. I don't intend to talk about what has happened. I saw Clearwater riding after Ellen. I left him back on the trail. Where did Ellen go?"

So then it *had* been Clearwater, after all! Gloria felt a vast relief, a strange, wild joy.

"Stranger," she said, "Ellen rode to Benson's. Clearwater must have scared her half to death. She was pretty near hysterical when I met her. Hev you killed Clearwater?"

"Not quite. He was able to ride home."

Lannon leaned close to Gloria. "I reckon you know how things are in the valley, Gloria. I'm going to ask you to keep silent about what happened to Ellen. She talked to you, I reckon. But she wasn't in as much danger from Clearwater as she thinks she was."

"She told me what happened, stranger. It's nothing to me. I reckon I'm able to keep my mouth shut."

"I know that. And I reckon that's all. Ellen will be safe at Benson's to-night. Clearwater won't bother her again. Do you want company into town or do you prefer to ride alone?"

"It doesn't make any difference to me, stranger."

For a mile Silver trotted beside Polestar. Lannon watched Gloria from the corners

of his eyes, but the girl did not look at him. He was certain of that.

It seemed to Gloria that circumstances were forever conspiring to place her in positions in which she would appear at a disadvantage to Lannon. Was it that, or was she to blame that she did not rise above such situations? Would another girl—Ellen Bosworth for example — have carried off the present situation to her own advantage? Would she have been able to impress Lannon with her ladylike qualities despite the jealousy she would have felt had she been Gloria Stowe? Gloria thought Ellen would have impressed Lannon, for Ellen had that delicacy of habit and manner which would have aided her to impress him. Where Gloria Stowe had been unable to speak because of the fierce flame within her, Ellen would have been able to give voice to disarming speeches. Would Ellen have uttered that sullen speech: "I reckon I'm able to keep my mouth shut." No; Ellen would have known how to answer Lannon without betraying her feelings. Gloria did not know how to do those things. She felt her incapacity to express what she felt or to conceal what she didn't want others to know. Her graces were all inward; she knew of their existence but could not give them expression—they were unformed, undeveloped, surging, painful, demanding, clamoring for outward display. She was groping in the dark of inexperience for the perfection she craved. With heaving breast she rode along, silent, fighting her emotions. She was glad that the dusk was deepening, that Lannon could not see her face distinctly, to divine her thoughts.

Also she was glad in a fierce, wild way that she had ridden westward that afternoon, for the whim had brought her where she was, riding beside Lannon, homeward. She would be content if he didn't speak another word to her.

But when they had gone another half mile Lannon spoke:

"Gloria, why do you keep on calling me 'stranger'?"

"I reckon we won't talk about that."

He dropped back a little, so that he rode close enough to see her face. She kept it averted. Lannon felt a strange wistfulness as he gazed at her profile, noting her set lips, feeling the gulf of distrust and dislike that he himself had dug when he had slighted her in Ellen Bosworth's presence.

But did not the fact that she betrayed the hurt indicate that in spite of what he had done she did not dislike him? He couldn't change what had already been done, of course, but he had regretted his attitude that day. Her praise had sounded so sweet to his ears that he had forgotten that she had certain rights — rights that any gentleman of sane and active mind would not overlook. But he was not certain that he had been in his right mind that day, because it had been the first time in his life that any woman had woven a spell about him, and he had been so amazed at the queer intoxication of his senses that he had forgotten to be polite.

And during the days of his convalescence from the wound Campan had given him he had yielded more and more to the strange glamour that Gloria had thrown about him. In every mental picture he drew of her he could see her honest eyes reproaching him; he could see back of the reproach the unexpressed and inarticulate wish that he would think her the lady she longed to be. He wondered then, as he wondered now, why nature, even though ironic and cruel, could not have granted the girl the boon of an outward grace that would have made men accord her the respect she craved. Also, he wondered what malicious devil had prompted him to treat her as other men she had met had treated her?

He rode closer, driven by an impulse to tell her that he had loved her from the instant he had seen her in the hotel office.

He reached out, grasped her left hand, which was resting on the pommel of Silver's saddle. He felt the fingers quiver, then grow rigid.

"Gloria," he said, "we can never stay strangers to each other. I've wanted you—"

Her right hand flashed out; the quirt she carried in it struck his cheek, searing into the flesh. He caught the scornful, contemptuous flash of her eyes, the bitter curving of her lips. Then Silver leaped

forward and plunged, a thundering white flash, into the growing darkness of the trail ahead.

CHAPTER XV.

"I'M PULLIN' THAT NOTICE DOWN!"

AN early moon was rising over the southern rim of the valley when Lannon entered Bozzam City. It threw a silvery radiance over the plains, it bathed the town's shanties, giving them a romantic quaintness of appearance, a comfortable smugness. The long street was almost as white as in the daylight; the flickering beams of light from kerosene lamps in the buildings seemed weak, impotent.

Lannon rode Polestar past the post office. He caught the glint of the moonlight on the brass cartridges he had placed above the bulletin board; he noted with satisfaction that the notice he had posted was still there. Polestar was trotting sedately when he reached the front of the hotel, and he showed an inclination to halt at the hitching rail in front of the building; but Lannon urged him on, sent him through a vacant space between the hotel and the building next to it on the east, and dismounted at the door of the big stable belonging to the hotel. After what had happened between him and Gloria he could not stop at the hotel overnight, but he saw no valid reason why he should not leave Polestar in the stable while he made some purchases in Blanchard's store, which adjoined the post office. He meant to take advantage of this visit. Later he would ride over to Benson's and have a talk with Ellen Bosworth.

Leaving the stable after putting Polestar in a stall he stood in the doorway for an instant, feeling his cheek where the quirt had struck it and smiling at the darkened windows in the rear of the hotel. Presently he moved away in the shadows, walked between two buildings and came out on the street in front of Blanchard's store. Blanchard, a fat man, who breathed wheezily and wore a greasy vest of such prominence over the abdomen that the cause of his difficult breathing was glaringly apparent, silently showed Lannon some shirts which the latter stood in need of. Blanchard was a newcomer to Bozzam City.

Laying out the shirts, Blanchard returned to resume talking with two men who sat on the counter a few feet distant from where Lannon stood examining the shirts. Lannon had paid little attention to the two men except for a quick glance as he had passed them. They, like Blanchard, were strangers to him. A fourth man, who was small, slender and wore faded overalls and a flannel shirt that was much too large for him, leaned on a cigar case near the front of the store, smoking meditatively. He had evidently been listening to Blanchard and the other men, and he was now trying to appear unconcerned and politely indifferent while he waited for them to resume the talk that had been interrupted by Lannon entering. The little man had gleaming, squinting eyes, and twice as Lannon glanced toward the front of the store he caught the little man watching him intently, an odd smile on his lips. The little man was also a stranger to Lannon.

Lannon had selected two shirts. He was examining another when out of the talk at the counter came a word that made him stiffen:

"Wa-al, I reckon ef I was lookin' fer a woman to marry I wouldn't hev no truck with Glory Stowe!"

Glancing past his left shoulder Lannon saw the speaker while the words were still issuing through his lips. He was a big man with a bold, raw face. He was not a cowboy, for he wore black trousers stuffed into stiff boots with low, flat heels; a calico shirt with a low, stiff collar, a black vest with a heavy gold chain caught with a massive gold bar in a buttonhole, and a brown derby hat with a flat crown. The hat sat on the back of his head, giving him a rakish, piratical appearance.

"Throne, I reckon you're mighty particular," suggested Blanchard.

"Haw, haw, haw!" laughed the other. "Wa-al, call it thet. A man's got a right to be perticuler, 'cause ef he's got sense he won't git hooked up to no female critter more'n once in his life. An' a man's got a right to his own jedgment. I'm jes tellin'

you boys thet ef I was a marryin' man I'd fight shy of thet Glory Stowe!"

"Throne, you're prejudiced," said Blanchard. "I ain't never seen Glory Stowe do anything that would make a man think she wouldn't make a good wife. I reckon you're sort of sore at her because she shut the door in your face when you was devilin' her."

Blanchard's tone was slyly jocular. Throne could not take offense at it. But there was something more than mere jocularity in Blanchard's voice. He had injected an earnestness in it, an insidious hint that perhaps after all Throne was right, and that there possibly was ground upon which Throne could base his claim to the unfitness of Gloria to become his wife.

"Sho!" The ejaculation was half sneer, half derisive laughter. "Blanchard, she didn't shet no door in my face because I'd been devilin' her. Haw, haw, haw! I reckon not! Devake was in thar with her! Devake hed been hangin' around thar for a good many days. An' I reckon you know Devake. Wa-al, when a woman shets a door in one man's face an' stays inside with another man, you can jes' gamble thet—"

Lannon stood in front of Throne. He might have been about to renew acquaintance with Throne, so coldly quizzical was his smile. It was as though he doubted Throne would recognize him. But Throne saw something more in the smile, something that brought a queer pallor to his face.

"Throne, stand up!"

Throne's color rushed back. He hesitated, smiled with a strange mixture of doubt and defiance, and slid off the counter, facing Lannon.

Throne saw Lannon's right arm flash outward. He threw up an arm to ward off the blow. Lannon's fist flecked past the arm, crashed against Throne's jaw with an inward, downward motion. The man fell sidewise, alongside the counter. He was lifted to his feet, where he stood, reeling drunkenly for an instant until he went down again from another savage blow that landed squarely on his lips. The second blow threw him against the counter. He rebounded, ran into another blow, and in falling, struck his head against the counter from where he dropped to the floor and lay on his back with closed eyes, his lips macerated, his face swollen and discolored.

Stunned, amazed, Blanchard and the other man at the counter had offered no interference. They stared at Lannon as he stepped back a little and looked at them, a sinister challenge in his eyes.

When he saw that Blanchard and the other did not intend to take any part in the affair he nodded his head toward the rear counter.

"I'll take the three shirts I have laid aside, Blanchard," he said.

He stood at a little distance from the counter while Blanchard obeyed his orders. Then he paid Blanchard, though he did not offer to take the package the latter had laid on the counter. He glanced at the little man who stood at the cigar counter; saw him watching Blanchard and the other man with a vindictive, satisfied smile. When Throne regained consciousness and got slowly to his feet, there to hang onto the counter for support, Lannon again faced him.

"Throne," he said, "you are one of those miserable sneaks that try to be important at the expense of innocent women. If I ever hear of you speaking Gloria Stowe's name again I'll kill you! Do you understand?"

Throne nodded. Lannon walked to the counter, picked up the package Blanchard had laid there and stepped out of the door. No word was spoken in the store until Lannon's shadow had passed from the glass window in the front of the room.

Then Blanchard spoke in a strained, light voice:

"I reckon that guy must sure be a friend of Glory Stowe!"

The little man at the cigar counter laughed derisively.

"You boys hev been hevin' a run-in with Flash Lannon," he said. "I always opined thet when a *man* comes to this here town he'd make the fur fly!"

He stood for an instant enjoying the awe in Blanchard's eyes, and the ashen pallor that swept over the faces of the other men. Then he walked, grinning, to the door, let himself out and walked swiftly down the street, chuckling to himself.

Lannon returned to the stable behind the hotel. He stored the package in the slicker behind the cantle of the saddle on Polestar, looked again with a smile at the darkened windows in the rear of the hotel building, stepped to the door and drew out his two black-handled guns. He inspected them, twirled the cylinders, restored the guns to their holsters and tried them a few times to make sure they would not snag when he drew them. For he expected to use them shortly. When emerging from the front door of Blanchard's store after knocking Throne down, he had heard Campan's voice issuing from the door of the post office.

Lannon did not return to the post office the way he had come. There was a chance that some one might have seen him and carried the news to Campan. He moved westward, close to the buildings, stepping carefully over the heaps of refuse that littered the place. Two or three times he halted to make sure there was no one watching him, and at last he passed to the far corner of the post office building, stole along it to the front and stopped in a shadow, from where he could see the front of the post office, where he could catch the glint of the moonlight on the cartridges on the little hood of the bulletin board.

Through the thin sides of the building he could hear the voices of men inside. Campan's voice was loudest. The outlaw had evidently been drinking, for normally he spoke softly. Now and then a laugh arose. But Campan's voice dominated all others, even in those moments when all seemed to speak at once.

" Bozzam don't need no interference from any damned Eastern dude!" cursed Campan. " This guy Lannon comes here after livin' East five years an' tries to lay down laws! Sticks a warnin' up in front of this here buildin' an' plants some cartridges on top of it. Why in hell haven't some of you boys pulled it down?"

There was an instant of silence; then a low voice:

" I reckon mebbe we was a little bit backward about havin' Lannon think we was that ' one other,' Campan."

" Well, I'll say this for Lannon," conceded Campan; " he's mighty slick. Stickin' that ' one other ' thing up there has got the whole damned country stampeded. It's got every man thinkin' the next man is goin' to squeal on him. It's got every man scared to death that Lannon has got his eye on him. There's waddies in this country that's shakin' in their boots, expectin' Lannon to throw a gun on them!"

" The trouble is that there's a heap of guys in this country that might be the ' one other,' " said a new voice. A gale of laughter followed his words.

The sound seemed to enrage Campan.

" Carter," he bellowed, " I'm pullin' that notice down!"

Carter was the postmaster, a little man, inoffensive, quiet.

" Campan," came his voice; " that's your business. I didn't feel that I wanted to take any chances on rilin' Lannon."

" I'm pullin' that notice down right now!" shouted Campan. His step sounded on the floor. It ceased suddenly. A placative voice followed a short silence.

" Shucks, Campan. What in hell do you care for that notice? If I was you I sure wouldn't go to courtin' trouble. Lannon's lightnin' with a gun. He's meaner'n pizen. Him stickin' that notice up there wasn't no bluff. In your place I'd do a heap of considerin'. That there talk he handed you at Benson's wasn't no bluff. I seen that. I'd be rememberin' them three ca'tridges Glory Stowe give him. Campan, if you don't step light he'll get even for what you done that night!"

" Bah!"

Campan's ejaculation was vibrant with derision. His curses were bitter; his threats wild, reckless. Again a step sounded on the board floor inside, and then he was standing in the doorway, his voice smiting the dead silence of the night.

" No damned Eastern dude can run this town, nor put up any notices!"

For an instant Campan stood, outlined in the feeble light in the room behind him. Then he was outside and swaggering toward the bulletin board on the front of the building, a crowd of men swarming out of the door behind him.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

Go Get A Reputation

by Howard Rockey

"I'VE just been fired," announced Percival Jones cheerily, as he stepped into the living hall of the little bungalow and made his way toward the dining-room.

Maude Jones, setting the table for their evening meal, looked up at him, startled. Tears came into her blue eyes as her smile of happiness faded away, and the silverware fell upon the tablecloth with a clatter.

"Oh, Percy!" she cried in a tone of despair. "What *are* we going to do?"

"I'm going to *stay* fired!" chuckled her husband with evident good nature. "That is, I've decided to hire myself and be my own boss from now on."

Mrs. Jones stared at him in amazement. A moment later she felt his arms about her, as he gently kissed away the drops on her lashes, and gently pressed her into a chair.

"Let dinner wait a few minutes, dear," he suggested. "Something tells me that this is the best little mishap that ever befell me. I want to tell you about it—to outline my plans—and see what you think of them. Perhaps you won't agree with me, but I hope you will, and I honestly believe I have the right idea. But since it means as much to you as it does to me, you are entitled to a vote on the proposition. I won't do it unless you say so."

Maude Jones made a sad little effort to smile. It was evident that Percival was not upset over losing his job. He appeared to have found a way out of the difficulty the misfortune presented, unless he was deliberately assuming a confident air in order to comfort her.

"Please don't hide anything from me, Percy," she begged, voicing her doubt. "You know you can't keep secrets from me anyhow. You never could."

"I've no intention of trying to stray from the straight and narrow path now," he assured her. "I'm going to open the whole tricks and make them perform for you—and I'll promise you that I've nothing concealed up my sleeve. But I think I have a perfectly good club to use in beating the wolf from the door, and a magic wand to wield in getting the coin I want to buy you ever so many things we can't afford just now."

He slipped down upon the arm of her chair and rested his hand fondly upon her gingham-clad shoulder.

"I was fired in company with half a dozen other copy men at the office," he began in a matter-of-fact way. "Old Barnes himself called us into his sanctum and slipped us the bad news in concert. We knew what he said was true. In fact, we'd all, more or less, seen it coming. You remember, I told you the agency had recently lost two of its principal accounts, and that other clients were sending in a flock of cancelations. Barnes was mighty decent about it. He said he hated to let us go, but that it was absolutely necessary to cut down the staff, since the business wouldn't pay the

freight. So we all shook hands with him, walked out to draw our final pay, and faded out of the picture."

He was silent for a moment. Maude's hand found his and pressed it understandingly. She admired his spirit. She knew how his dismissal must have hurt him. But when Percival spoke again, there was no note of discouragement in his voice. His tone was one of thoughtful conviction.

"This is the third time in my life I've been handed the blue envelope," he said quietly. "Each time my discharge has come through no fault of my own. My work has been satisfactory and I've always left the old boss on good terms. I've never failed to land another job at a good salary, but the trouble has been that I wasn't building anything for myself. I've always been working for somebody else. When others didn't need, or couldn't afford, the services I could supply—I was shown the door. Now, I'm still young; but I don't ever want to be fired again. I don't intend to be. I'm going in business for myself. I'm going to be my own boss, and put myself in a position where the only man who can fire me will be Percival Jones himself!"

The flash of battle was in his eyes, and his wife smiled at him indulgently. "But you haven't any capital, and we've only a little put away against umbrella days," she reminded him dubiously.

"I shan't need any capital, other than my knowledge of the business," he told her. "I'm not going to try to become a full-fledged advertising agent right off the reel. At first, I'll simply be a sort of free lance, offering to write advertisements, prepare booklets, and devise campaigns for small advertisers. Later on, I may branch out. Just now I'll be satisfied to sprout and bud a while."

"But won't you find it hard to get clients?" asked Maude. "You know you've always been inclined to ridicule efforts of that sort—"

"Maude, my dear," he smiled, "I've been prone to ridicule a lot of things that I'm disposed to think better of as I grow older. Of course it won't be easy. If it was, every one would become a successful advertising man, earning a fabulous sum per annum—per week—or perhaps. Then no one would waste time laying bricks, baking bread, or manufacturing hairpins. It's going to mean late to bed and early to rise, but the business will be mine—as will be the profits—if any—"

"And the losses," Maude reminded him gently, not wishing to discourage her husband, but rather to stem what she imagined to be a tendency toward undue enthusiasm and optimism in his mood.

"Well," laughed Jones, "if the losses prove to be too great, I'm afraid I'll have to fire myself and try something else. In any event, I'll be building for the future—whether I pile up dollars in the bank or accumulate a brand new lot of experience that I can take out and sell to some wiser employer than Percival Jones."

An appetizing, yet warning odor from the range, halted the further discussion of plans. Like a couple of panic stricken kids, they hastened into the kitchen in time to rescue an almost ruined meal, and the incident saved the hour, in that it took their minds off the more serious aspect of things.

Then, with the retrieved dinner on the table, Percival went into greater detail, punctuated only by his appreciation of Maude's culinary artistry. As his platter became bare, his contentment grew—not solely with the satisfaction of the delicious food, but because he saw sympathy with his little scheme dawn upon the pretty features of his wife.

Over coffee, the two got down to cases. Prior to their marriage, Maude had been a commercial artist—which was how she had met her husband—by doing illustrations for the ads he wrote.

"I'll just love to get back to my drawing again," she announced eagerly. "I used to be able to deliver work your clients would accept. If I can do it now, there will be that much less for the new firm to pay out, and that much more for *us* to take in. Illustrating won't interfere with the housework at all—and, if it should—I can do pen and ink work at night——"

"Let's settle that right here and now," Percival said flatly. "The new firm isn't going to be a slave-driving organization. Of

course, I expect to work o' nights now and then, and I don't mind if *you* do once in a while. But we're going to have fixed play nights and only semioccasional work nights. I mean to make money—all of it I can—but I'm not going to wear myself out and sacrifice everything in order to get rich. Nor do I intend that you shall overtax yourself—"

"It won't seem like work to me—it will be fun!" Maude broke in.

"Sure it will, for both of us," Percival agreed. "Work is always fun if a chap or a girl is really interested in it. But even fun needs variation. In any event, old dear, I don't imagine we'll be so swamped with orders at first that we won't be able to loaf a bit without any qualms of conscience."

Maude clapped her hands joyously. "I'll clear out the sewing room to-morrow morning and we'll set up our 'offices' there—"

"Oh, no, we won't!" he protested, and her face fell as she looked into his. "That won't do at all, girl—except as a sort of den when we want to talk things over. If a man hasn't confidence enough in himself to hang out his shingle and pay office rent, he can't expect the world to come round and hunt him up. Not that I'm expecting a stream of callers paging me right away. I'll have to pound the pavements, and go on a still hunt after clients at the go-off; but the time will come, I hope, when the men who retain me will want to come to my workshop, for one reason or another. I can't very well hand them a suburban time-table and ask them to run all the way out here."

Maude saw the force of his objection, and the next morning Jones took the early train to the city to seek suitable quarters. He found offices scarce and expensive. But that did not surprise him. He had decided that extravagance was neither wise nor essential; yet he felt that he must have a place which would adequately reflect the character of the service he meant to render.

At last he found what he sought. It was a small, two-room suite, in a substantial if not imposing building; and having signed the lease and drawn a check for the required deposit, he hastened off to buy the necessary furniture. Despite the prices of fixtures, he selected the best he could find—not too ornate—but desks and chairs and filing cabinets of simple dignity and unquestioned substantiality. He meant to have an office inviting confidence.

Then he telephoned Maude, and like a schoolgirl out for a lark, she hastened to the new office to give it her approval. Together they decided upon the scheme of painting, and Maude drew little sketches as a guide for making the curtains that were to hang at the windows.

"Percy," she said reminiscently, "I haven't had such a lovely time since we came back from the honeymoon and planned our bungalow!"

He gulped just a little, then straightened up like a ramrod as he saw some new doubt mirrored upon her features.

"You—you've got to have a stenographer," she blurted out at last. "I want to come in and be—it—her!"

Percival understood, but he knew that wouldn't do. It took him half an hour to explain this to Maude, but at last he gained his point, and together they went to a nearby newspaper office to insert a want ad for the employee Maude secretly envied.

At last the stage was set for the first act of Percival Jones's little business drama. He fondly hoped it wouldn't prove a comedy or a tragedy—but that it would develop into a long and prosperous Broadway run. The formal opening of the office found it equipped with everything but clients, and Percival was well aware that these would not come pounding at his door. So he proceeded to scent out Opportunity and track it to its lair.

His resolutions were high, but optimistic as he was, Percival soon discovered that he had his task cut out for him. Skilled as he was in his chosen vocation, no one outside the portals of the Barnes Advertising Agency ever heard of prosaic Percival Jones. He had no specimens of past work that he could exhibit as his own. His name, personally, had never been linked with any of the advertising successes for which the Barnes Agency had long been famous. It had been a shop policy never to permit the individuality of the staff to obtrude upon the fair horizon of the great firm name. Jones had never resented this. Barnes had paid him

liberally, and what he purchased of Percival was his to do with as he chose.

But the handicap under which he labored was made quite clear to Percival by the first prospect upon whom he called. He had selected Caleb Matthews, the smug manufacturer of a patented heating apparatus. Matthews was notorious for switching from one advertising agency to another, and Jones shrewdly figured that a change of heart on Matthews's part was just about in order. His audience with the maker of the heaters confirmed his judgment.

"I *do* need an advertising agent — one who really knows what he is about," Matthews said, when Percival had presented a brand new engraved card and eloquently pleaded his case. Jones took new heart, but the heater-man's next remark chilled him—and also got his goat.

"I've no time to waste on beginners," Matthews declared sourly. "I must have an experienced man who knows what he is doing."

"I am experienced—and I know what I'm doing!" Percival retorted, almost hotly.

"Do you?" came the sarcastic query. "Maybe you are experienced and maybe you're not. You say you are—but I don't know it. And I haven't time to find out. Go and get a reputation, young man. Then come and talk to me."

Jones wanted to throttle him, but he wisely held his temper. He straightened up and looked Caleb Matthews squarely in the eye. "I believe that's good advice, Mr. Matthews," he said quietly. "I'll do just what you suggest. And when I come back with the reputation you require, you'll hire me—and my fee will be exactly double the amount I'd have asked if you'd retained me now."

Without another word, he rose, and turning on his heel, left Matthews's office. The heater man gazed after him speculatively. "That boy is either a comer or a goner," he mused. "He'll show me something or the world will show him a lot!" And he turned to the mass of papers on his desk.

Jones swept into his own office with the air of a man of affairs. His stenographer looked up from the magazine she was reading, and regarded him with amazement. At his private office door, Percival paused and said impressively, "Miss Murphy, I shall be engaged in working out an important plan. I do not wish to be disturbed under any circumstances." The glass door closed and a key turned in the lock. With a grin, the stenographer resumed her reading, but Percival did not laugh at himself as he walked to the little Mission bookcase and lifted to his desk a file of periodicals.

One by one he tackled them, studying the advertising sections page by page. Before the desk clock had ticked away an hour he had found what he was seeking. It was what Percival considered the most conspicuous contemporary example of cleverly successful advertising. It was part of the campaign sponsored by the Kirby Clothing Company. Among advertising men it was common knowledge that the firm's president, Rufus Kirby, planned and wrote these advertisements himself. The striking poster illustrations were even said to be his own conceptions. No advertising agency had ever been intrusted with the Kirby account and it was whispered that no agency would ever have the ghost of a chance of getting it. For which ample reason Percival decided to solicit it.

Jones unlocked his sanctum door, announced that he might or might not return that day, and hastened to the office of Rufus Kirby. His mission was to take a crack at the hardest nut in the basket and convince the nut that he was just that and nothing more. As he walked through the busy streets, Jones laughed at his own supreme confidence—or was it utter idiocy? But his footsteps did not falter.

An elevator whisked him to the fourth floor of the building that bore Kirby's name. An attendant ushered Percival into a large room that contained neither desks nor tables —only some two dozen chairs, ranged like a hollow square against the walls of the place. They were set about ten feet apart —and firmly screwed to the floor. This prevented restless callers shifting their positions and discouraged some from waiting. Likewise, the conversation between a man sitting in one chair and another standing before him, would not necessarily be heard by the occupants of flanking seats.

Percival surveyed the scene and took the vacant chair assigned him. Other callers were sitting resignedly or fidgeting restlessly, as they awaited their turns; and now Jones observed Kirby himself, talking with a man on the opposite side of the room. Kirby did not invite any interviewer into his private office. He was standing beside the caller's chair, listening to what he had to say. Jones saw him answer with quick decision, bid each man good-by and pass on to the next in turn.

Jones instantly grasped the fact that this was Kirby's method of handling visitors. He saw Kirby pass from one chair to another in the order of their arrangement. He never made a move to sit down. There *was* no chair for him, and, consequently, his caller would arise. Kirby gave an attentive ear, but his manner, and frequent glances at his watch, counseled brevity. With an inward chuckle, Jones saw Kirby rid himself of ten salesmen in little more than twice that number of minutes.

Then Jones's heart sank. He knew he was in for a hard row endeavoring to sell his services to Kirby under such conditions. He had no evidence to present; no past nor present to which to point, and his solicitation must be the mere promise of a service which Kirby had repeatedly announced that he did not need nor want.

But Jones bucked up when his turn came, and Kirby stood before him inquiringly. He began with machine-gun cadence. "You're so busy that I know you need me, Mr. Kirby. You write the best clothing advertisements I've ever seen. It must take a lot of your time to do it. I can save you at least part of that time, and it won't cost you a cent if I don't."

"Interesting if true, but I doubt what you say—about yourself," Kirby answered, not unpleasantly. "Mine is an intricate business. I know it backwards and upside down. I know I write good stuff. I don't believe any one else can handle our advertising as well as I can." He spoke without egotism. He was voicing an honest conviction born of fact.

"I agree with you—in the main," admitted Jones. "But if some one *could* help you, you'd welcome the assistance. I'm willing to try—to match a lot of my time against a little of yours—"

"Sit down!" snapped Kirby. "Wait until I've seen these other men. Then I'll give you five minutes more."

He passed on, and Jones sank abruptly into his chair. He was somewhat amazed. It seemed that he had won his first skirmish. Now he must get himself together to make the most of the additional five minutes allotted him. But he had plenty of time to think things over. It was more than half an hour before Kirby completed the last of his interviews, and turning, beckoned to Jones.

"Come with me," he directed, and led the way to an adjoining room, where a mass of papers was spread out on a tall, bookkeeper's desk. Kirby sifted through a sea of typed sheets, layouts, printers' proofs and memoranda. He selected what he wished, seemingly at random, and tossed the material to Percival. "If you want to try your hand at this work, write me sixteen newspaper advertisements and have them illustrated. This memo gives you the subjects and tells you all about the merchandise to be featured. I also want a six-page booklet for an envelope inclosure, and three mailing cards. Keep to our regular style. Make your stuff talk right out from the shoulder. Each piece of copy must attract attention and sell goods. If I like what you submit, I'll pay you for it. If I don't—the loss is yours."

Percival left Kirby's place in a dream that threatened to become a nightmare as he walked up Broadway toward his newly opened office and thought over the situation. He had secured a job that did not amount to an order. He had promised to deliver something on the basis of speculation; and he knew full well that time expenditure and cash outlay would make his experiment in getting a reputation a mighty costly one.

But he bucked up and summoned his ebbing courage, as he lifted the receiver and phoned to Maude that he would be out on the early train. "Found my first client!" he called cheerily as he entered the bungalow. And then, over the dinner table, he told Maude all about it. "It may prove to

be something worth while and it may not amount to a hang," he concluded. "But it's going to be an interesting experiment. It will demonstrate to me that I can do as good work as Kirby can—or it will show me that he's right in believing he has no equal."

For the balance of the week, Maude sandwiched sketching between slices of housework. Percival, in his New York office, mystified Miss Murphy by closeting himself with his own pet typewriter for most of the working day. He was in fine fettle. Copy, cleverly phrased, yet not too clever to score, flowed from his typemill in an easy stream. At night, he and Maude would confer, and match his typewritten sheets against the pen and ink pictures she had given to his ideas. Then, all too soon for their eager interest, the assignment was completed. That night they both slept restlessly, and Maude was tense with excitement as Percival left the bungalow to catch the early train, with a well filled portfolio under his arm. Jones himself, felt like a cross between a schoolboy about to attend an examination and a condemned criminal on the way to execution.

Arriving at Kirby's office, he was ushered once more into the torture chamber assigned to callers. From the throng already seated, Percival realized that he had not seized a propitious day for the important interview. But Kirby had noticed him out of the corner of his eye, and Jones knew there was no sanity in withdrawing now.

At last Kirby paused before Percival's chair. He had been watching every move of his prospective client, but when Kirby stood before him, Jones was apparently engrossed in figuring out a difficult problem in a leather bound notebook. Kirby grinned, but Percival did not see the humorous distortion of his usually severe features. Attracted by Kirby's impatient movement, he stood up quickly. "I've executed the whole order," Percy announced, exhibiting his precious portfolio.

"Good! Leave it with me," snapped Kirby, and taking the folder from Jones's hand, he passed on to his adjoining visitor.

Jones was angry with himself. He knew he had handled the situation badly. It wasn't fair of Kirby to ask him to leave his work. Naturally, he had wished to go over it with Kirby—to explain it—and to get Kirby's viewpoint as to why the clothing man did or did not like what Percival had done. "Yet what's the use of sticking around?" Percival asked himself. And his own little goat, now rampant, led him out of the room.

Back again in his own sanctum, he once more closeted himself. "P. Jones," he counseled silently, "you're ten kinds of an idiot! You've no reason to fear for your work. You *know* it is good. It's the same kind of honest endeavor you've been putting over for nearly ten years. Yet," he admitted, to his still restless prancing angora, "it doesn't seem fair to your brain-children to leave them alone with an ogre like Kirby!"

He knew Maude would be eager for news, but as many times as he looked at the telephone, he had not the courage to call her and confess the real situation.

"You darned big kid!" Jones chided himself. "You've had enough copy rejected in your time to sit calmly under this suspense. If you haven't courage to go on in spite of possible rejection of your efforts, you'd better take your name off the door and let the sheriff sell the furniture. As the gang said overseas, 'If you get it you get it—if you don't you don't!' And that applies to orders and dollars as well as bullets!"

Which little outburst of personal chastisement seemed to calm down Percival's goat and persuaded him to look over some bona fide if minor orders for booklets and similar chores that well-wishing friends had sent him.

By one o'clock he felt the inner man calling, and attempted to forget business as he sank down into the winged armchair of a dairy luncheon. But meditation on the mysteries of a pamphlet dilating upon the merits of a new washing powder, made him dash down his cup of coffee and devour his bit of cake to hurry back to his office.

"Mr. Kirby called you up," the stenographer informed him as he swung through the door.

Jones paused on the threshold. "Try to

get him on the wire," he directed, and darted into his own cubby-hole.

"Mr. Jones?" came the snappy tones of Kirby, after the call had passed from stenographer to secretary, and Jones had held the wire for a seemingly interminable time. "I like that work."

Percival nearly dropped the receiver.

"The drawings are all quite good—and I'll take your copy, with the exception of advertisement number four. What do you want for the lot?"

Jones was almost panic-stricken. He had given considerable thought to the matter of charges, but now, faced with the necessity of naming his fee, he grew nervous. He did not wish to ask too much, and he knew he could not afford to cheapen himself by asking too little. Unfamiliar with the fixing of prices, he lost his nerve. Then the formerly enraged goat of P. Jones backed its little self up and administered a swift, deciding kick at the base of Percival's backbone.

"I'll charge you twenty dollars each for the advertisements," Jones said in a businesslike voice. "The booklet will be two hundred, and the mail cards fifty dollars apiece. The drawings will stand a flat price of thirty dollars." Jones knew very well that what he asked was fair—but for a moment he had misgivings.

"All right," came the voice of Kirby over the wire. "I'll send you a check. Drop in at four o'clock. I want you to handle the printing."

There was no chance to say thank you or good-by. The connection had been severed.

"Whew!" gasped Jones, leaning back in his chair. "I never dreamed it would be so easy!" Then, elated, he called up Maude.

"I knew you'd put it over!" she told him proudly. "Glue your ear close to the receiver so Miss Murphy won't hear—I want to give you a kiss!"

"Your drawings went like a breeze!" he praised loyally. "So it's your victory as much as mine. I'm going over to see him as he asked me to, but I'll be out early as I can."

Percival's experience in various advertising agencies had been as an "idea man"—a planner and writer of advertising campaigns. He had always had at his elbow a completely organized technical department to look after the setting of type, the engraving of cuts, and the various details that enter into the making of a finished advertisement. The operations of these processes were only vaguely known to him, and he suddenly realized that he might have considerable difficulty in executing the second part of Kirby's order.

However, he meant to see it through, and four o'clock found him in Kirby's reception room—this time bare of visitors. Kirby promptly summoned him into the next office and handed him back his drawings and sheets of typewritten copy. With the packet was a detailed memorandum. "This will give you the various quantities I wish of each—tell you how many colors to print them in, and when I want delivery. I want you to see the jobs through, and I'll give you fifteen per cent of the cost price for your services. Send me the original bills from engravers and printers. Give me an estimate on the work before you start. Good afternoon."

Once more Jones found himself dismissed. It was too late to summon the various contractors to his office, but he had Miss Murphy telephone to a number of the best known firms, and a steady stream of engravers' and printers' representatives visited him the following morning. Jones attempted no bluff. He placed himself frankly in the hands of his callers. He told them the effects he desired, and confessed his ignorance as to costs and methods. These men did not know Jones, but they did know the Kirby Clothing Company, and they were all eager to get this slice of the big firm's business. So, before the close of the day, he had a sheaf of estimates, which he carried home and studied under the living room lamp. The maze of items and figures was almost Greek to him, but at last he puzzled the problem out. By process of elimination, he finally struck a figure which he thought seemed fair, and discarding too low and doubtful bids, struck a reasonable average. Then he typed the figures off on a sheet of his own stationery, and went to bed to dream over

them and the possible results of his next séance with Kirby.

At ten the next morning Kirby scanned the estimates with practiced eyes. His pencil checked one item after another. "Too high, all of them—much too high," he said. "Do you think you can load printing charges on an old bird like me?"

Jones flushed. "I haven't tried to," he rejoined stoutly. "I confess that I know but little about the mechanical side of this business. I've always been a creative and not a production man, so I'm not in a position to judge what costs are fair; but if I ever hope to make my own advertising agency succeed I know I must learn these things. Probably a large concern like yours is in a position to buy cheaper than I can—"

"All right," said Kirby, somewhat annoyed. "Leave the things here—I'll get them out myself. I had hoped you could relieve me of such detail."

"I *will* relieve you of it—at your own price!" Jones shot at him.

Kirby, about to walk away, paused in surprise. "You're either an inexperienced child, or else you're crazy!" Kirby grinned.

"I'm neither," Jones protested. "I'm willing to carry this out and charge it to experience. If you will mark after each of these items the price you consider right, I'll guarantee to deliver the work at that figure."

Kirby hesitated a moment. "You write good stuff, and your drawings are clever," he admitted. "I'll give you a chance—if you want it. Samuel, give Mr. Jones the figures he asked for." He was gone without another word.

Armed with Kirby's prices, Jones went back to his own office. Upon examining them, he was seized with a sinking feeling. He called in the contractors again, and they confirmed his worst anticipations. Even the lowest of them said the work simply couldn't be done at the prices named.

"All right," answered Jones, gritting his teeth. "Produce it anyway—do the job right—and bill me at your own price. I'll pay the difference myself, and charge old Kirby on the basis of his own estimates."

Believing they were dealing with an impractical dreamer, the printers and engravers demanded payment in advance. Jones drew his checks without a murmur, despite the fact that this left scarcely fifty dollars in the bank. Now he figured that even with the checks to come from Kirby, his loss on the jobs would amount to nearly three hundred dollars; but he was dogged in his determination to go through with it.

"Kirby can't bluff me at this stage of the game!" he told himself resolutely. "I'm learning, and the knowledge I gain will be valuable if I am to continue."

But Maude was far from approving his course when he told her the story. "We can't run the business at a loss," she reminded him. "Kirby may be taking advantage of you, and in any event, he will expect you to work on the same basis in the future."

"In that case he'll expect in vain," said Jones. "Unless I find a way to make his account pay, I'll decline his future business. But this work is going to be done to the king's taste. He's going to like it so much that he'll be willing to pay me my own prices hereafter."

While the various jobs were in progress, Jones haunted the engraving and printshops that were handling them. The proprietors of the various places seemed to take a fancy to Jones. They not only made him welcome, but gave him a helping hand. Under their guidance, Percival watched every stage of the procedure, found out just how each thing was done, how each effect was gained, how long it took to obtain it, and why it cost what it did. His brain and his notebook were storing up valuable knowledge for future use.

At last he passed on the final proofs, and the actual printing began. Fortunately for Percival the shops were not busy, and the jobs were finished on schedule time. Thoughtfully Percival mailed his bill, and took counsel with himself as to his next act, while he waited for its payment. Within a week the check arrived, with a note of appreciation from Kirby—praise from Cæsar, indeed. "Your service is quite satisfactory," the clothing man had written. "Be at my office at eight thirty next Thursday, and I will give you another order."

Percival chuckled and walked over to the bank to deposit his check and pocket his loss. Then he sauntered back to his office and made up a little portfolio, showing all of the advertising he had executed for the Kirby Clothing Company. In the same exhibit he included some of the other copy he had recently turned out, and smiled with satisfaction as he looked over it. "Now, my son, you've something to *show*," he told himself happily, and going to his card index of prospects, planned a series of calls.

His first visit was at the office of Caleb Matthews, who remembered Jones and greeted him curiously.

"Back again so soon?" he inquired. "Have you made a reputation in so short a time?"

"Lots of men have made, or lost them, over night," Percival laughed. "Maybe you'll care for this stuff and maybe you won't, but I'd like to have you glance through it."

Matthews took the portfolio and skimmed over its pages. "Do *you* do the Kirby advertising?" the heater man asked in surprise. "Why the devil didn't you say so before?"

"Because I only do part of it, and I didn't want to sail under false colors," Percival truthfully answered. "I don't wish to claim any glory that isn't mine, but this is my work, from typewriter to printing press. Of course, Mr. Kirby does the bulk of his advertising himself, but he sometimes calls me in to help him out."

"These things are splendid!" Matthews frankly praised.

"Naturally," admitted Jones, with a suppressed smile, "otherwise Mr. Kirby wouldn't have accepted them. And let me tell you something, Mr. Matthews. Rufus Kirby gave me that order blindly, without questioning my ability to make good—"

"Then you must have done it on a speculative basis. If you want to work for me that way—"

"No thank you," interrupted Percival. "I've just handed you a concrete example of what I can do. You admit that it is good. I told you that after I'd proved my ability, my prices would be doubled. If you want me to do anything for you, the order will have to be *bona fide* and the fee will be determined before I begin."

"Rather cocky, ain't you?" sneered Matthews. "Do you think you can put something over on me?"

"I *know* I can. I've done it," Jones said quietly. "You hold the evidence in your hand. To-day I'm not asking you to buy without knowing what sort of stuff you'll get. I'm offering you a known quantity and an understood quality — and you'll have to *pay* for it if you want my services. And," he added, looking at the clock, "please make up your mind. Time is all I have to sell, and you start buying it from the moment I enter your office."

Matthews nearly hit the ceiling, but somehow he liked Percival's spirit as much as he did the samples of his work. And with secret satisfaction he realized that it was his own suggestion that had caused Percival to "go out and get a reputation."

That afternoon Jones started in on a series of booklets for Matthews. They had spent the intervening hours poring over data and in going through the great heater plant.

As the months slipped by more and more of the blue prospect cards in Percival's card index were replaced with pink ones that denoted clients, and by fall he had quite an imposing list of retainers.

But despite Maude's frequent inquiries, Percival never called again on Rufus Kirby. Nor did Kirby send for him.

"Don't you think you're foolish, dear?" Maude protested. "It was your first account, the work that gave you your prestige; and it would help you to get more business now, if you could say you handled it."

"I'm not in business for fun, Maude. Kirby's orders are not profitable and I'm doing very nicely without him," was Jones's answer. But he chuckled inwardly as he saw the look of dissatisfied perplexity on Maude's face.

One noontime, some weeks later, Jones was lunching at the Hotel Diplomat with the advertising manager of the Imperial Baking Powder Company. Kirby and two friends came in and sat at a nearby table. Jones nodded casually to his first client,

and then plunged into a serious discussion of the Imperial's problems. Before coffee was served Percival had a new client. Flushed with success at obtaining his first big account, Jones ran into Kirby in the foyer.

"Jones," said Kirby, with a twinkle in his eye, "I want to congratulate you! I've always wondered why you took that job from me at a price that must have meant a loss, and why you never came back to try to compensate yourself for the deficit on other work. Frankly, I thought I was putting over something on you, but when I saw your spirit I resolved to tell you so and make it up to you some day. Now I know that it was you who put over something on me!"

Jones laughed as he realized that Kirby had guessed his secret; but he pleaded that he did not understand, because he wanted to have Harrison, of the Imperial, hear Kirby confess the story.

"Oh, yes, you *do* understand, my boy," insisted Kirby, and Harrison, impressed by Kirby's evident regard for Jones, listened intently. "You solicited me because you wanted the prestige of working on my account to help you in soliciting others. For that reason, you were willing to do my work not only without profit, but at an actual cash sacrifice—"

"At a cash sacrifice, yes," Jones admitted. "But not without profit. You've guessed the truth, Mr. Kirby. My profit on that little deal was the *reputation* it earned me."

"Would you like to add to your reputation by taking over all my advertising?" Kirby asked, and Harrison looked inquiringly at Jones.

"The suggestion is flattering," Percival answered thoughtfully, despite his natural elation. "Of course I'd like to handle your account, but I'm pretty busy these days." Then a twinkle came into his eyes, as he added: "My fees are pretty stiff now I've proved myself and gained a reputation."

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WHEN SUMMER CAME

THE elm boughs brushed my window as I slept,
And something touched me softly, still as air.
I felt its breathing where the curtain crept,
I heard its footsteps on the lattice stair.
But when I looked, only a drowsy bird
Called in the flowering lilac trees below.
Only the restless poplar branches stirred,
Above the budding morning-glory row.

But the far hills were swept with pallid grays,
The moonlight faded from the apple trees,
The oleander's newly crimson sprays
Shook at the passing of a swift, warm breeze.
Then the rose banners of the dawn unfurled,
And golden summer glowed across the world.

Rose Henderson.

The Further Adventures of Zorro*

Part V

by Johnston McCulley

Author of "The Mark of Zorro," etc.

CHAPTER XXII.

A PRICE TO BE PAID.

THE face of Captain Ramón turned livid as he struggled to get his sword from its scabbard. There was a look of fear in his countenance, too.

"Zorro!" he cried. "Señor Zorro, eh?"

"*Sí!* Zorro!" came the answer. "There is not water enough in all the sea to drown me while there remains something to be avenged. We have crossed blades before, *señor*, and I have marked you. But this time shall be the last. A fatal wound this time, *capitan!* It is an honor that I do not cut you down without giving you the chance to defend yourself!"

Captain Ramón finally had his sword out, and now he was on guard. But he could not forget that once before in his life he had crossed blades with Señor Zorro, and Zorro had played with him as a cat plays with a mouse, and finally had left him for dead after marking him on the forehead.

And so the captain grew desperately afraid, feeling that he had small chance against the better sword play of the other. He sprang back toward the door to the front room, but found Señor Zorro before him blocking the way.

"Are you a coward and would run?" Zorro taunted. "A pretty soldier, by the saints!"

"Ha! Señor Zorro is here!" the *commandante* shouted at the top of his lung power. "Zorro is here! To me, pirates!"

He had no time to say more. Señor Zorro's face assumed an expression of grim determination, and he advanced swiftly. But Captain Ramón had found another method of protection for the time being. He sprang back beside the *señorita*, grasped her roughly and held her before him, shielding his body with hers. And he continued his shouting, hoping to attract the attention of Barbados and his men.

"Poltroon!" Zorro sneered. "Coward and dog!"

"Fly, Diego!" the *señorita* begged. "The pirates will be here and take you."

"When I have slain this arrant coward and rescued you, and not before!" Señor Zorro declared.

He danced toward Captain Ramón again, but the *commandante* was back in a corner now, holding the *señorita* close before him,

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for May 6.

and Señor Zorro was afraid to attempt a thrust. The *señorita* made a struggle to get free, but found that she could not.

In the other room the woman Inez had heard the tumult and the words. She had dared to open the door a crack and peer inside, and then she had closed the door again and barred it quickly, and hurried into the open.

"Barbados!" she shrieked. "Sanchez! Fiends of hell! Señor Zorro is here trying to kill the captain! Come and take him!"

Barbados heard and understood her shrieks, as did some of the others near. They rushed across the open space and crowded into the front room of the building. From the storeroom came the sound of Señor Zorro's voice.

"Hide behind a woman, eh, coward? Come out and fight, poltroon! Come out, renegade! Is there no insult strong enough to bring you forth?"

Barbados motioned with one hand. Inez unbarred the door and threw it open. Into the storeroom tumbled the pirates, their blades held ready.

"Take him alive!" Barbados thundered. "Catch me this land pirate unhurt!"

Señor Zorro whirled to confront them. He darted to a corner and threw up his blade. He sprang forward a few steps, wounded a man, retreated again.

But he knew that the weight of numbers was against him in such cramped fighting quarters, and he could not get to the window and make an escape. They hurled themselves upon him, buried him beneath their combined weight, disarmed him, and forced him to his feet again. They lashed his hands behind his back, and Barbados, now that it was a safe thing to do, stalked forward and spat at him.

"So, Señor Zorro, we have you in our hands again!" Barbados said. "This time it will be fire or steel instead of water, since you seem to swim so well! And this time, *señor*, we make a real ghost out of you!"

Captain Ramón lurched forward, his face purple with wrath. "Do with him as you will," he said to Barbados. "But let me have a hand in it!"

"Ha! You had your chance, *capitan*, a moment ago, and did not make much of it!" Barbados replied, grinning. "I'll have him put in the other adobe building with the *caballeros*. Fiends of hell, take him away!"

The *señorita* made an attempt to get forward, but the pirates thrust her back. They took Señor Zorro away, and the grinning Barbados followed them. The captain turned to face the *señorita* once more.

"*Señorita*, you must try to understand," he said. "I could not act or speak in any other manner. The pirates must still think that I am one of them, else I cannot get to San Diego de Alcála and fetch the soldiers."

"There is small need of further pretense, *señor*," she replied with much scorn in her manner. "I know you for what you are!"

"You are inclined to show bravery, now that you know this Señor Zorro is alive, eh?" he said. "But will he live long, in the hands of these pirates, some of whose friends he has slain? This Barbados loves ransom money, but Don Diego Vega is one man who never will be ransomed. For Barbados loves vengeance, too!"

"I cannot endure your presence longer," she said. "Leave me alone with my sorrows!"

"Nor can I endure your scorn much longer," Captain Ramón replied. "Has it occurred to you that you are in my power completely, if I will it so?"

"Now you show your true colors again, *señor*. And there is always death!"

"And torture!" Captain Ramón added. "That will befall this Señor Zorro, no doubt!"

"Torture?" she cried.

"Ha! Real torture, such as only these beasts of pirates know how to inflict!" he declared. "No man can stand against such a thing for long. He will beg and shriek for the release of death when the pain begins."

"No—no!" she cried.

"And you will be forced to watch it, no doubt!" the *commandante* continued. "Barbados, his men say, is a master hand at torture of all kinds. They'll chip at him with their knives, sear his flesh with white-hot brands—"

"*Señor*, for the love of the saints—"

"You do not like the picture? Wait un-

til you see the reality, which will be much worse than words could paint!"

"If I could save him—give my life for his—"

The captain looked at her sharply. "Perhaps there may be a way," he said.

"What mean you?"

"I can have speech with this fiend of a Barbados and coax him to delay the torture until he has accounted for the troopers from San Diego de Alcála. The troopers will account for him and his men instead, of course, and then Señor Zorro and the *caballeros* will be released."

"And you will do this?" she cried. "Ah, *señor,* if only you would!"

"I can do it, *señorita*—at a price!"

"And what—is the price?" she asked.

"You are the price yourself, *señorita.*"

"Beast!"

"Is that a way to save Señor Zorro by calling me a beast?" the captain asked. "All that I ask is an immediate marriage. Would it be an ill thing to wed with one of his excellency's officers?"

"I cannot! My heart is not my own!"

"Can you hesitate?" the captain asked. "One way, you will be my wife, and Señor Zorro will be saved from torture and will be set free. The other way, *señorita,* he will be tortured until he dies—and you will come to me unwed!"

"Oh!" she gasped. "That a man could be such a fiend—"

"Love drives men to do strange things, *señorita.*"

"Love!" she cried. "You know not the meaning of the word! To love is to be gentle, to cherish and protect!"

"I know the meaning as it appeals to me," the captain declared. "And I have scant time, if you are to agree. Fray Felipe is in the camp, and he can wed us. Barbados is afraid to affront a *fray* and will not see Felipe harmed. So he lets him roam around, though he is watched."

"I cannot!"

"Very well, *señorita.* It is for you to make the decision. But I am afraid that the pirates will have their way. And their way will not be a gentle one!"

"Can you not be a proper man?" she cried. "Can you not save him without exacting such a payment? For once in your life, *señor,* can you not show yourself a *caballero?*"

"Save him and let him claim you?" Ramón asked. "You are asking far too much!"

"Is there no other way?"

"None!" he replied. "There are certain things that you must do—be my wife, and I will save Señor Zorro by fetching the troopers from San Diego de Alcála. And afterward you must say that I did but trick the pirates, and that you wed me in gratitude for saving you from them."

"Such a falsehood would not come easily from my lips, *señor,*" she said. "And how can I trust you? How do I know that you would fetch the troopers?"

"I am not afraid to make the bargain," he told her. "You need not wed me until after the pirates are defeated and the *caballeros* are released. That is fair enough for both, is it not? But how, on the other hand, may I be assured that you will not forget your part of the bargain, once I have done my share?"

"*Señor!*" she cried, her face flaming. "Would a daughter of the Pulidos break her given word?"

"Then you give it?" he asked.

"Not yet!" she replied firmly. "There are to be certain stiplations, *señor.*"

"And they—" he questioned.

"I must see Señor Zorro alone and speak to him, and explain just what I intend to do. I would tell him the truth—that you will save him and the others if I wed you. I would not have him think that my heart is one that can change so easily."

"Ha! After that you would have to save him against his will. He would not accept the sacrifice."

"Then will I save him despite himself," she declared. "And you need not fear for the future in such case, *señor.* Once we were wed, Señor Zorro would not raise his hand against you if I asked him not to do so."

"Perhaps it may be arranged," Captain Ramón said.

He was plotting more, even as he spoke. He did not see how he could lose in this game. If he fetched the troopers, and the

pirates were wiped out and the *caballeros* saved, the *señorita* would keep her word if she had given it. Men might despise him for taking advantage of a situation, yet would he be safe. And perhaps, for a small sum, he could have this Señor Zorro killed yet.

And if the pirates through some fortune of war managed to be victorious over the troopers, then Captain Ramón could do the other thing—simply seize the *señorita,* give Señora Zorro up to torture, and remain a renegade, perhaps even become a pirate chief himself in the future.

"I will speak to no other man, *señor*—only Zorro," she said, as he seemed to hesitate. "I will not betray your double-dealing to the pirate crew, for that would defeat all our ends and mean death for Señor Zorro and the *caballeros,* and much worse for me. But I must speak to Señor Zorro a moment before I give you my decision in the matter."

"I will try to arrange it with Barbados," Captain Ramón replied. "Come into the other room and let the woman guard you until I return. You must play the game well if you would be successful. And there is scant time. I should start my ride to San Diega de Alcála as quickly as possible."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SEÑORITA PLOTS ALSO.

CAPTAIN RAMÓN, hurrying outside, found Barbados in the open space before the other adobe building. The pirate chief, it was easy to see, had been drinking heavily of rich, stolen wine. Among the pirates slain were some of Barbados's particular friends, and he was trying to drown his sorrow at their untimely taking off.

He turned as the *commandante* approached and greeted him with a shout.

"Ha!" he cried, lurching drunkenly. "So you have not started for San Diego de Alcála yet, *capitan?* You have just come from the little *señorita—sí?* Yet your face does not bear the marks of her nails, which is strange. I would not want the taming of her. By my naked blade, I would not!"

"Attend me!" the captain commanded, grasping the pirate chief by the arm. "Is it your intention to torture this Señor Zorro your men have taken?"

Barbados cursed loudly, breathed heavily, and squinted his eyes until they were only two tiny slits. "I shall make him squirm and squeal!" he declared loudly. "And then I shall turn him into a proper ghost!"

"Death is nothing to a man like that," Captain Ramón told him. "But torture is a different matter."

"Then I'll see to it that he is prettily tortured!" Barbados declared.

"There are two sorts of torture, Barbados—the physical and the mental," said the captain.

"Mental? I do not understand such things!"

"Torture to the mind," the captain explained. "That is the worst kind by far. If you would have some sport with this Señor Zorro, whom we both hate, listen to me. The *señorita,* who was to have been his bride, is afraid that you will torture and slay him. I have told her that I will save him by fetching the troopers from San Diego de Alcála—if she will wed with me."

"Ha! Is this treason?" Barbados cried.

"Are you a fool?" questioned the captain. "And am I one? There must be no talk of treason between us. Attend! She will go to this Señor Zorro and explain to him what she intends doing. Just think of that, Barbados! There is torture for you! He, who loves her so much, will think that she is to become the bride of another man. Ha! He will squirm and squeal indeed! A prisoner, and unable to prevent it! Ha!"

"Ha!" Barbados cried, understanding finally, and grinning to show his appreciation.

"And we will taunt him with it" the *commandante* continued. "We'll watch him squirm!"

"But it appears to me, *capitan,* that in this affair you are acting the part of an ass," Barbados dared to say. "Why work so hard to get the wench to agree to wed you when you can take her at your pleasure?"

"Because it will hurt this Señor Zorro

a great deal more to know that she gives her consent," the captain replied. "We'll taunt him about it, and then I'll ride for the soldiers. And your men will sweep them off the earth and then ride to San Diego de Alcála and loot the place. As for this Señor Zorro—having tortured him mentally, you will proceed to torture him physically when you celebrate your victory."

"It appeals to me!" Barbados declared suddenly. "He slew some of my closest friends. Yet I would not wait too long! Some of these fine enemies must be tortured soon, while I am in the proper mood for it!"

"And there can be more mental torture," the captain said. "Do not touch him until the very last. Make him watch as some of his friends are being tortured. Let him hear their shrieks of pain. Let him see Don Audre Ruiz, his boon companion, suffer. That will hurt him as much as being tortured himself."

"Ha! By my naked blade, *capitan,* you should have been born a pirate!" Barbados shrieked.

"Then it is agreed?"

"*Si!* It is agreed!"

"I will get the *señorita* and let her tell Señor Zorro what she intends to do."

"There are two rooms in that adobe building," Barbados explained. "This Señor Zorro is alone in the front one, for I thought it best not to put him with the others. The door between has a heavy lock, and I have the key. You can let the *señorita* go in there, and we'll listen at the window and enjoy his pain when she tells him. Ha! I say it again, *capitan*—you should be a pirate! You are wasted in the army!"

Captain Ramón hastened back to the *señorita,* whispered that he had been able to arrange things as she wished, grinned at old Inez, and then conducted the daughter of the Pulidos across the open space and toward the adobe building where Señor Zorro and the *caballeros* were being held prisoners.

Barbados was waiting. He leered at the girl, then called one of his men to his side, and commanded that he unfasten and open the door. Señor Zorro, his wrists still lashed behind his back, was pacing around the room. From the room adjoining came the voices of the *caballeros.*

"Señor Zorro, here is a pretty wench who has some words for your ears," Barbados called. "She is not so pretty as she was, having dirtied herself in an attempt to escape, but possibly she will serve. I give you a few minutes in which to hold speech. Do not abuse the privilege."

"Whatever you may do in the future, I thank you for this, Señor Pirate!" Zorro said.

Barbados laughed and withdrew, and closed the door behind him. The *señorita* stepped forward slowly, her hands held at her breast, a look of anguish in her sweet face. Señor Zorro was smiling down at her.

"The saints are good, *señorita!*" he whispered. "That I may see you again—"

"Diego, my beloved, it is a sad errand!" she interrupted. "Yet I had to come."

His face was grave for an instant, and then he smiled at her once more.

"So they have sent you to tell me that I must die?" he asked. "I could not receive a warrant of death from sweeter hands. My one regret is that I have failed in your rescue. I do not fear the coming of death. It will be only another adventure. It is for you that I fear."

"Fear not for me!" she said. "Nor fear the coming of death, either. It is not a warrant of death that I bring you, Diego. I have come to tell you that you are to go free."

"Free?" Señor Zorro gasped. "Have pirates turned kind? Has old Fray Felipe demonstrated to them the error of their ways? Is the devil going to mass these days? *Señorita,* you are trying to make the sentence lighter by saying it in a kind manner. Speak out! Don Diego Vega is not afraid to learn the truth, and most certainly Señor Zorro is not."

"I know that you are not afraid, Diego. I dread to tell you this thing, though it means your life."

He stepped closer to her suddenly, and looked down into her eyes. "What are you trying to tell me?" he asked kindly. "Do not be afraid to speak."

"That you are to go free, Diego," she replied, failing to meet his glance.

"And how may that be?" he asked.

"Captain Ramón is to arrange it."

"Put not your trust in Ramón!"

"Ah, Diego, but there is naught else to do!" she said. "He tells me that he is tricking the pirates. He will ride to San Diego de Alcála and return with the troopers from the *presidio* there. The pirates will be slain or captured, and you and the *caballeros* will be saved."

"Ramón will do this?" Señor Zorro cried. "Is there some hidden spark of gentlehood in the beast?"

"He will do it, Diego—for a price."

"Ha! I might have known it! Well, I can pay the cur! What is the price?"

"Not money, Diego, beloved! The price is that I wed him."

Señor Zorro sucked in his breath sharply and bent quickly over her.

"You wed with him?" he said. "Wed with a snake like Captain Ramón?"

"Only to save you, Diego! Ah, do not think that I am untrue! He but asks my word—the word of a Pulido! And the wedding is not to take place until he returns with the troopers, the pirates are slain, and you are free."

"*Señorita—*"

"There will be torture and death for you, else," she was quick to add. "And I will remain true, Diego. I shall but promise to wed him, understand. And after the ceremony, before he can claim me as his bride, I—I shall die!"

"And do you think that I would accept such a sacrifice?" Señor Zorro asked. "Could I live and see you the bride of another man? And could I live knowing that you had taken your own life for me? No, *señorita!*"

"If I do not, they will torture and slay you!"

"Then let them torture and slay!" he said. "You cannot do this thing! You—a daughter of the Pulido blood! Think of the blood in your veins!"

"I could not be his wife, except in name, but I can die!" she said. "Only a thrust of the dagger after the ceremony! The blood of the Pulidos tells me to do that!"

"I command you—entreat you—"

"Can I see you die?" she asked. "And, if I refuse, there will be nothing except death for me as well as for you. For Ramón will try, then, to make me his by force."

"Better to die in defense of your honor, *señorita,* than have your fair name linked with his even for a moment!" Señor Zorro declared. "I demand that you refuse to do this thing! Ah, *señorita,* all hope is not gone! They have taken my sword, and they have bound my hands, but I am not helpless entirely. The spirit of Zorro still burns in my breast! Given but a little time, and I'll win through!"

"Diego!"

"If we could work for time—" he said.

"Perhaps I can hold him off for an hour," she whispered. "But no longer than that, I am sure. And—there may be a way. I have thought of something!"

"What is it?"

"Whisper," she commanded. "I am sure that they are listening outside the window. Pretend that all is agreed between us. Let me embrace you!"

Barbados and Captain Ramón not only were listening, but also they were peering through the window. And they saw her go up close to him, press against him, saw her arms go around him, as though in a last embrace. But her back was toward the window, and they could not see all.

For, as she pressed against him, the little *señorita* took from her bosom the dagger that the woman Inez had given her when she had attempted to make an escape, and which had been forgotten afterward. And she reached around him even as she buried her head against his breast, and sawed with the sharp dagger at the cords that bound his wrists.

"Careful!" she warned. "Hold the ends of the ropes, so they will not know that you are free!"

"*Si!*" he breathed. "Never in all the world was there ever a *señorita* like you! Hope sings within me again!"

"Do not let it show in your face!" she warned.

Her hands crept to the front again, and she slipped the dagger into the sash around

his waist. She knew that he felt it, and knew that it was there. And then she she stepped back, and raised her voice so that those at the window could hear.

"It is the only way, Diego!" she said. "I must leave you—I cannot endure this scene longer! Take my lips, Diego—for the last time!"

She raised her head, and her eyes closed. He bent forward, their lips touched. And then she gave a little cry as though of pain, and rushed back toward the door. And Señor Zorro remained standing against the wall, anguish in his countenance.

Barbados opened the door and let the *señorita* out of the room, then closed and fastened the door again. Captain Ramón hurried up to her.

"You have decided, *señorita?*" he asked.

"Almost am I ready to give you my sacred word, but not quite," she replied. "It is a terrible thing for me, *señor*. Give me but one little hour. Let me go to old Fray Felipe and have him pray with me."

"I am growing tired of waiting!" Captain Ramón said. "I should be on my way already. Why not decide now?"

"You will have ample time to return with the troopers long before nightfall," she whispered quickly, as Barbados turned away to howl an order to some of his men. "Give me only an hour—perhaps less!"

"Very well—an hour!" said the captain. "But no longer! I'll find the *fray* for you, and put you both in one of the huts under guard until you can make up your mind."

CHAPTER XXIV.

INTO THE OPEN.

SEÑOR ZORRO fought the battle of his life, after the little *señorita* had gone and the door had been closed and barred, to keep from showing his elation in his face.

His hands now would be free at any time he wished to drop the ends of the cords that bound his wrists. He had a weapon hidden in the sash about his waist. Given those minor advantages, Señor Zorro felt that he could disconcert his enemies again, else fail to be Zorro.

But the expression in his face did not change as he walked slowly around the room and finally came to a stop before the window and glanced across the clearing and the beach toward the glistening water of the bay. He looked like a man devoid of all hope, expecting the worst.

Not so very far away was a small hut, before the one door of which two of the pirates sat on guard. Señor Zorro was well aware of the fact that the weapons of the captured *caballeros,* and those of their comrades who had been slain, were in there, and that his own beloved sword was there also, waiting to be claimed by him.

And, as he watched, Sanchez rode wildly into the clearing on a magnificent horse, undoubtedly stolen from some great *hacienda.* Barbados's lieutenant dismounted and allowed the animal to wander near the hut while he hurried in search of the pirate chief with some report.

These things Señor Zorro saw quickly, and then he hurried back to the door that opened into the other room. It was barred, and locked with a strong lock, and Zorro had no tools with which to open it. He could not unfasten it and release his friends, but he could hold speech with them.

He made certain that nobody was near the window to overhear, and then kicked against the door to attract the attention of the *caballeros.*

"Audre!" he called, in a guarded voice.

There was silence for a moment, and then he heard a whisper from the other side of the door.

"*Si?*"

"I have another chance, Audre. The *señorita* has cut my bonds and given me a dagger. It is a poor weapon, but better than none. It would avail us nothing for me to let you out if I could, for the pirates greatly outnumber us. But I can try to escape and ride to San Diego de Alcála for troopers."

"Good, Diego, my friend!"

"I know not what may happen before I am able to return. Ramón is in the camp and up to some sort of deviltry. But, should you escape, look to the *señorita!*"

"Be assured of that!" Don Audre replied.

"If I can do so, when I escape I'll take her with me. If not, I'll return with the troopers as swiftly as possible. The saints be with you!"

"And with you!" Don Audre Ruiz returned.

Señor Zorro walked slowly away from the door and approached the window again. The horse Sanchez had been riding was now but a short distance from the adobe building. The two guards were squatted before the hut wherein the captured weapons had been stored, drinking and talking. Other pirates were in the distance, walking around, stretched in the shade of the huts, gambling, shouting, quarreling.

Señor Zorro knew well that it would profit nothing to get those weapons in the hut, for the *caballeros* could not be liberated quickly, and so the element of surprise in an attack would be lost. Moreover, were they liberated and their swords in their hands, they would only be cut down by the pirate crew after they had taken some toll.

Señor Zorro wanted his own sword, but did not know whether there would be time for him to get possession of it. He would not dare stop to attack the two guards, for the other pirates would rush up and endanger his chance for escape. It would be far better, he decided quickly, to seize the horse and ride with what speed he could toward the distant village of San Diego de Alcála, get help there at the *presidio,* and return to the work of rescue with an armed force behind him.

Back to the door he hurried.

"Audre!" he called, softly.

"*Sí?*"

"Raise a din in there, create a bedlam of a sort, and 'twill help me vastly. Pretend to be fighting among yourselves."

He did not have very long to wait. He could hear Don Audre Ruiz whispering instructions to the other *caballeros,* and almost instantly they began shrieking at one another, pounding on the heavy door, making a bedlam of noise. Señor Zorro hurried across to the outside window and called to the guards before the hut.

"Come here!" he shouted. "The prisoners are fighting and slaying one another!"

But they refused to leave their posts, as Señor Zorro had hoped they would do. Instead, they shrieked the news at Barbados, who was not far away, and he ran toward the adobe building followed by Sanchez and half a dozen of the men. They unbarred the door and burst in upon Señor Zorro, who stood back against the wall gazing at the door of the adjoining room, as though trying to decide what was taking place inside. From the other side of that door came shrieks and cries and the sounds of blows.

"Fiends of hell!" Barbados swore. "They will slay one another, and then there will be neither torture nor ransom! Unfasten that door and stand ready to drive them back if they try to make an escape. And two of you guard that outside door also!"

One glance he flung at Señor Zorro, to find him standing against the wall as if his attention were concentrated on the other room. But as Barbados turned toward the door again Señor Zorro shifted along the wall for a distance of a few feet, and glanced toward the door through which he would have to go to freedom.

He waited until the other door was about to be thrown open, until the pirates in the room had their attention centered there, and then Señor Zorro dropped the severed cords from his wrists, wriggled his fingers for an instant to restore the circulation of blood, and suddenly brought his hands around in front of him and tore the dagger from his sash, where the little *señorita* had put it.

Forward he hurled himself, just as the other door was opened. He took the two men before him by surprise. One he hurled aside; the other he was forced to wound slightly to get him out of the way. Past them he dashed, even as they shrieked the intelligence that he was escaping. Out into the open he darted and straight toward the horse that Sanchez had ridden into the clearing. He would have no difficulty in getting to the horse, he saw. But his escape was all that he could negotiate. A glance told him that the *señorita* was not in sight, and he had no time to search the entire camp for her.

The pirates were rushing toward him from every side, attracted by the tumult. Barbados, behind him, was shrieking commands and foul oaths. The dagger held between his teeth, Señor Zorro dodged the two men before the hut and vaulted into the saddle, kicked at the animal's flanks, and was away.

Behind him a pistol barked, but the ball flew wild, and he could hear the insane roar of rage that Barbados gave because he had missed the target. It was a flying target now. Señor Zorro bent low over the horse's neck and kicked frantically at the animal's flanks again. Straight across the clearing he guided the animal, toward the trail that ran to the crest of the slope.

Another pistol roared behind him, but he did not even hear the shrill whistling of the flying ball. He wished that he might make a search for the *señorita,* but he was afraid that capture might result if he tried it. And were he captured again Barbados would make short work of him. It were better to get away free and return later to rescue.

He was approaching the edge of the camp now. He knew that there were some mounts with saddles and bridles on, and that there might be a pursuit. Once over the crest, he would have a chance. The pirates would not dare follow him too close to San Diego de Alcála, and that was only eight miles away.

And then he saw, just ahead of him, Captain Ramón. The *commandante* was drinking from a bottle and talking to some women of the camp. He whirled around when he heard the mad pounding of the horse's hoofs, and Señor Zorro saw his face go white as he struggled to get his sword from its scabbard. The *commandante* had recognized him.

The women shrieked and fled. Captain Ramón, his sword out, stood his ground. Straight toward him Señor Zorro raced his horse, bending forward, his dagger held in his right hand again. Now he wished he had his beloved sword!

But Ramón sprang out of the way just in time and swung his blade in a vicious blow. It missed Señor Zorro and struck the horse on the rump, inflicting a minor cut. It had the effect, however, of frightening the animal more. Up the slope he raced, and Señor Zorro sat straight in the saddle and shrieked at the top of his voice:

"*Atención!* A *caballero's* near—"

It was not merely in a spirit of bravado. It was to let the little *señorita* know, if she did not already, that he was free and riding wildly for help.

CHAPTER XXV.

AT THE PRESIDIO.

IN that instant, as he watched the singing Zorro racing up the slope toward the crest, Captain Ramón realized that his future was hanging by a very thin thread. Were he to protect his own interests he must move swiftly.

He sensed that Señor Zorro would make a mad ride for San Diego de Alcála and pour a story into the ear of the *commandante* of the *presidio* there. And it was highly imperative that Captain Ramón tell a far better story—and tell it first.

Ramón managed to return his sword to its scabbard, and then he raced with what speed he could toward Barbados and the others, who were following lurchingly in Señor Zorro's wake. He grasped Barbados by an arm and hurried him aside.

"What happened?" the *commandante* demanded.

"The fellow tricked us in some fashion!" Barbados declared with an oath. "His hands were untied, and he had a dagger. If that pretty wench we let speak with him—"

"Attend me!" Ramón cried. "The wench is under guard in one of the huts, and is not to be touched. Get me a horse. Be quick about it! The fool is riding to San Diego for troopers!"

"Ha! Let them come!"

"I must get to the *presidio* before he arrives," Captain Ramón explained. "The lieutenant there will take orders from me. Then I'll lead the troopers into your ambush, as we had planned. And this Zorro—"

"Ha! This Zorro!" Barbados cried.

"When I have my hands upon him again there'll be no delay."

"I'll have him imprisoned in the *presidio,*" the captain promised. "Then, after you defeat the soldiers, and when you go to loot the town, he will be at your mercy."

"You think of everything!" Barbados declared. "I say it yet once again—you should be a pirate!"

One of the men, understanding more than his fellows, had fetched the captain's own horse, with saddle and bridle on. The captain sprang into the saddle.

"Arrange the ambush at the head of the cañon, as we planned," he told Barbados. "Do it without delay. I'll lead the troopers straight into the trap."

Then he touched spurs to the animal he bestrode and dashed up the slope in the wake of Señor Zorro.

Captain Ramón was an excellent horseman, and he rode an excellent mount. Moreover, he had been through every mile of that country with his troopers some time before. He knew the shortest route to the *presidio* at San Diego de Alcála, and he felt quite sure that Señor Zorro did not.

Reaching the crest of the slope, Captain Ramón stopped his horse beneath the trees and watched and listened for a time. From the distance there came to his ears the drumming of a horse's hoofs. As he had expected, Señor Zorro had ridden along the bottom of the cañon, and Captain Ramón knew that such a course would take him at least two miles out of his way. Once in that cañon, a horseman was forced to follow it until he came to the other end.

Captain Ramón turned his horse's head in another direction and drove home the spurs. He rode around a hill and emerged upon a flat space, across which he raced toward a row of foothills in the distance. Señor Zorro had the start, but he was taking the long way. Aside from an accident, Captain Ramón could reach San Diego de Alcála and have his story told before Señor Zorro arrived.

The thing had to be done, he told himself. He would use his authority and have Zorro thrown into the guardroom at the *presidio.* He would go back to the pirate camp at the head of the troopers, see that the pirates were wiped out to a man, release the *caballeros* and the *señorita.*

And then there would be other things to do. He would convince the authorities that Señor Zorro had been allied with the pirates and that the *caballeros* had not known of it, and have Zorro hanged. He would ask his friend, the Governor, to order the *señorita* to wed with him because he had saved her and wiped out the pirate brood, and the *señorita* would be forced to obey his excellency's command. And he would see to it that all men believed he had been true and loyal continually.

If the *señorita* spoke out the truth Captain Ramón could smile and say she uttered a falsehood because she did not wish to wed with him. He was guarded against every emergency, he felt.

There was a mere possibility, of course, that the pirates might be victorious, and in such case Captain Ramón would pretend that he had been with the rogues always, turn pirate himself, and have the *señorita.* But he preferred the other way.

He thought of these things as he rode. Around another hill and down a slope he rushed, and when he came to a wide trail that ran toward the distant El Camino Real he knew that he had distanced Señor Zorro. Yet he rode furiously, for he wanted all the time he could have at the *presidio* before Zorro arrived.

And finally he reached the highway, and tore along it like a mad horseman riding on the wind. The mount beneath him was showing signs of wearying, but the captain urged him on. Now he was flying past natives' huts scattered along the broad highway. Children and chickens and swine hurried from his path. Women came to the doors of the huts to look after him through clouds of dust.

Then he could see, in the distance, the *presidio* on its little hill, and the group of buildings around it. Captain Ramón urged his horse cruelly. As he approached men turned to watch him. Before the *presidio* itself troopers sprang to their feet, as men will when there is a feeling of excitement in the air.

Captain Ramón stopped his horse in a

cloud of dust before the *presidio* entrance and was out of the saddle before the nearest trooper could seize the bridle. The men saluted, but Captain Ramón spent no time in answering their salutes. Drawing off his gloves, he strode through the entrance and straight toward the office of the *commandante*.

He had lied nobly to Barbados. Instead of their being a smaller force of soldiers than usual at San Diego de Alcála, there was an extra detachment, come to relieve others who were to go toward the north. But only a lieutenant was there by way of officer, the real *commandante* being on a journey to San Francisco de Asis to explain certain things to the Governor.

Captain Ramón opened the office door and strode inside, gasping his breath, slapping the dust from his uniform. The lieutenant sprang to his feet.

"Ramón!" he cried. "So far from home—"

Captain Ramón stopped him with a gesture.

"Have your trumpeter sound the assembly, and gather your men while we talk!" he commanded. "This is serious—and urgent!"

The lieutenant was a good soldier, and did not question. He sprang to the door and called an order, and almost immediately the commanding notes of a trumpet rang through the place. Then the lieutenant closed the door and hurried back to the long table in the middle of the room, before which Ramón was sitting.

"Pirates within eight miles of you!" Ramón declared. "They have a large camp. Three nights ago they raided Reina de Los Angeles."

"The news has reached us."

"Ha! I followed by land and approached their rendezvous at an early hour this morning. They abducted Señorita Lolita Pulido. Some *caballeros* pursued them by sea, fought, and were overcome. Many are being held prisoners, for ransom and torture. The *señorita* is a prisoner also."

"Where?" the lieutenant asked.

"On the coast, a bit north. I lurked about the camp and made some discoveries. Señor Zorro is mixed up with them."

"Zorro?" the lieutenant gasped.

"The same. His wild blood has broken out again. The *señorita* is of the opinion that he followed to rescue her, when in reality he had her stolen. He was to have married her, but is eager for lawlessness, it appears. This will be the end of the fiend!"

"Ha!" the lieutenant gasped. "If—"

"Attend!" Ramón interrupted. "I overheard a plot. Zorro is to ride here wildly and tell of the *señorita* and the *caballeros* being held by the pirates. It is his intention to lead back the troopers—and lead them into an ambush."

"By the saints—"

"So the pirates will wipe out your men. And then San Diego de Alcála, unprotected, will be before him!"

"The fiend!" the lieutenant gasped.

"Call half a dozen of your trusted men and have them ready. When he enters and begins his story have him seized. Throw him into the guardroom and put him into the maniac's shirt. Then I'll help you lead the troopers. I know how the ambush is planned. We'll attack in the rear, save the *caballeros*, and rescue the *señorita*—and gain considerable credit. Promotion will come to you!"

"It is agreed!" the lieutenant said, his face beaming.

"Be quick about it. I'll disappear while Zorro tells his tale. Seize him, throw him into the guardroom, put him into the maniac's shirt, leave two men to guard him. When we return we'll see that he is punished for his perfidy. *Caballero* or not, he'll be hanged for this."

The lieutenant sprang from his chair to issue the necessary orders. But the door was hurled open—and Señor Zorro rushed into the officer's room!

CHAPTER XXVI.

HELPLESSNESS.

ON the occasion of this meeting it was Señor Zorro who was properly astonished instead of his foe. Captain Ramón had been the last person he had seen at the pirates' camp; he had rid-

den at great speed, and yet here was the *commandante* ahead of him at the *presidio* in San Diego de Alcála.

But it did not take Señor Zorro long to guess that the captain had taken advantage of some short cut across the country and so had arrived at the *presidio* first. And, since he was here, Señor Zorro found himself in something of a predicament.

For weapons he had only the short dagger and his courage. The element of surprise upon which he generally depended so much was acting against him instead of for him in this present encounter; but he did not despair.

He took two quick steps forward, and the dagger suddenly was in his right hand. He glanced quickly at the lieutenant, who had picked up his sword from the long table and was drawing it from the scabbard, and then whirled toward Captain Ramón, who already had his sword ready for use.

"So!" Señor Zorro cried. "You got here ahead of me, did you? Renegade and traitor!"

"'Tis you who are the renegade and traitor!" Captain Ramón declared. "Friend of pirates!"

"Ha! So that is the tale you have told?" Señor Zorro gasped. "Lieutenant, I am Don Diego Vega, of Reina de Los Angeles. Perhaps you have heard the name?"

"The lieutenant also has heard of Señor Zorro, and knows that he and Don Diego Vega are one and the same man," Captain Ramón said before the other officer could reply. Captain Ramón felt some small degree of courage now, since Señor Zorro had no weapon except his short dagger.

"Ha! Who has not heard of Zorro?" came the reply. "And it is not to be expected that one of his excellency's officers would go far out of his regular way to do Señor Zorro a service. Yet an officer will serve his duty, and there are certain things to be considered, lieutenant. In a pirate camp a few miles from this place is a *señorita* of proper blood and several *caballeros* who must be rescued before they are tortured. I have ridden here for help, having made an escape."

"Made your escape?" Captain Ramón cried. "You came purposely with the story to lead the soldiers into a trap, you mean. Your story will avail you nothing, Señor Zorro. The lieutenant already is planning to ride to the rescue of his men. But you will remain here, a prisoner in the guardroom, in a maniac's shirt—"

"Ha!" Señor Zorro shrieked. "Lieutenant, make no mistake about it. This Captain Ramón may outrank you, but he is a traitor, and I would have all honest men know it. He is in league with the pirates himself."

"You scarcely can expect me to believe that," the lieutenant replied, smiling.

"It is the truth, by the saints! He is planning to lead your men into an ambush, no doubt!"

"I think that we have had enough of this nonsense, Don Diego!" the lieutenant said, his official manner upon him.

"You believe Captain Ramón in preference to me?"

"I do! You are to consider yourself a prisoner, Don Diego. You'll be held here safe until the rescue has been accomplished, and then there will be an investigation of this entire affair."

"It will not be necessary for you to keep me a prisoner," Señor Zorro replied, his eyes narrowing. "Lead your own soldiers, as you will, and be quick about it, and do not listen to the advice of Captain Ramón. The *señorita* who is held a captive is my betrothed. Her name is Lolita Pulido. At least allow me to remain free to aid in her rescue."

"I cannot forget that you are Señor Zorro as well as Don Diego Vega, and that the Pulido family does not have the friendship of the Governor," the lieutenant answered. "Captain Ramón has preferred a charge against you also. You remain in the *presidio* a prisoner."

The lieutenant picked up a silver whistle from the table, and started to put it to his lips to blow a blast that would call his orderly. But Señor Zorro, it appeared, had no intention of being kept a prisoner. He glanced swiftly toward Captain Ramón again, and then darted forward.

The lieutenant's whistle was knocked

from his left hand, but Señor Zorro did not succeed in getting possession of the officer's sword as he hurled him aside. He dashed on to the wall, struck it and whirled away, and came back with considerable momentum. Captain Ramón had started toward the door.

But as he put out a hand to pull the door open Señor Zorro grasped a small stool that stood at one end of the long table and hurled it with precise aim. It struck the captain's arm and caused him to recoil with a cry of pain.

The lieutenant was young, and enjoyed the recklessness of his youth. He bellowed his challenge and charged. Señor Zorro caught his sword against the dagger and warded off the blow. But, to do so, he was compelled to give some ground, and so Captain Ramón got to the door and opened it.

"Troopers!" he cried. "Help! This way! Your *commandante* is attacked!"

Señor Zorro fenced the lieutenant for a moment, but he knew well that he could not do so for long with any great degree of success. And suddenly he dropped to his knees, and the lieutenant, lunging with his blade, tripped over him and sprawled on the floor. Zorro was upon his feet again before Captain Ramón could reach his side. Again he whirled, and Captain Ramón recoiled against the wall, his sword advanced, his left arm stretched out across a wood panel.

Señor Zorro did not care to encounter the long blade with his dagger; besides, he heard the soldiers coming. His arm flashed, and the dagger flew through the air. Through the sleeve of Captain Ramón's uniform coat went the sharp blade, to be driven almost to the hilt in the wood beyond. The captain was held safely for the moment.

There was one large window in the officer's room, and it was swinging open. Zorro dashed for it, reached it, sprang up as the wondering troopers rushed in through the door. Through the window Señor Zorro plunged, sprawled on the ground for an instant, and then was upon his feet again and running with renewed vigor toward the front of the building.

But disaster waited for him there. The horse he had ridden had been jaded, and a soldier had taken the mount to the rear to rub it down. Zorro found his horse gone, and that of Captain Ramón also. The troopers in front of the *presidio* were in their saddles. And they surrounded the unmounted horses of those who had rushed inside in answer to the captain's call.

Señor Zorro turned immediately to flee. But the shrieks from inside the *presidio* told the troopers what was happening. They forced their mounts forward, ran Señor Zorro down, cut off his flight, and surrounded him. For a moment there was a pretty battle; but the troopers did not strike to slay, not understanding, quite, the status of this man who seemed to have run amuck. However, they prevented an escape.

The lieutenant shrieked from the window, demanding an immediate capture. Señor Zorro made one last attempt to escape. He darted beneath the belly of a horse, got outside the circle of troopers, and dashed away. He reached the corner of the low building and went up it as a fly goes up a wall, using the rough masonry of the corner as stepping-stones.

Across the roof he darted, while the soldiers urged their horses forward again in an effort to surround the building. Down the other side of the roof he ran, skipping across the Spanish tiles until he reached the eaves.

Below him was his horse, and the hostler was wiping one of the animal's forelegs. Señor Zorro did not hesitate. He crouched and sprang, and landed in the saddle. The hostler rolled to one side in fright as the animal lurched forward.

Señor Zorro whirled the beast toward the highway. But he saw at a glance that there was small chance of escape. The mount he bestrode was almost exhausted, and the troopers had fresh mounts. And they were upon him with a rush.

Weaponless, he could do nothing. They charged around him, pulled him down from the saddle, made him prisoner, and then marched him back to the entrance of the *presidio*, where the lieutenant and Captain Ramón were waiting.

"The maniac's shirt for him!" the lieutenant commanded. "Put him into it and then into the guardroom. Two men will remain behind to see that he does not escape. But I scarcely think that even Señor Zorro can escape the maniac's shirt!"

"Put me in it, and I hold it against you!" Zorro warned.

"I have given my orders," the lieutenant replied loftily.

"One last word for your ear!" Zorro said. "You are making a sad mistake. I tell you here and now, before some of your men, that this Captain Ramón is a renegade and a traitor. Heed not his advice! And ride swiftly, else you'll not accomplish the rescue. I charge you to take the *señorita* to a place of safety."

"Certainly, *señor!*"

"You'll not let me ride with you?"

"I have given my orders."

"Lieutenant, I swear by my honor as a *caballero* that all I have told you is the truth. Does that carry weight with you?"

It seemed to carry weight, for the officer hesitated. A *caballero* does not pledge his honor lightly. But how could it be possible that an officer like Captain Ramón could be anything but loyal and true. And Captain Ramón himself decided the lieutenant.

"For a *caballero* to swear by his honor is a great thing," the captain said. "Yet now and then we find a man of *caballero* blood who forgets the honor that should be his. And we remember that you are Señor Zorro, also!"

"*Señor*—" Zorro began angrily.

But the lieutenant cut him short. "I have decided," he said. "You will be held a prisoner in the maniac's shirt until we return. Take him away!"

The soldiers grasped him roughly, hurried him inside and to the guardroom. There, Señor Zorro tried to fight again, but could accomplish nothing against so many foes. They lashed his ankles and knees and tied his wrists together in front of him. And then one fetched the maniac's shirt. The latter was exactly what it was named, an instrument used on violent maniacs to prevent them harming themselves or anybody else. It was a long bag of leather, constructed so that a man could be slipped into it bound, and the top of the bag then gathered around his neck with a leather thong.

Protesting to the last, Señor Zorro was put inside the leather bag and the neck thong tightened. And then they propped him up on a bench in a corner, and left the room. The door closed; he heard the bar go up against it.

The soldiers hurried away. There was a moment of silence. And then Señor Zorro heard the clattering of horses' hoofs as they rode toward the highway. And he was left behind, bound and helpless, in the guardroom of the *presidio*, in the maniac's shirt, and with two troopers just outside the door.

(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)

THE SWIMMIN' POOL

REMEMBER the willows and the bend in the river,
Remember the shadows so deep and so cool—
And the ripples that set the whole surface a-quiver
And made the light dance on the old swimmin' pool?

Remember the kids—gosh, they sure were some swimmers!
Remember the days we played hookey from school?
Some things I've forgot—but Time can't put the dimmers
On the charms and the joys of the old swimmin' pool!

F. B. Fink.

The Shadow in the Snow

by Hamilton Craigie

A MAN, huge, brutish, broad, with a broken nose and a mouth like a steel trap beneath the iron-gray stubble of a new-grown mustache, walked, with a slouching shuffle, up the main street of Port Simpson, British Columbia.

The man was wearing a rich, fur-lined parka, with the hood thrown back, exposing his corded neck, ridged like a wrestler's; mukluks hung from his great shoulders by a rawhide thong; his high-laced prospector's boots creaked to the lift and scrunch of his feet on the board sidewalk. Perhaps the squeaking of those heavy boots on the pine planking annoyed him. Twice, as he came forward along the walk, he paused, his heavy face twisted in a scowl, lips moving as in a muttered imprecation. Somehow, for all his bulk he did not look like a man who walked openly, as by habit; if it had not been for those squeaky boots he would have passed, with his lifting, slow drag, as silently as a denizen of the wild passes: soundless and furtive as the night.

But there was nothing unusual or arresting in his dress, his gait; he might have been just one among the many: prospectors, trappers, hard rock men, government employees who thronged the walk and the road beside it—had it not been for his face, his eyes, these bitter, bleak, brooding, and just now harried with a certain fear.

The fear was there for him who could read it; it glowed, like a pinpoint of light, deep down, in a still fire; it showed, for him who could read it, in the sidewise turning of his head, the fingers, plucking at his bearded chin; he seemed like a man who walks with a stiff-kneed, lagging gait because he fears openly to run.

But no one appeared to notice him as he passed, with his slouching shuffle, among the crowd of half-breeds, Cree trappers, Ojibway bucks, Nass River *coureurs*, miners from across the Skeena, mackinaw-clad lumbermen, white-water men just in from Kuldo and Kitsumkalem.

Opposite Paulsen's Hotel, which is at the corner of Fremont and Twelfth, he halted, his gaze, sleepy-lidded as a falcon's, raking the sidewalk and the roadway just beyond, in a swift, squinting appraisal.

Two men stood in the doorway of the hotel; one tall and broad, with a keen, good-humored face, but with a frosty blue eye sharp as a surgeon's scalpel, nose a jutting eagle's beak. Authority emanated from him—it was in the glance of his eye, the turn of his head; a certain poise that in a lesser man would have been a swagger. Boots Alliston, sheriff of Kitkargas, glanced over the man in the parka and away to a dog-team resting in the snow. They were still in harness, and now, as if he felt the idling regard of the sheriff, the leader, a splendid husky, the wolf strain showing in the pointed ears and the long muzzle, lifted his great head to his master in the doorway.

Abruptly he whined, deep in his throat, hackles rising, as if, unbidden, he strove to voice a message, a warning, a command.

But Alliston, his gaze on the slouching figure in the parka, frowned, the warm lights in his eyes turning suddenly to a questioning coldness as the giant in the parka swung inward abruptly across the walk.

Then—what followed happened with the speed of light. To reach the doorway the giant had to pass the dog-team.

There came a combination of grunting snarl and roar from the man on the sidewalk—matched, for pure savagery, by the blood-mutter of the beast there in the snow, rising to pitch as he lurched and sprang the full tether of the traces, jaws wide. One could not have said how it was done, but even as Alliston's shout of: "You, there—look sharp!" cracked like a pistol shot, the giant's heavy boot had swung in a short arc; there was a smacking thud, a ripping, a tearing, a curse from the man—who, sleeve ripped along its length, from a safe distance eyed the dog with a saturnine, silent malevolence.

Following his first outburst the man in the parka, for an instant, surveyed the husky in a tight-lipped calm. And the dog—and now he was all wolf—bright eyes fixed upon the stranger in a red-rimmed watchfulness, kept silent, dumb. It was as if for a moment man and beast measured each other, eye to eye.

Now the giant turned to Alliston with a surly hardihood.

"That your team, mister?" he inquired, with a lifting swagger. His heavy face, scarred and scabbed with frostbite and pocked blue with powder burns, glowed suddenly, as if lighted from within. For a moment a little silence held—a breathless pause. The sheriff drew down the corners of his mouth. Perhaps the fellow would be asking damages for the ruin of his sleeve—it had been ripped clean from shoulder to red, hairy wrist. And Alliston was not certain that he had not been the aggressor.

Something, a premonition—what you will—awakened by the sight of that bleak, bitter countenance upraised to his—laid hold of Alliston for a moment, like fingers plucking at his elbow, so that he turned sidewise to his companion, a stocky, sandy-haired man with the bow-legs of a range rider, an unspoken question upon his lips.

But the sandy-haired man, his eyes upon the black-a-vised stranger with the sullen mouth, gave no sign.

And for a moment, too, a chord of memory vibrated somewhere, deep down, fading to less and less. There had been a story, somewhere, that Boots Alliston had heard, but it was dim, fragmentary, half-forgotten, if he had ever remembered it. His glance embraced the giant with a cold scrutiny.

"Yes—I reckon the dogs are mine, mister—" he said quietly, hesitating bluntly at the word, on his keen, good-humored face a faint shadow, like the sun on water.

"—Harbaugh," the giant told him, as a man recites a lesson, though glibly enough. "Jim Harbaugh—from Port Essington."

But that was not his name, and he had seen Port Essington only from the porthole of a cargo boat beating down from Unalaska. He jerked a huge hand at the dogs.

"Some lucivee you got there, mister," he said, grinning out of the corner of his mouth. "He's sure got one hell of a disposition—what 'll you take—I like fighters—what 'll you take for the outfit as it stands?"

Alliston's surprise, if he felt any surprise at the abrupt offer, was not apparent in his manner. As it chanced, he had owned that dog-team but a matter of days; the need for it had passed; anyway, if necessity arose, he would have his pick of the government huskies at Kitkargas. Actually, he had bought the team as the result of a generous impulse; Boots Alliston was that kind of a man; and—well— But as he appeared to consider, again that tug of memory twitched at his mental elbow; it had to, somehow, with the dog there in the snow and the surly giant with the roving eye and the furtive, repellent manner.

His jaws snapped shut with a click as, turning to the man before him, he named a price at which the other's eyes for an instant blinked in the sun dazzle, the still, flickering flame in their depths on a sudden a hot, avid spark. He showed his teeth as a wolf draws backward its long, upper lip, but there was no humor in the eyes, bleak, cold as the sun-dogs over Arctic ice.

"You'll throw in th' good-will, too, for that, old-timer, ha?" he countered with a heavy sarcasm. "Well—I got th' jack."

He peeled off the amount from a thick wad of bills with saffron edges, circled with a rubber band, handing the purchase money to Alliston. He turned, walking toward the sledge. He picked up the heavy dog whip. It sang in his hand, whistling to the weight of the heavy shoulders.

"Mush—mush on!" he shouted, but the team, whining in the traces, backed in a sudden flurry, crowding against the sledge. The leader had not moved.

Now, as the giant, whip in hand, strode forward, cursing, the great dog, pivoting in his tracks, faced him, lips drawn backward from the teeth in a soundless snarl, red-rimmed eyes alert, legs like iron columns braced, four-square in the snow.

For a moment, as in the sudden stoppage of a cinematograph, the picture held; the dog, defiant in the traces, his whole canine entity fused in a soundless manifestation of hate; the giant, whip raised, snarling in his beard, heavy face congested with passion, great shoulders hunched, head lowered like a Kadiak bear's.

Alliston, in the doorway, frowning, beheld the tableau, his hand on the collar of his mackinaw, tightening with the pressure, the knuckles whitening, mouth a grim, bodeful line. He had not interfered so far because the team was now Harbaugh's. Alliston knew men and dogs, and as between the two, man and beast—he had owned that team a little less than a week—he would have made an unhesitating choice in favor of the lesser brute, the dog.

"Drop it!"

The words, low, even, controlled, reached Harbaugh above the noises of the street; the crunch-crunch of heavy boot-heels; laughter; oaths; the slatting clatter of a slamming door just across. Some men passing, turned to stare curiously, thereafter mending their pace, without a backward glance; there fell on a sudden a silence, tense and strained, as a door is opened and shut softly upon the surge of traffic.

The man at Alliston's elbow, thumbs hooked inward across his broad chest, shifted his position a trifle, right elbow crooked, hand poised, the fingers spread apart stiffly in a thrusting gesture. The sheriff spoke out of the corner of his mouth:

"You—leave him to me, Hardesty," he said, low. "I'll handle him—now—"

He moved slightly, bending forward at the hips as a sprinter upon the mark. His voice came again, cold, contained, matter-of-fact:

"Drop that whip!"

The giant, hand held high, jerked his head backward, staring at Alliston, lips curving in a sneer, heavy face congested with a dark tide of blood; the veins in his neck and temples stood out in ridges.

"You—" he began thickly. He got no further. Alliston, from his position in the doorway had moved so that his coat, open, had all at once displayed the cartridge belt and the heavy pistols.

But it was not at sight of these that the giant, his face gray, gave backward one halting step. The hand holding the whip, fell at his side; he spoke in a sort of slurring mumble, his eyes upon the snow, head bent.

"All right, mister," he said heavily. "But you tell 'im—th' dawg—he ain't took a fancy t' me, I guess—he don't *know* me, see?"

The sheriff of Kitkargas grinned coldly, a mere facial contraction of the lips.

"He knows you," he said briefly. "But—" He ceased abruptly, lifting his voice in a high-pitched call:

"You—Midnight!" he called sharply. "Mush—mush on!"

At the sound of that voice, stern, authoritative, the huge beast whined, deep in his throat, turning his great head, ears pointed forward, human almost in its suggestion of dumb protest. Alliston's eyes kindled. He shrugged. Almost for a moment he was minded to make the giant an offer—buy back the team. But—he was needing the money and he was not needing the team. Even if at the moment it was the only dog-team in Port Simpson; a sudden gold-strike in the Tanana having accounted for the rest. But the hour was at hand when he would regret that decision, the stifling of that generous impulse—wish with all his soul that

he could recall that moment there in the street. But there was nothing and no one to tell him, no prescience to forewarn, unless, indeed, that fading recollection had strengthened at the last. But it did not.

He waved a hand, turning his head as the leader sprang forward, behind him the dogs, as one, straining to the load. The giant had bestowed his duffel on the sledge. Now, hand upon the gee-pole, hood pulled forward over his face, he broke into a lumbering, bearish trot.

Chin between finger and thumb, Alliston watched him go, a speculative, slow stare in his blue eyes; a brooding look that all at once became assured, decisive. He brought down his hand smartly on his thigh, turning to his companion with one of his quick movements.

"By godfrey, Hardesty!" he exclaimed. "I remember that fellow—I've seen him before—it was in Dawson, in '21—I'm certain of it! And it was that same husky, or his twin brother; he owned him then—he was just a youngster—and this man Harbaugh was beating him half to death—" He paused, a frosty glint in the eyes, mouth grim. "And now that I recall it, it seems to me he wasn't called 'Harbaugh' then. Seems to me, too, that he was wanted, afterward, for something or other. Perhaps I shouldn't have let him get away; no wonder Midnight didn't want to go with him, poor fellow! He *knew!* Well—"

He shrugged, following Hardesty into the hotel, while, at the edge of the long rise making upward from the sea Harbaugh and the team went forward over the snow at a steady, space-devouring stride. Once clear of the town he meant to put them into it; just now he would spare them for other reasons than merely to conserve their strength. For it would be a race, and the devil take the hindmost, in very truth. But the savage in him, never far below the surface, rose to peer outward from the porcine eyes, red-rimmed as were Midnight's. And his gaze was on Midnight even as his thick fingers, in anticipation, closed on the heavy lash-butt, swinging from his thick, hairy wrist.

But he must not seem in too much of a hurry—that fellow, Alliston—he had a damned inquisitive nose, and a keen eye.

"He cain't know, damn him—he cain't remember—an' even ef he did, he ain't heard it—yet," he muttered, half aloud. But his eyes crinkled with the thought; his forehead beaded on a sudden with a fine mist of sweat.

The giant, whatever else he might have been, was not a coward, physically, but two things, and they were closely akin, had stayed his hand back there in the snow in front of Paulsen's, and one of them had not been the sight of the sheriff's pistols, or the flaming spirit of the man—altogether; it had been, in part, the sudden glimpse that he had had, as Alliston bent forward from the doorway, of the sheriff's badge of office. And, as he conceived it, what the sheriff did not know would work him no evil. But he had needed that team, and he had got it.

On a sudden his thick fingers, holding to the gee-pole, tightened with a grip of iron; his face grayed; a quick oath escaped him as he glanced, startled, at the roadway just ahead. Muttering, he looked; then looked again.

It was a trick of the sun and the shifting shadows—but for a moment, even as he looked, he saw it; the shadow in the snow; a gallows, a tree—and on it, as it was outlined in the snow, a figure swinging in the wind.

The team, halting as the man halted, sank down instantly, taking their rest wherever found, as was their custom. The giant, glancing upward, rumbled a relieved curse in his throat.

At that time they were running the line that later reached Kuldo, and just ahead a pole, as yet without its cross-pieces, rose like a tree without limbs, bare, save for the clinging figure with its climbing irons at the top. The lineman waved a friendly hand, but the giant, growling at the team, stared straight before him in a stony calm.

For, just beyond that shadow, the great malemute, Midnight, three-quarters wolf and ten-tenths savage, sitting on his haunches in the snow, gave him back stare for stare, unwinking, bright-eyed, and unafraid.

Harbaugh was no more superstitious than others of his ilk, and yet, as he returned that bright-eyed regard, it came to him

abruptly, illogically, that there was meaning in it. As if, you might say, the dog knew something that the man did not.

The wind, rising out of the north, sang with an eerie, shrill piping, prelude of storm. The giant shivered in his furs.

"Some one's walking over my grave," he muttered, calling to the team. And this time the malemute, almost as if he smelled that journey's end, sprang quickly to obey.

II.

About the time that Harbaugh, driving the team without let, had reached the country of the Little Sticks, Sheriff Alliston, without dog-team or sledge, was ten miles on the back trail to Kitkargas when the message reached him at his nooning camp. The messenger, a Cree runner, had come far and fast; his dogs were footsore—one riding on the sledge—the rest leg-weary.

Alliston heard his story in a white-lipped silence, the disjointed gutturals pouring out a tale of wanton murder, cruel and unprovoked; a lonely old man—attack, treachery.

But it was enough, and more than enough. Pop Schoonover had been his friend; why, only the other day he had been promising himself a visit to the old trapper's cabin on Thunder Mountain. And now—

"Him—Harbaugh; him—all same Allegash Joe," the Cree was saying. "Big fella. Old Pop—he little fella—no chance."

The Indian made an expressive gesture. Old Pop had had no chance, indeed, and Harbaugh—Allegash Joe—there were fifty long miles of frozen trail between him and pursuit. Fifty miles. It might as well have been five hundred, Alliston reflected bitterly. And by the time, urging himself forward to the final ounce of his strength, he would reach Kitkargas and the station, the killer would be beyond the law, lost in that vast wilderness north of Peace River.

Allegash Joe—yes, Alliston remembered him; and as he slogged forward over the trail, behind him the Indian with his crippled team, the thought was always with him, roweling him forward over the miles: that dog-team; it was he himself, Sheriff of Kitkargas, who had furnished the murderer with the means of his escape.

He reached the station, the center of a whirling white welter of snow; the blizzard, raging, beat in his face, storming out of the north, covering the trails—mile upon white, desolate, dreary mile.

III.

At about the time that Alliston, with a deputy, and the pick of the huskies from the station, had left Kitkargas in the teeth of a fifty-mile gale howling southward from the Barren Lands, Harbaugh had crossed the Nass River north of Kuldo. He was somewhere between the Nass and the Skeena when the blizzard struck him and his dogs, but the snow had gone with the wind in half an hour; the edge of the storm, moving southward from Wrangel, passed, howling, down-country, as Harbaugh, his hand upon the gee-pole, chuckled in his throat.

The storm would gather force as it swept southward, holding back pursuit, obliterating his trail, wiping it clean, giving him an edge which they would never be able to overcome. Of that he was confident. And that fool of a sheriff—well, it was certainly a grim jest and an ironic one; that he should have purchased the very means of his getaway from the man who now, miles distant to the southward, followed him in a stern chase, a hopeless and ever hopeless pursuit.

Now the runners sang with a thin, dry whine over the snow as the drifting smother rolled off to right and left; the sun, a flat, pale disk, swam upward to mid-heaven as Harbaugh, a herculean figure of a man in that enveloping parka, went forward to break trail.

The trail, here running between low hills, had been well-packed and hard, but further along the wind had piled it, waist-high, to powdery crystals, flattening out, however, a scant fifty yards beyond, to smoother going for both man and dogs.

Harbaugh, a huge figure in his furs, had passed the leader, striding forward in the snow.

And as he went the giant, with that sixth sense of the woodsman which was his heritage, was aware suddenly of danger—how

or from what quarter he could not have told—and suddenly he knew. But that brief interval of hesitation almost, by the measure of a hair, had played him false.

Out of the air it came: the leaping, thunderous onslaught at his back—a hundred and eighty pounds of iron-hard muscle, hurled forward in one furious, living projectile. Almost at the moment of impact Harbaugh dived headlong, and this, together with the impeding harness, had halted Midnight in mid-spring. As it was, steel jaws clashed at the giant's shoulder; an inch, a hair's breadth nearer—and they would have written *finis* to the chapter.

Harbaugh got slowly to his feet, his face gray, mouth working evilly beneath the matted beard.

"Damn you, you mangy wolverine!" he grunted, his hand going for his pistol, and then falling at his side in realization. Later—well, there was plenty of time. But in that oath there had been fear as well as anger. Those teeth had been decidedly too close for comfort. He passed the dog, picking up the heavy whip. A moment he balanced it, his huge hand tightening upon the butt, the mitten dangling from his red, hairy wrist. Then:

"Mush—mush on!" he croaked, his voice flat in the immensity of the great, silent void, the arching blue dome of the sky, like a sheet of hammered steel, the silence and the mystery of the wild closing in about him, as, man and dogs, they fled northward along the trail.

IV.

THAT night, a moonless, black emptiness save for the pale stars and a whispering wind searching the open spaces like voices whispering together out of the dark, Harbaugh made his camp in a thick stand of second-growth spruce.

But at first sleep was slow in coming. Unimaginative as he was, the giant was seeing pictures, was dreaming dreams; they beckoned out of the black wall of the night, beyond his fire, bending and swaying to the hiss and sputter of the crackling wood: a little, old man, with a white wisp of beard, skinny arms raised in terror and surprise. And those eyes had widened, visioning eternity with the roaring broadside of the heavy .48; the old man's doeskin money-pouch was bulging his breast-pocket even now—

And then, spectral in the starshine, again he saw it; at first as a black wavering bubble, forming and re-forming to the lift and fall of the bare branches just across; then, etched like a dim stain upon that pall of white, a gallows, a tree—and on it, as it was outlined in the snow, a figure, swinging in the wind—the shadow in the snow.

"Hell!" he snarled, the word breaking oddly in the middle register. His hand, groping inside his shirt, came forward, fumbling, shaken, as a drunkard reaches for his tipple, in the thick fingers a pint metal flask.

He tilted it, and the biting grip of the contraband soothed and steadied; the shadows fell away; he heard the whining of the dogs, fathoms deep in dreams; the cracking of the tree-boles, rigid with the frost.

Again he drank, and presently, the wind, lulling to a murmurous, slow hush, he slept, his rest colored by fantastic dreams. The dreams were vivid, torturing; he groaned, muttered, twitching in his blankets, to wake abruptly to a growling confusion of savage snarls and snaps. Eyes, red-rimmed, watched him out of the dark; then shifted, vanished. There came a panting—a rustling, as of dry leaves, then—silence.

Beyond the firelight's dim core he saw, or thought he saw, for a moment, a gaunt, gray shape, high humped against the stars; then, with the eyes, it was gone, melting into the shadows.

"Dam' those huskies! Mangy malemutes! I—I'll have a look—see!" he mumbled, lifting his head to peer outward into the wind-swept dark. The fire had dulled to a faint, luminous half circle of smoldering brands. And, even as he looked, sleep, with the potent liquor that he had drunk, pulled him abruptly backward like a vast, smothering hand. His eyes closed—

And then, in a moment, as it seemed, he was broad awake, shivering in his blankets, the cold, gray dawn-light in his face, fear riding with the wind among the spruce. And there was a silence, a void, an absence of something heard and yet unperceived.

Groping heavily to his feet, he stared—then stared again, in his heavy face the blank look of a man who sees and will not believe. For about and around him the silence held; the chill, deep silence of the eternal north. And the sound that he had not heard had been the growling of the dogs.

"Hell!" he said thickly, fumbling at his beard.

For the dogs were gone. The sledge was gone. Sign there was plenty; it showed in the snow, plain as print which there was no mistaking. And presently, following the broad trail which they had made, he came upon the sledge, on its side among the pines.

"Midnight!" He cursed, deep in his throat, as realization came to him with sight of the broken trace, the rotten harness. But—but was it that?

Kneeling, he pieced together the raveled ends, putting them together, and where they joined there showed the evidence of teeth; the quick wolf slash, aimed with the cunning of the wolf. Midnight had done it, of course—th' dam' lucivee! Harbaugh shivered in his furs, as, downwind, there came all at once a clamor, faint and far, ending abruptly in a high-pitched cry.

But the sound was not repeated. Head down, gaze held steadily before him, he went forward, into the north. He would make it. Even without the dogs he would make it. And that was because, thirty miles to the eastward, he had crossed the Finlay at Sifton Pass; the river lay now between him and pursuit; pursuit, even if behind him within rifle-shot, would have to follow where he had led. And that meant that they would never catch him this side of—hell.

Now the timber fell away, thinning out to scattered single trees—lodgepole pine—smooth, bare of limb, standing like sentinels together in the white waste of snow. Out of the corner of his eye, to right and left, as he had gone forward, he had been aware at times of a ripple, a movement, a faint, half-luminous, gray shadow sliding among the black trunks of the trees. It was a shadow sensed rather than perceived; at first he had been but vaguely aware of it, and then, as the timber thinned out, he saw it, suddenly, in leaping silhouette; a great, dun, silent shadow, soundless and swift.

Midnight! And upon the instant he had jerked off his mitten, firing from the hip. But the dog had vanished.

The wind, pattering in the snow like the feet of an invisible army of the dead, seemed suddenly to voice a warning, a message, a command. And as suddenly, from right to left, he saw them: the vanguard of the wolves.

He swung up his rifle, aiming into the brown of the leaping bodies, but the hammer clicked upon an empty magazine. He dropped it, racing for the nearest tree, the lean, gray bodies fanning out from right to left. And as he ran, he saw, etched upon his consciousness like the burden of a fantastic nightmare, an evil dream, from which he would presently awake, the great, gray leader, leaping in full stride—and the leader was a dog.

The tree was close, but for an interval, measured in time or in eternity, Harbaugh, in anticipation, felt death and tasted it, there in the snow. A stumbling rush, the clashing of fierce jaws almost in his face—and he had gained the tree, swarmed up it in one desperate, clawing scramble. He was safe.

Beneath him he felt the pine shiver to the leaping onslaught of the wolves; he looked down; then looked away, his sightless stare straining to the horizon, and the wide white waste stretching southward to the lakes. And upon that horizon's rim there showed abruptly two moving specks, faint and far, moving no faster than the minute hand of a watch.

Again he looked down, fumbling for his pistol. But there were three or four loads in it—no more; his cartridge belt, full, lay just beneath him, perhaps a scant five paces from the tree. And all about, as his red-rimmed eyes surveyed them, he saw the wolves—and at the circle's edge that gaunt, gray shape: a wolf and yet not a wolf, for it was three-quarters wolf and ten-tenths savage—Midnight—watchful, silent, bright eyes, in a fixed unwavering, avid flame, upon the lone man in the tree.

And all about him, as he looked, his fingers gripping the smooth bole with hooks

of steel, the ring lay silent, watchful, bright eyes regarding the man with a terrible, grim, silent waiting. Fifty of them there may have been; they looked very much like dogs as they lolled there in the snow, some sitting, doglike, on their haunches; others passive, muzzles upon paws—but all possessed of an infinite patience, content to wait, and waiting, keep that inhuman vigil to the end.

V.

ALLISTON and Hardesty had come far and fast. Picking up the fugitive's trail, they had crossed the Skeena as Harbaugh was turning north from Sifton—as the crow flies, they were a matter of perhaps fifty miles in the rear—but in spite of the blizzard and the handicap of time and distance, they had cut down the fugitive's advantage by a full day's travel until halted by the barrier of the Finlay.

The river here is wide and deep, flowing with a racing drive, deep down, between sheer sandstone cliffs towering to rimrock like a battlement. There was no crossing it; men and dogs would have been engulfed in that raceway as straws in a tornado. Thirty miles to the northward lay Sifton Pass, and by the time they would have turned the river's flank Harbaugh with his dogs would be beyond them.

Alliston, halting the team above the flood, stared with a morose intentness across the river and to the table-land beyond it, where the shoulder of the land thrust out a long mile westward from the fringe of dwarf oak and scrub pine bearding its eastern face.

A long moment he stared; then with a quick exclamation, turning to his companion, he swung an arm, quartering a wide arc of the dazzling whiteness just across.

"Something moving out yonder, Tom," he said. "Wait a minute."

Straight ahead, distant perhaps half a mile, there had sprung suddenly to view a number of dots, as if imprinted upon that surface by a giant hand. They moved slowly across the surface, appearing and disappearing, faint and far, but clear against the whiteness.

It was Harbaugh; there could be no doubt of that. Alliston, in imagination, beheld the grim, saturnine countenance, the lips twisted in a sneer—could almost, across that half mile of distance, see the ironic gesture of the arm, in a mockery of farewell.

For the fugitive, there, almost in plain sight, safe by the short span of that rushing stream, might as well have been miles distant.

It was Harbaugh—and he was beyond them, in very truth. That was Alliston's unspoken thought.

Unslinging his binoculars, the sheriff focused them upon the snow plain, and at what he saw in the dancing field of their vision he stifled a quick word in his throat. Then he spoke, his voice strangely hoarse:

"It's—Harbaugh—Tom."

Under the bright sun he had seen first, that silent, patient, savage semicircle, fangs bared, jaws a-grin in anticipation; then the figure on the tree; and then, below it, the wavering shadow, in ink-black silhouette—the shadow in the snow.

Well—the man had been a murderer. Unconsciously Alliston found himself thinking in the past tense. He had been a brute, and worse. He was—better off dead.

White-lipped, he handed the binoculars to Hardesty, who, after a prolonged scrutiny, returned them with a shudder, eyes bleak with a swift, sudden care.

"I—saw his face," he said simply. "We wouldn't make it—a quarter of the distance—before—before—"

He left the sentence unfinished.

For a moment between the two men a silence held, the dogs whimpering in the traces; then, faint and far, like the breaking of a stick, there came the flat crack of a pistol—another—until they had counted three. Then—silence.

"His last shot, I reckon," said Hardesty grimly, his hand upon his chin with fingers that trembled.

"No," answered Alliston.

For a moment neither spoke, listening, waiting, in a strained and terrible expectancy. The man had been a murderer, as Alliston told himself, but somehow, as the seconds lengthened to a fine-drawn interval, he found himself curiously shaken, his forehead beneath his fur cap beaded thick with sweat.

"No!" he said harshly, and hard upon the word they heard it, faint and far, punctuating the stillness like a period—a period to one mortal life.

The sheriff of Kitkargas raised the glasses in a long look, sweeping the timber, the snow, in a slow, quartering arc. They centered, steadied. Abruptly he lowered them, speaking to the dogs, his voice curiously loud in the silence:

"Mush—mush on!" he croaked, facing to the south.

For the shadow in the snow had now vanished.

The Gusher

Part IV

by Garret Smith

Author of "After a Million Years," "Between Worlds," "Treasures of Tantalus," etc.

CHAPTER XXII.

MERT CAPITULATES.

MERT stood staring out the open door until the flat-boat disappeared around the bend, then he sank into a chair and buried his face in his hands. For a long time he sat there thinking. He was thinking over and over again word for word the story he had just heard. And he was putting himself in her place. Vividly before his mind rose the image of his own invalid father. Wouldn't he have done anything in the wide world to have restored his own father to health?

Then he pictured a brave frail child of fifteen going out to work to support her helpless father. The bitterness he had felt when the significance of her confession first burst upon him slowly melted away. She did not love him, it was evident. He could not hope now that she ever would. But while that thought filled him with heart-sick anguish, he was at the same time overwhelmed with pity for her.

And now, when it came to the test, with all there was at stake, she couldn't after all do a dishonorable thing. She was fine through and through. After the effect of the first crushing blow of chagrin and despair had spent its force he realized that he loved her more than ever. And be it said to his credit he was thinking now more earnestly of what he might do to help her than he was of his own hopeless position in the matter.

She had refused him the right to help her directly when she refused to marry him. What could he do?

Most of that afternoon he debated the problem, alternately pacing the floor and staring hopelessly out of the window as if

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seeking counsel of the muddy flood. Suddenly, as he watched aimlessly while a floating log passed the point after repeatedly grounding and tearing loose again, much as his own mind was grappling with its problem, a light dawned.

"Gosh! That's it!" he exclaimed aloud. "Why didn't I think of it before? I'll sell out to that bunch of crooks. Tell 'em she got me to do it, and let her claim her reward."

It was a momentous decision, this unconditional surrendering after a fight of three generations. In his burst of enthusiasm over finding a solution of his problem its significance did not at first dawn on him. He was too absorbed by the troubles of the girl he loved.

But presently he thought of his father again and once more recalled his dying request that the old farm be kept as it was. There followed another period of mental struggle. At length, however, he settled it.

"I guess if she could risk her very soul to help her dad, my dad would want me to do this much to help her," he decided finally. "Besides, they won't touch the old house."

Having once made up his mind he found himself strangely at peace. A few days later when the water had subsided enough for him to get around again, he went over to the Flanders place. Violet and her father, he learned, had gone back to town where she had returned to her old work as stenographer.

But the new president of the consolidated oil company was there, the man Dunsmore and Haslip had selected as a dummy to cover their trail when they affected to withdraw. Mert had no illusions on this score. From the reports Firewater Joe had given him he knew only too well that he was dealing with the same old gang of crooks. But that was the only way he could accomplish his purpose. They might skin him alive, but Violet would get her reward.

When Mert made known his intention of selling, the new president was all affability.

"How did you come to this conclusion after resisting my predecessors so long?" he asked.

"Well, I'll tell ye," Mert lied. "Miss Worthington, lady that boarded here with her sick father, got to talkin' with me about it, and she made me see that I was a fool to let a good chance like this go by."

The official seemed greatly gratified at that. He brought out some contract forms at once and filled them in. Mert was to receive a thousand dollars down and a liberal royalty on all oil produced if the well proved a success within a period ending two months from date, the oil men to have full use of Mert's land for their purposes during that period. If the well had not flowed big by then all agricultural rights would revert to the original owner, and on their part the royalty contract would be abrogated. This seemed eminently satisfactory to Mert. It looked like a pretty good deal for him. He signed and went away with the feeling that he had done Violet a good deed, and that he would take whatever he could out of it.

Drilling began almost immediately afterward down in the old woodlot. There was every appearance of fairness about everything. Mert had free access to the well platform at any time, and the drill boss discussed progress of the drilling without reserve.

The drilling seemed unusually slow, however. The driller complained that the rock stratum was peculiarly hard at this point. Several times the machinery broke down. As a result there came time within a week of the limit of the option when Mert began to fidget. He saw no sign of oil yet. If another week went by without oil that would end the prospect as far as this company were concerned.

But the next evening Firewater Joe, who was now attendant on this drilling and still spying for Mert, came to him and reported that he had overheard one of the drillers tell another that they were all through but shooting the well, and that would have to be put off. The driller had added that there was no doubt now that the well would be a gusher from the indications they were getting.

This made Mert uneasy. He began wondering if there could be any flaw in the contract. Evidently he was being misled.

He finally took his copy over to his lawyer, as he should have done in the first place.

"You're stung, son," the lawyer said after he had carefully gone over the document. "If they don't want to shoot the well till after the time limit passes, nothing can make 'em. All this wording about agricultural rights reverting to you cleverly hides the fact that after the expiration of the date set down here, they will still hold the oil rights and be free of all royalty payments. All you get back is the right to work your farm again. They simply won't shoot the well at all until they've shaken you out. You'll get nothing out of your well but the original thousand dollars, and they can make the farm practically useless to you if you start any trouble.

"Somebody must have hypnotized you hard to get you to sign a contract like that without consulting a lawyer."

CHAPTER XXIII.

VIOLET TO THE RESCUE.

OF all that had taken place in Goar Valley since she had escaped from her imprisonment at Dibble farm and returned to Flowerville with her father, Violet Worthington was in complete ignorance. She had shaken the dust, or rather the mud, of Goar Valley from off her feet and hoped that she would never hear of it again. She wished she would never have to think of it again.

But the wish was easier than the fulfillment. She carried with her the ghost of Goar Valley, and it haunted her night and day, a ghost in the shape of the pale stricken face of Mert Dibble as he had watched her go out of his home and out of his life on that day of her painful confession. For she knew now beyond the shadow of a doubt that she loved the lonely young farmer, loved him as she had never dreamed she could love any human being. She understood now why when it came to a choice between giving health to her father and saving him from ruin she had impulsively chosen his welfare. And she did not regret it.

And as if Providence sought to set the seal of approval on her choice, her father was steadily improving in health. His doctor in town said that the quiet and freedom from worry he had enjoyed during his summer in Goar Valley had put him over the top, and there was every reason to hope that another year of treatment would restore him to a fair degree of health.

Next to her pain at leaving the man she loved and could never hope to see again was the haunting dread that the man Craig would make good his threat of accusing her to her father of the horrible thing he had dangled before her frightened eyes the night she had temporarily refused to go on with their plot. She had defied them finally when she confessed to Mert and had gone back to Flowerville without seeing any of them again.

The dread of what such a charge might do to her father troubled her so that she finally decided to tell him the whole story and prepare him for any false charge that might be made. She broke it to him gradually to save him from shock as much as possible and then waited breathlessly to see how he would take it.

It was fortunate indeed that the weakened nerves and heart of Thomas Worthington were stronger than they had been. As the significance of what his daughter told him gradually sank in he turned deathly pale, and she rushed to him in alarm, thinking he was going to faint. But the paleness was followed by the flush of anger. He was silent for a long moment until he could control his voice. When he spoke it trembled with rage.

"I know now that I am going to be well again. All I ask is to have my strength back long enough to seek out and horsewhip each one of those contemptible human skunks."

He paused a moment and then his face softened. He turned to Violet and drew her gently to him.

"Little daughter," he whispered, "you're wonderful! I can't say any more. That's another reason why I'm going to get well. I'm going to live to repay you a little for what you have gone through for me."

But the days went by and Violet's fears of the charges of the man Craig were not

realized. Her only dread of it, now that her father was satisfied, was that he might carry his scurrilous story to her employers and cause her to lose her position. When a month had gone and nothing had happened, however, she began to breathe easily.

Then one morning she found on her desk at the office a letter, the corner card of the envelope bearing the name of the oil company. Her heart failed her and it was some time before she could get herself to open it. When she did her fears gave place to amazement. The inclosure was a check for a thousand dollars and the following letter, signed by Dunsmore himself:

> Inclosed find payment promised for successfully concluding your efforts to bring about the sale of the Dibble oil right to us. We congratulate you heartily on the skill with which you finally put it over. We congratulate you further on your very lively prospect of obtaining the ten-thousand-dollar bonus promised in case of a successful drilling. Already the well we are drilling on the Dibble farm shows signs of being a gusher.

Violet read this letter several times in growing amazement. Then acting on the fear that some great wrong may have been done her lover through some unwitting blunder of hers, she secured a leave of absence from the office and hurried over to Dunsmore's headquarters. She was fortunate enough to find him in and willing to see her.

"Ah, this is a pleasure," he exclaimed suavely when she was ushered in. "Have you some other suggestion to be of help to us?"

"No, Mr. Dunsmore," she replied, looking him steadily in the eye. "I called to see what this means. There seems to be some mistake."

She held out the letter and check. Dunsmore was frankly puzzled. He examined the check carefully, then read the letter over.

"Seems to be all right. What's the matter with it? That is according to our original agreement, isn't it? Did you expect more?"

"I didn't expect anything. I didn't succeed."

Dunsmore frowned.

"That's very strange. The young man sold us the oil rights and told us that you had persuaded him to do so. He must think it's so. Haven't you gotten overwrought and imagined things?"

"No, I'm not imagining things. If this is so would you mind letting me see the contract between your company and Mr. Dibble?"

Dunsmore stiffened a little.

"Doubt us, do you?" he said. "Very well, I'll prove it."

The contract was placed in Violet's hands. She was familiar with legal phraseology, having been a stenographer in a lawyer's office. She read it through carefully twice, each time haunted by an elusive something about it that she did not like. She was not enough of a lawyer to catch it without help.

"But that looks as though you were going to let him make something out of it," she exclaimed after a moment's thought, assuming a look and tone of disappointment. "I thought after the way he'd stood us off and damaged your property you were going to fleece him good."

Dunsmore was a little puzzled.

"But I thought you got soft on the young man and had to be — ah — urged quite a lot to go on."

"You were mistaken. I did have a slight revulsion of feeling after he tried to save us in the fire, but he treated me so afterward that I frankly wanted him to get the worst of it. I seem to have started something when I least expected it. I'm sorry if I've only succeeded in making a lot of money for him."

Dunsmore chuckled.

"Don't worry," he said. "Let me show you. It's too late now for you to get another change of heart and stop anything."

He pointed out then the joker in the contract. Violet had what she wanted. After a little more dissimulation she departed. Down in the street she took the letter and check from the oil company out of her bag again, tore both into small bits and dropped them into a rubbish box.

"I'll let them worry a while as to why that check doesn't come back to them through the bank," she thought. Then she

took the next train to the valley she swore never to enter again.

Late in the afternoon she arrived at Dibble farm in a hired car, bent on warning Mert of his danger and setting her mind at rest as to the mystery of how he came to sell his oil rights to men he knew were crooks.

Mert, as it happened, had just learned that morning of the ruinous trick that had been played on him. He was just now in the throes of the first reaction from that discovery. He was coming from the barn when Violet's car drove up. His first impulse was to turn back and avoid meeting her. But Mert Dibble had acquired a new boldness out of the experiences of recent months. He shook himself together and faced her firmly as she came up the walk.

"You needn't bother to come in here," he said coldly. "You were very cute. You got me finally where you wanted me, and didn't even have to purtend you loved me to do it. I was pretty soft."

Without another word he turned on his heel and left her.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AN UNAUTHORIZED SHOOTING.

SHE might have saved herself the trouble of trying to warn Mert Dibble of his peril, Violet thought. He not only knew it already, but he, too, seemed to believe that she was responsible for it. It was all very bewildering. She could make nothing of it. She resolved after thinking a little that she would not go back to town without solving the puzzle, and if possible setting herself right with Mert.

So she dismissed the car and decided to stay with the Flanders family overnight at least.

But on her way through the woodlot curiosity prompted her to take a look at the well that was causing so much trouble. She turned aside and was halfway to the spot where she saw the derrick towering among the trees when a figure of a man confronted her in the woodland dimness. In the twilight she did not recognize him till he thrust his face menacingly into hers.

It was Firewater Joe. The memory came suddenly back to her of that afternoon out on the stormy river when he had leered at her for a moment before hurling her into the swirling flood.

But she saw that he was perfectly sober now. He seemed all the more menacing for that. The gaze he bent on her was hostile, but calm and cold. Violet was stricken with sudden terror. She wanted to scream, but dared not. There was no one in sight in the darkening autumn woods.

Since the episode on the river Joe had become even more certain in his mind that Violet Worthington was his beloved master's arch enemy. Mert had never discussed her in detail with the Indian, but such references as he had made caused his shrewd mind to put two and two together. The sudden change about of Mert in selling his oil rights to the crooks after his week with Violet during the flood confirmed his suspicion. When he learned that Mert was about to be beaten out of the fortune that should have been his, he swore a solemn Indian oath to wreak vengeance on this traitress even if he had to follow her to the big city.

Of all this Mert was ignorant. He had never connected Joe with the Indian Violet said had left her to drown. She had instinctively avoided identifying him at first for fear of revealing the plot, and later in the emotion of her complete confession this had been a minor phase on which neither of them dwelt. Had Mert known of Joe's drunken brutality on that occasion there is some doubt if Joe would still be alive. Joe suspected as much himself, and had wisely kept off the subject of the young woman who, he felt, was getting Mert into her power.

But now he thought she had been delivered into his hands just as she was bent on more deviltry.

"Where you going now?" he demanded gruffly of the frightened girl. "You trying make more devil trouble. Not now. Mebbe I kill you first."

Violet in her alarm decided on the spur of the moment that her safety depended on taking Joe into her confidence. She had inferred from things she had observed and

what Mert had dropped from time to time when they were together, that this half-savage was Mert's devoted slave. She did some quick thinking now and saw that her chance lay in capitalizing this devotion. There was a murderous look in the fellow's eye. Desperate frankness was her own hope.

" Listen, Joe. Do you love Mert Dibble and want to save him from being ruined? If you do I am here to help you do it. Where can we talk so we surely won't be heard? I can show you in a minute that I am his friend and that I can help him if you will help me."

Joe eyed her intently without change of expression and without a word, so long that her terror increased almost to the shrieking point. At length he seemed partially satisfied with what he saw in her face.

" Come," he said, " and we make talk. You make one lie and I kill you quick."

He turned and led the way through the woodlot to his shack, opened the door and motioned her in. She was trembling with fright now, and had an almost irresistible impulse to scream and run, but with heroic effort she controlled herself and obeyed. He stood in the open doorway while she crouched in a corner of the tiny place, and as soon as she could make her voice act began to speak. She told him a story modified just enough to meet the pressing need of arousing his sympathy.

" Joe, I love Mert, even more than you do. I love him so much I would let you kill me if it would save him from harm. But some people who want to hurt him and me have lied to him and made him think I had something to do with this trick they have played on him. I warned him a while ago that these men were crooks and would rob him, but after I went back to the city they got the best of him. I found out today about the trick and came right out to warn him, but he wouldn't believe me because he had been lied to.

" Now I've learned right from the oil people themselves what you and Mert may only guess. They won't shoot that oil well until after the contract expires and then they will own everything. They told me so themselves. Now we must manage somehow to shoot that well ourselves, just you and I, and not say a word to anybody else because it won't be safe to trust anybody, not even Mert. He must never know I had anything to do with it. If I go ahead with you and do that, will you believe me? If we can shoot the well before the thirtieth of the month when the contract expires then Mert will have his royalties and beat those crooks at their own game. Will you help me?"

" Sure, I help you, but I watch you. So don't play any devil tricks. How you do it?"

The idea had been a sudden inspiration of Violet's. It took some thinking to get started on the details.

" Have they got the well closely guarded?" she asked.

" Men all round all night."

" Have they nitroglycerine and everything on hand ready to shoot the well?"

" Yes, week ago I seeum putum in shed."

" Do you suppose you could steal it and bring it to me?"

" Can try. Mebbe I doum. Mebbe they see and I catchum hell. I try."

Violet did some more thinking.

" I tell you what we'll do," she said finally. " You get the stuff to do the shooting and bring it to me. If you find you can't steal it without too much danger of being caught, buy it. I'll pay for it. Get a pair of overalls and a man's hat for me, too, so I can look like one of the workmen. Then, after midnight, we'll steal up as near the well as we can. You go around the other side and make a big noise of some kind to attract the guards. Then I'll slip in and shoot the well. I know how, because I saw them shoot the Flanders well."

" I think mebbe I do it," Joe decided finally after some thinking on his part.

Two nights later, when the Dibble oil contract still had three days to run, two dim figures stole through the woodlot toward the Dibble derrick. Had it been light enough to see clearly one might have recognized in the smaller of the figures in overalls and slouch hat, the one with a cumbersome package under one arm, Violet Worthington. The other was Firewater Joe.

They stopped behind a clump of bushes almost at the elbow of one of the well

guards. Violet undid her package. It contained a coil of small, strong cord, to the end of which was attached a can of nitroglycerine. There was also a heavy cylindrical weight of a diameter a little less than the drill hole.

After a few whispered words Joe went around in a wide circle to the other side of the well.

A moment later there were shouts and shots the other side of the well. Joe was dashing back and forth, crashing and shouting here and there, giving an imitation of a good-sized attacking party. And to the startled guards about the well it seemed as though a regiment were attacking.

"Over this way, everybody," Violet heard some one shout on the far side of the derrick. "The Night Riders are at it again."

She saw the dim figure of the guard near her hesitate a moment and then speed away. The coast was clear.

Violet tucked her paraphernalia under her arm and crept forward on her side till she reached the well platform and found, by feeling, the slimy opening to the drill hole. The drill had been withdrawn ready for the shooting. Only a light plank covered the hole.

In trembling haste while the tumult beyond continued, she lowered the can of explosive down the deep well. It seemed an hour before the slackening of the cord told her it had reached bottom. Then holding her breath involuntarily she slipped the weight into the opening and let go.

She sprang up and dashed back to the shelter of the bush. She had barely reached it when the ground shook under her. There was a rumbling muffled concussion. Then she felt a stinging blow on the top of her head. She crumpled up in a little unconscious heap on the carpet of autumn leaves,

CHAPTER XXV.

FIREWATER JOE, MATCH-MAKER.

WHEN Firewater Joe heard the explosion he knew his purpose had been accomplished and immediately ceased from his *opéra bouffe* and slipped back silently into the woods, leaving the bewildered guards who had just now been trying to locate the supposed attacking party to rush back to the well which was spraying the ground all about it with a shower of oil.

The Dibble well, as its drillers had predicted, was a gusher.

While the oil men were recovering from their confusion and taking measures to get the well capped under the direction of the drill boss, Joe returned by a wide detour to the spot where he had left Violet. He stumbled upon her unconscious form. Stooping and examining her with the pocket flash which Mert had given him for spying purposes at night he saw she was bleeding from a wound on her head. A small fragment of freshly broken rock lying near her told the story. She had been hit by débris from the explosion.

She was evidently only stunned, however, as she was breathing faintly and even as he examined her she began to moan a little with returning consciousness. Joe gathered her up in his arms as if she had been a baby and dashed through the woods with her toward the Dibble house.

Mert Dibble had been aroused by the uproar. He had hastily dressed and was just dashing out the kitchen door when he met Joe with his burden.

"What's the matter? Somebody hurt?" he exclaimed as he took in the limp figure in overalls. "Take him right into the dining room lounge. One of the workmen? Which one?"

But Joe, without answering, went ahead and laid the injured girl with unwonted gentleness on the lounge while Mert brought the lamp he had lighted in the kitchen and set it on the dining room table. Then Joe spoke, standing for the moment between the moaning form on the couch and the inquiring Mert.

"Yes, she workman," he said. "She dam' fine workman. She find crooks beat you, no goin' shoot well till next week. She shoot well herself and save you. You got gusher now. You rich man. Then she get hit on head with one dam' rock. She fine girl, Mert. She tell me she love you and she act like it. She make fine wife. You better be good to her, Mert."

Firewater Joe ended his speech, probably the longest and most heartfelt he had ever made in his life and then stood aside, letting the light fall on the dark, blood-stained hair and pale, beautiful face of the girl.

Mert gave one look, then with a cry like a wounded animal fell on his knees beside the couch and threw his arms about her.

"Violet! Darling! Speak to me. Oh, what a fool I was to misjudge you again. You did this for me now and I ain't worth it."

"Mert," interrupted the practical Joe, "you better git doctor on phone, do love talk afterward."

Then he slipped silently out, leaving them alone.

But Mert needed no further hint. A low moan from the still only half conscious girl was the only answer to his impassioned speech. In alarm he leaped to the telephone and called the doctor, who said he would be right over. When he returned to Violet and knelt down beside her again her eyes opened and she recognized him.

"Mert," she whispered, and the soul in that whisper seemed to tell him all he wanted to know.

Silently he bent and kissed her unresisting lips.

She lay for a moment gazing at him with glowing eyes. Then memory of other things dawned in them and they clouded with alarm. She tried feebly to push him away.

"Mert," she whispered, "you mustn't. I nearly caused your ruin. And you let me see this afternoon that you hated me. I don't wonder that you can never trust me again. I tried so hard to undo it and save you."

"But you did save me," he exclaimed passionately. "Joe tells me you shot the well and that she's a gusher. I'm a rich man now and can do all the things you need to have done for yourself and your father. Tell me that you love me and you'll marry me."

"No, no, Mert, I can't. I'll tell you why when I'm stronger. I'm very faint now. Don't make me talk."

The little tinge of color that had come to her face with her first lover's kiss had faded and she was ghastly pale again. Mert put aside his selfish appeal for the moment in his anxiety and spent the time till the doctor came bathing her head with cold water and making her as comfortable as possible.

When the doctor arrived he found that Miss Worthington had escaped serious injury.

"It was a pretty heavy blow and knocked her out," he said. "She has a bad scalp wound, but evidently there is no concussion or fracture of the skull. She'll be a little giddy for a few hours and pretty sore-headed for a few days. She had better lie here the rest of the night, but she can be taken over to the Flanders place in the morning if she wishes. Her head's as sound as it is pretty, Mert."

He chuckled, slapped the blushing youth on the shoulder and departed.

Violet slept a little toward morning, Mert watching by her side. Soon after daylight at her request he called Mrs. Flanders and told her of the accident, and she agreed to come right over and take the girl home with her.

When Mert turned away from the phone Violet was regarding him with troubled eyes.

"In a day or two, Mert," she said, "I want to talk to you. I'm not strong enough now. I'm sorry I had to say what I did a little while ago. Don't let it make you too unhappy. It 'll be for your better happiness in the long run. I want to tell you about it when I'm stronger."

Mert yielded unwillingly to her wish that he say nothing more to her at present about the matter that was uppermost in his mind, but it was a heroic struggle for self-control. Nevertheless, he felt far from hopelessly discouraged at her words. He had seen with his own eyes, or believed he had seen, evidence that Violet really loved him. He felt that there was no obstacle he could not overcome. Besides, she might see those obstacles in a different light when she was feeling strong again.

He was watching her depart in the Flanders car when some one spoke to him from behind. He turned and faced Craig, the oil company's confidential agent, who had just come through the barnyard from the temporary office the company maintained on

the site of the drilling. Mert had never met him before, but suspected that he was one of the oil men and eyed him accordingly with cold suspicion.

Craig, as a matter of fact, had been routed out of his bed in the Senabaugua Hotel, where he was stopping under the guise of a traveling man, by a telephone call at midnight informing him of the unauthorized shooting of the well and asking him to motor out at once and run down the culprit. He suspected it was Mert himself, in which case they could hardly proceed against him legally, inasmuch as it would involve exploiting their unwillingness to shoot the well before the limit of the contract. There were other methods of punishment in their repertoire. Mr. Craig, therefore, approached his investigation most tactfully.

" I want to congratulate you on the splendid well we've struck on your place," he said after introducing himself. " We were lucky after all in being able to shoot her before our contract was up. I never saw so much trouble with machinery on a job before in my life, but Flannigan got things cleared ready for shooting last evening and decided to go right ahead. I wasn't here, so I missed the sight. But of course you saw it."

" Me? I should say not." Mert snorted, disgusted with this thin attempt to pretend the oil men had voluntarily shot the well. " Nobody invited me to the shooting."

Then his rage got the best of him. He'd let them see that he'd been wise to their trick and that the girl they had tried to manipulate as a traitor had been too much for them.

" You know perfectly well you people didn't shoot that well and you know you didn't intend to till after the thirtieth when you could gobble the whole works. I got onto the trick when it was too late, but I didn't shoot the well if that's what you're here to find out. I didn't know it was to be shot any more than you people did. A brave little girl that you folks tried to corrupt put one over on you. She discovered your trick and beat you at your own game. She shot the well with her own hand and was nearly killed doing it. Now the well's a paying property, thanks to her, and if you people try any more tricks on me I'll send you to State's prison if it takes the rest of my life to do it."

When this startling statement of the boomerang he had thrown by means of his coercion of Violet Worthington was delivered, Craig turned purple with rage.

" So!" he sneered. " That's the lay of it. Well, I'm not surprised. She's a cute one. It's easy to see how she worked you. Got you sweet on her, got you to pop the question, got you to sell your oil rights thinking she'd cop a rich husband, then when she found she and you'd both been tricked she takes a last chance and makes sure she gets the dividends. She'll milk you the way she milked Ellis Wheeler. Didn't know about Ellis Wheeler, eh? He's the most notorious woman-chaser in Flowerville. I was hired by interested parties to look into his performances. I can show you any number of checks that have been made out to this Worthington woman, signed by Wheeler and cashed by her. I trailed him out here to secret meetings with her many a time last summer. I certainly wish you joy."

He was so enraged that he failed to interpret rightly the deadly quiet of Mert.

" So that's what you've got to say, is it?" Mert asked when he was through, and his voice was ominously low. " Well, I can show you in one second what I think of your statement and of you, you dirty, lying skunk!"

He struck out and took the detective on the point of the jaw. When the man came to and got up there was more of it. It lasted a full ten minutes. When the detective finally was allowed to crawl away to the drillers' shack, his clothing in shreds, his features pommeled beyond recognition, Mert went into the kitchen and disgustedly washed his bleeding hands as though he had been handling something foul.

CHAPTER XXVI.

RETRIBUTION.

BUT in thrashing Craig, the special agent, Mert Dibble realized as soon as he cooled off, satisfactory as that operation had been to his devouring rage, that

he had merely stepped on the tail of the serpent. Craig, he knew, was acting for Dunsmore and his associates and had probably only repeated a tale that they had prepared between them to keep Violet in their clutches and make her do their bidding. That there could be any shadow of truth in the story Mert never thought for a moment. He knew from what she had already told him and from his own investigations that the wily group had the girl by some firmer grip than even the desire to help her father could insure. Doubtless they had trapped her into some situation that would make such a tale seem plausible.

Craig had said he could produce the checks she had received to prove it. That might be. It would merely show to his mind that they had manipulated payments to her for honorable service rendered so as to give it a sinister twist if necessary. Further than that he gave the story no analysis. Its foundation was of no importance. The punishment of those who started it was all important.

So Mert went into executive session with himself for a season, and after he had devised the germs of a plot he called Firewater Joe into conference. The nub of the matter was that the oil men, being assuredly crooks, may not have covered their tracks in Goar Valley so thoroughly, but that something might be uncovered that would send them to prison where they belonged. That starting anything against them might jeopardize his own financial interests now closely tied up with them never entered Mert's single-track mind. It would have made no difference if it had. He was going to punish the traducers of his girl if he died in the attempt.

The best chance, they thought, lay with Sam Goar, who they knew had been in close touch with the plots of the oil men until, as Joe had discovered, Sam overreached himself and was cast out by his fellow conspirators. Joe had not been able to learn the details of this falling out, but he knew enough to know that Dunsmore and Haslip were holding a prison term over Goar's head as an ax to compel him to keep his mouth shut.

Now Joe also had just been having a falling out of sorts with the wily moonshiner. Sam Goar, smarting over the way in which he had been done out of some of his ill-gotten gains by the oil men, had taken part of his spleen out on Joe by refusing to pay him part of the money the Indian felt was rightfully due him. Joe had submitted and held his pace, but Indianlike he had not forgotten. He was merely biding the time of revenge.

In dispatching Joe to get Sam Goar Mert was employing a willing and eager agent. Before starting him on his campaign, however, Mert had a conference both with the district attorney and the excise commissioner of that district.

As a result, when Firewater Joe made his next visit to Sam Goar's place for the purpose of replenishing his supply of that which had given him his familiar title, there were planted in the bushes where they could get a good view of the Goar garden of illicit joy two excise agents. Joe went through the usual rigmarole of hoeing in the garden and planting his bottle, this time wrapping about its neck a marked bill supplied by the agents.

When the moonshiner, after digging up the bottle as usual, was replacing it full of the throat-rotting corn product, he was leaped upon and caught beyond cavil with the goods. And presently he found himself in the Senabaugua jail being interviewed by the district attorney and the excise commissioner. The district attorney did the talking. Acting on Mert's suspicions he gave Sam a third degree founded on pure bluff.

"Mr. Goar," he said, "you are possibly under the impression that you are here merely to answer the charge of unlawfully selling intoxicating liquor. You are here to answer that charge to be sure and we shall see to it that you go up on that charge.

"But you are wrong if you think that is the only charge or the worst one we have against you. We merely used that first to get you here and have a talk with you. Certain people with whom you have had dealings have accused you of some pretty grave crimes in an effort to clear themselves of suspicions. We suspect that in doing the things they charged they were the real

principals. Now if you care to turn State's evidence and tell us all about the dealings you have had with the oil men here and tell us the exact truth, we'll see that you are not sent to prison on that charge and that your punishment on the charge of selling liquor is made as light as possible. Now how about it? Don't try any lying, because we have just enough line on what has happened through spies of ours so that we'll trip you up and then your chance of getting off is gone."

Sam Goar, naturally, could come to one conclusion only. Dunsmore and Haslip had fallen into trouble at last and in an effort to get under cover had accused him of setting fire to the Dibble woods and anything else that might have suited their fancy. He had everything to gain and nothing to lose now by telling the truth. He told it fully and freely from start to finish. It checked up with all that Joe and Mert had previously testified to.

When he had finished and been sent back to his cell the district attorney shook his head sadly.

"I'm afraid it's no good. In all this I can see where the gang has covered its tracks so well that we couldn't prove a thing in court excepting sharp business practices that don't come under the statute. The district attorney up in Flowerville has had an eye on them for some time with the same result. I'll check up with him and see if it will tighten up his evidence of fraud in organizing their company, but I'm not hopeful. I guess we'll have to rest with sending this Hookfinger pest over the road for a minimum sentence for selling rot-gut."

Mert went away greatly disappointed. He had missed the head of the serpent by an inch. But the more he thought of it the more he was determined at least to bruise that head. If it couldn't be done by process of law there was left the same kind of satisfaction he had enjoyed in beating up the detective.

All that evening and the greater part of the next day he puzzled over the problem. Then suddenly a solution dawned on him and he laughed gleefully. That night he had a poker game with his old Night Rider pals at one of their homes in Senabaugua.

Late the following afternoon Firewater Joe landed in Senabaugua from his canoe and delivered a telegram at the telegraph office. It was signed by Flannigan, the drill boss, and was addressed to Dunsmore. It read:

> Run out to Dibble farm with Haslip and Gantry to-night without fail. Important developments.

It was along toward midnight that the party in Haslip's big car swung off the State highway into Goar Valley in response to the urgent message. They were racing along the dark river road at high speed within a half mile of Dibble farm when they picked the red tail light of a stalled car ahead of them in the narrow highway. They slowed down just in time to avoid a collision. Before they had come to a full stop a half dozen white masked figures leaped on their running boards and covered them with revolvers.

In less time than it takes to tell it they were transferred from their own car to the other. They were stripped to the skin and their clothing thrown into their own car.

"Now, you, beat it back to the city and tell the police if you want to that your passengers evaporated, leavin' their duds behind 'em," said the leader of the attackers to the city chauffeur, who needed no second invitation to make his exit.

The stripped prisoners were huddled in the bottom of the car under a buffalo robe. The numbers of the car were changed, and a minute later they were headed up over one of the hill roads on a roundabout route to the Indian reservation.

Some ten miles from the railroad in the midst of that desolate, flat waste of scrub trees and scattering farms and hovels on which Uncle Sam had segregated his red nephews, they stopped, and in the edge of a barren field, while one Night Rider guarded the prisoners, the rest built and lighted an open fire, whose mounting flames presently revealed the fact that a rude fireplace of stones had been prepared beforehand and that on the stones rested a big iron kettle full of tar. From under a canvas near by one dragged a barrel, from which he dumped a cloudy pile of feathers.

When the tar reached a liquid consistency the fire was dragged out and left burning near by for lighting purposes only. The tar was allowed to cool below the scalding point and then the prisoners were haled forth.

"Now, fellows," one masked figure shouted, "how do we treat men who bulldoze an innocent young girl until she does their dirty work for them, and then turn round an' throw mud on her reputation?"

"Watch us!" chanted an eager chorus.

One by one they seized the protesting, struggling prisoners, thrust them up to their necks in the tar kettle and then rolled them in the feathers. Then they turned them loose. They surrounded the three grotesque black-feathered figures and spent a merry half hour jeering them. Finally they got in their car and departed for parts unknown.

Some four hours later, just before the sun rose over the flatland, the night operator in the little station at Four Mile, out on the edge of the reservation and some miles out of Senabaugua, was having a wire chat with his friend, the night operator in Senabaugua.

"Big news," wired the Senabaugua man. "Hang on to that oil stock I got you to buy. I've just had a talk with my friend Jenks in the Flowerville office. He's the guy I told you sold my oil tip to some big money guys and he's in heavy himself. One of the crowd drifted into his office about one o'clock this morning to get his proxies for a reorganization meeting. It seems the other reorganization was a fake. Those crooks—Haslip, Dunsmore, and Gantry—were still back of a set of dummies. But the district attorney out here pulled in Sam Goar, a dirty old Hookfinger moonshiner and general utility crook, who'd done a lot of stunts for that bunch and made him cough up his guts. What he told didn't give the district attorney anything he could make an arrest on, but when he compared notes with the Flowerville district attorney they had the picture complete. There is a warrant out for the arrest for those three crooks, but it looks like they'd flew the coop sometime during the night. They were among those missing when the cop went round with a warrant. But, cheer up. We're going to get an honest run for our money out of the oil deal after this."

The Four Mile operator rose from his key and danced a jig of sheer joy around his tiny office.

And at that moment the door of the station opened and there entered three of the most remarkable figures the startled agent had ever seen. They looked for all the world like great pot-bellied, obscene blackbirds to whose bodies had been affixed the pale and agitated faces of sorely punished men.

The largest of the three birds slid sidewise over to the ticket window as though he were trying to accomplish the difficult feat of hiding behind himself.

"We have been the victims of a terrible outrage," he croaked. "A band of ruffians for some unknown reason took us out on the reservation here and left us in this horrible condition. If you'll shelter us here and summon help I'll see that you are well paid, my man. My name is Dunsmore—Samuel M. Dunsmore, of Flowerville. I'm a well-known business man there, and these gentlemen are associates of mine. Kindly wire my house, 136 Northern Boulevard, and have them send my chauffeur out here with the limousine and three suits of clothing. Also wire police headquarters there in my name and start a general alarm for these miscreants. Better wire the sheriff at Senabaugua, too. We were assaulted in his county."

But the agent had ceased to listen to the details of his instructions. He admitted his three guests to his office and gently locked the door. His face shone with holy joy as he turned to his telegraph keys and sent in his own name a message to police headquarters in Flowerville.

CHAPTER XXVII.

BY GRACE OF FIREWATER JOE.

THE next evening, after this final disposal of his ancient enemies, Mert Dibble received word by telephone that Violet Worthington, who was still at the Flanders cottage, had recovered sufficiently from her injuries to see him.

Again Mert dressed for his call with the greatest of care. And as he did so he was

in even a greater state of nerves than on that former call which had ended disastrously. But now it was not shyness that oppressed him. It was fear of the outcome of his interview with Violet, an interview on which hung all his future happiness.

She met him at the door, pale, trembling, evidently keeping her composure with an effort. It took as great an effort on Mert's part to keep from taking her in his arms, but something in her manner showed him intuitively that she had not retreated from the position she had taken at their last interview and his heart sank.

" Violet," he cried, " don't keep me waiting. Tell me you've changed yer mind and 'll marry me. You know how I love you."

She looked at him piteously.

" Mert," she said, " you think you do now. But let me try to show you how impossible it is. Tell me first, why did you sell your oil rights finally to people you knew were crooks after you and your father had fought them so many years?"

Mert flushed. He had hoped she would never ask him that question. But when he looked into her eyes now he could only tell her the truth.

" Because you needed money to help your father and there wasn't any other way you'd let me help you exceptin' to fix it so's you'd get the reward."

" I was afraid so," she said sadly. " You did it out of pity for me and my father, mostly for my father, because he reminded you of your own father. What you think is love for me is founded only on pity. Love to last has to be founded on respect, and you don't really respect me. Oh, I know. You think you do. Please don't interrupt. But if you had respected me really—and I don't wonder that you couldn't after the way I had acted—you would have known I would never touch a penny of that reward after what passed between us. You really respect me so little that you believed for a little time that I was responsible for the last trick of those oil men in getting you to sign a contract that might have robbed you of everything.

" No, Mert, you don't really respect me and you never can. Nobody else would, either, if I married you now that you are about to be a rich man. Everybody would say that I married you only for your money. They might even say I shot the well after knowing you were interested in me so that I would have the benefit of your money. And you would always be likely to have that suspicion yourself. We could never be happy together with such doubts between us."

Mert started to interrupt indignantly. She stopped him.

" That isn't all. There is a terrible story about me that you may hear at any time. You'll be told that a certain detective agency that has been trailing a married man who is notoriously bad has in its possession checks made out by this man and cashed by me. It 'll be true. You'll be told that one of their detectives watched secret meetings of mine. And you'll be likely to believe it. And that 'll be too much for the respect you think you have now. Don't you see how impossible it is?"

" Violet," Mert exclaimed, " don't try to tell me any old stories. The last person who told me that story happened to be a man I could lick and he's in the hospital now being put back together again, leastwise all the parts of him they could find. It took me ten minutes to make it real clear to him that I didn't like his story and didn't believe it none at all. I ain't any more likely to believe it you tellin' it yourself."

The girl looked at him with shining, tear-filled eyes.

" Mert, you dear boy!" she exclaimed. " Did you really do that for me?"

She turned her face away and was silent for a long time. Mert began to pluck up hope. But she dashed it again.

" No, Mert," she whispered finally. " I can't. Your money is between us. I'd always be set down as a fortune-hunter and I couldn't stand it. I might get to wondering at times if I wasn't. I can't be sure of my feelings for you even now. And you'd always wonder."

Mert started to protest, but they were interrupted by Mrs. Flanders announcing that a lady and gentleman wished to see him on important business. They were in a hurry,

and finding out at his house that he was here they came right over. Violet retired, and the visitors were ushered in.

Mert started in surprise to see his stepmother standing before him again. With her was a man whose face was vaguely familiar. A moment he studied it, then he remembered. It was one of the men who had called on his father and stepmother nearly ten years before and brought with him a mysterious document which Joe, who had been listening under the window to the discussion over the document, said afterward was a new will of his father's leaving everything to the stepmother. That was one of the two mysteriously missing wills whose absence left Mert so long in doubt as to whether he really owned his old home.

The visitors wasted no time stating their errand. The man drew out an old looking document.

"This," he said, "is the last will and testament of your father. It was taken away from your stepmother by certain men who withheld it and used it for a long time as a club to make her do their bidding. It finally came into my hands. You will see that it is dated June 14, 1909, and leaves all your father's property to your stepmother. As no other will has ever been probated we can assume none exists. We have come to serve notice that we are about to probate this will and to ask you to make arrangements at once to leave the farm and get quarters elsewhere."

Mert, in a sick daze, studied the document over carefully. There was no doubt in his mind that it was genuine. The signature of his father appeared bona fide. It was the will his stepmother had boasted she possessed and yet never before produced.

Whether this will was made out before or after the one his father had told him about just before he died, leaving the property to him, made no difference. That will had never been found. This one stood, anyhow. He saw no chance of fighting it.

"I'll get right out," he acquiesced simply and dismissed them without another word.

Then he sat, head in hands, immersed in gloomly thoughts. He had lost the girl he loved and now the old home and his new fortune had gone. He was so engrossed in his misery that he did not hear Violet return until she spoke.

"Mert, what is it?" she asked.

Listlessly he told her the story. Then he got the biggest surprise of his life.

With a little cry of joy she flung herself down on the old sofa beside him and threw her arms around him.

"Mert, I'm so glad," she exclaimed. "Now we can begin all over again with that miserable money gone from between us."

"Do you mean, Violet, that you'll marry me after all?" he demanded incredulously.

"Of course I do," she assured him with her cheek against his shoulder. "I was afraid all the time I couldn't hold out against you till you got away, and now I don't want to hold out at all."

And then for a long time there was nothing said worth repeating.

The next day was to be Mert's last in the old house. He was too proud to stay there any longer beholden to his stepmother, whom he still hated despite his revised viewpoint toward womankind in general. It was his wish, however, that he be married in the old home before leaving.

Violet had no desire for delay, so she sent for her father that night and he arrived just before the simple ceremony. He, with the Flanders family, Firewater Joe, and Simple Martha were the only guests. The young couple were to go to Flowerville directly after the wedding where Mr. Worthington was confident he could get his son-in-law a good job with some commission merchants handling farm products.

Mert turned to Joe and Martha after the ceremony, and for the first time told them the unwelcome news that the old place had changed hands and that he was about to leave them.

"You know, Joe," he explained to his faithful Indian friend, "you always stuck to it you heard father making a will leaving everything to my stepmother? Well, she showed up yesterday with that will and she gets everything, our new oil well that made so much trouble, and all."

Joe was looking profoundly puzzled.

"You say that devil woman show you her will?"

"Yes, Joe. There's no doubt about it. It was dad's last will as far as we can prove, though he did seem to think just before the end he'd made another one."

"Then what this dam' ol' paper?" Joe asked, and reaching into the front of his shirt he unpinned a soiled and dirty document and handed it to Mert.

"That day your pa he die an' fight with stepmother woman over will, an' she drop it on floor. I pickum up this paper. I think it devil woman will, an' say to me she never useum. So I pin in shirt and hide till now. I no dare burn it, for mebbe I go to jail. That ain't will at all mebbe. Mebbe I one big, fathead fool."

Mert opened it and then cried out in joyful amazement:

"Joe, you ol' idiot!" he shouted. "You been luggin' round in your shirt all these years dad's real last will, dated two years later than that other one. The farm an' well's all mine after all."

Joe digested this for some moments, while Violet wept on Mert's shoulder and muttered incoherent words into his coat collar.

"Well," Joe pronounced finally, "ain't that like hell?"

He thought some more moments, adding:

"It's all right, Mert. I givum your dam' fine wife a wedding present."

And for once the stoic face of Firewater Joe broke into a broad grin.

And Mert was grinning, too, as he whispered into the ear of his bride: "How about it, sweetheart? Do I have to go an' git a divorce right away, seein' my fortune has come back?"

Violet dried her eyes and grinned back.

"I'm afraid it's too late, Mert. I guess I'm the one girl in the world who's going to eat her cake and have it, too."

(The end.)

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INTERIM

HERE, on the hill, beneath indifferent skies,
I lay my common, mortal burden down,
The hot, and twisted thoughts, the furtive lies,
The parrot talk of foolish and of wise,
The anthill haste of man and beast and town.

Here I forget confusion of the mind,
The soul-ship straining for a new release,
At fleshy anchors. Here, I come to find
The rough allegiance of the careless wind,
The passionless possession of clean peace.

Here I shall stand until the stars sing out,
Here lie, upon the earth's brown, vital floor,
And listen to the sea's triumphant shout,
Free for the moment. Then, drained dry of doubt,
Rise, and depart to battlefields once more.

Faith Baldwin

Smiley Pays His Debt

by Christopher B. Booth

"DRILLER" BICKFORD, staring out of the window of the northbound Chicago and Alton train, gave one parting glance at the towering stone walls of the Joliet State prison on the east side of the tracks, and exhaled a deep breath of relief. A little over an hour before he had been behind those walls—Convict No. 3,399. Now the five-year nightmare was ended, and the steel gates had rolled back, like the stone of a living tomb, to permit the resurrection of hope. Unlike so many who shuffle forth, blinking, helpless creatures with no plan to mend the broken strands of their life, Bickford had stepped into the sunlight again with his shoulders up and lips smiling.

A man slipped into the seat beside him, and the Driller turned.

"The big stone house don't look so bunk from the outside, eh, cully? Sure is great, pal, to see the country flashin' by the car window again. I'm just finishin' a three-year stretch to-day and—" The man's voice trailed off into an exclamation of surprise as he saw the Driller's face. "Why, I know you; you the guy on the upper tier what saved me from bein' bumped off in the shop two years ago by that murderin' Italian what tried to run a shoe knife between my ribs. Out the same day! Shake, pal—shake! I ain't never had the chance to express my gratitood 'fore now. My name's Lewis—'Smiley' is the monniker my friends use mostly."

The Driller shook hands. "My name's Bickford," he said; "they used to call me the Driller."

"The Driller? Sure, an' I've heard about you, Driller. I'm proud to meetcha. You are the guy what can crack a crib without usin' nitro; I read about your trial in the papers. I ain't so high class. Use the pen a little an' work a con game now an' then. Got this last three-year ticket for trimmin' a guy from Pilot Grove, Iowa, outta fifty bucks. Second time I been up."

"This was my first time—and my last," declared the Driller.

"Yeah—that's the way we all feel the first day out, pal."

"But I'm quittin' the game cold," insisted Bickford. "I'm going to stay in Chicago just long enough to get a little stake that I salted away with a friend of mine, and then I hit the iron trail for the West—and begin all over again."

"That sounds like you had a moll waitin' for you."

"You're right, Lewis, a girl," nodded the Driller, suddenly eager to talk. "She's true blue. Any girl who waits five years for a man—like me—is true blue."

"You're a mouthful, pal; there ain't many skirts what 'll wait five years for a guy in the pen. Mine trotted out to Gary

and got hooked up with some piano pounder in a cabaret before the ink was hardly dry on my commitment papers."

"It's going to be no trouble for me to go straight—now," said the Driller. "I couldn't fail her, after the way she's stuck. She didn't know I was playing the crooked stuff—not until I was pinched. She believed I was on the square. I thought she'd quit me cold, but she stuck. The job they got me for was to be my last trick. I was going to cut it out. The men I was hooked up with threatened to frame me if I didn't open that last box, but I'm not trying to make excuses. The girl— Well, read this, Lewis; it tells the whole story."

Smiley took the envelope and drew out the folded pages; they were soiled with countless finger marks, showing that they had been reread many times. In a firm, neat hand was written:

DEAR GEORGE:

My calendar tells me that it is just two weeks more, and I wonder if you have been marking off the days, too. You will reach here Thursday, and I am counting the hours. The house is very plain, only a shack, but it is very cozy. It is very clean and wonderful out here in the open places.

It seems nothing short of providence that you have the two hundred and fifty dollars put away with your friend in Chicago, as you wrote me, for it will let you buy your railroad ticket, some new clothes and leave over one hundred dollars. The installment on the homestead is due on the first of the month. Two of my cows died and the potatoes turned out badly so that I have been unable to pay it. Unless it is paid we will lose the little place that I have worked so hard to have ready for us to begin life over with. So you see how lucky it is that you have this money.

There was more of the letter, and Smiley Lewis stopped when he came to the more personal passages.

"Isn't she true blue?" demanded the Driller. "She went out there all alone and homesteaded that claim. She had only her little savings to start with."

"She's the goods, pal," agreed Lewis warmly and a little huskily. "I—I never had nobody carin' for me like that. You're right, Driller, you gotta go straight—you gotta! Me? That's different. If you had let that Italian bump me off that time in the prison shop there wouldn't of been nobody t' care—nobody. There ain't nobody waitin' for me; nobody carin' if I go straight or not.

"Moreover, pal, I ain't got no two hundred and fifty bucks salted away with no friend. I'm askin' you, Driller, what chance have I got? Mebbe if I had—but, aw, what's the use? I gotta deck of cards in my pocket; let's play a little pitch on top of my suit case—just so's to keep my mind offen some disagreeable subjects."

II.

THE Driller and Smiley Lewis moved toward the Union Station exit and paused.

"Well, pal," said Smiley, "I guess here is where we parts company. We're travelin' different roads from now on; you're goin' West—an' straight. Me? I'm just driftin'. I wanna thank you again, cully, for that little favor you done for me back in stir, an' if there's ever any way I can even the score— Well, you know how a guy feels about them things."

"I'm going over to Farley's hotel right now," said Bickford. "Farley's the fellow I've got that two hundred and fifty dollars stashed with. He's keeping it for me."

The parting smile fled from Lewis's face and his eyes widened apprehensively.

"That's queer," he muttered. "I was goin' that way m'self—sort of lookin' out for a friend that used t' hang around Farley's. So you was hooked up with Farley's mob, huh?"

Smiley Lewis suddenly feared for the Driller, for he knew Tom Farley's reputation throughout the underworld.

"I'm guessin'," he said to himself, "that a slick bird like Farley ain't gonna let no safe artist with the Driller's talents waste his time farmin' out West—not if Farley c'n help it. Guess I'll trail along."

Farley's hotel was a peculiar institution. It was, to outward appearances, nothing more than a second-rate transient hostelry such as thrive in the West Madison Street section around Union Station; but Tom Farley's income was largely augmented by other means which were dark and devious. It was an open secret among the initiated

that Farley served as the silent partner in many a daring criminal exploit. Of late he had become the head of a bootlegging ring.

When Lewis and Bickford reached the hotel Smiley nodded to a chair.

"I'll be hangin' around," he said. "Look for me when you get through."

"Sure, Lewis," rejoined the Driller. "When I get this money from Farley I'll let you have a few dollars, and maybe you—"

"Aw, Driller, fergit it! I wasn't tryin' t' lift a piece of change offen you. You'll be needin' all that two fifty if—"

"If? If what?"

"Aw, nothin', pal; I guess it 'll be all right."

"Sure; why shouldn't it be?" demanded Bickford.

Smiley did not answer.

Tom Farley was sitting in his shabby little private office down a narrow dingy hall off the hotel lobby. There was about the man's body a brutal massiveness of strength which suggested the gorilla, and about his pin points of eyes that gleam of cunning betokening the fox. He was alone, stubby thumbs hooked in the armholes of his vest with characteristic swagger; tilting from the corner of his coarse mouth, clamped between his teeth, was the inevitable black cigar.

"'Lo, Bickford," he grunted. "Come in an' shut th' door behind you. I was lookin' for you to-day; sort of waitin' for you."

"You remembered?"

"Sure; I got reasons t' remember. Nimms wants to have a talk with you."

"Well, Farley, I don't want to see Nimms; that means another job—and I'm through. I just came in to get my two hundred and fifty; I'm getting a train to-night."

"Train? Where th' 'ell you think you're goin'?"

"Out West, Farley. I'm quitting."

There was no bluster to his voice, only a quiet determination that caused Farley's eyes to narrow and his hand to reach for the desk drawer.

"Country's gone prohibition since you left us for your little visit, Bickford," went on Farley, "but I've a little of the old stuff left. Help yourself."

The Driller's old thirst flamed up for a moment and his fingers edged forward only to draw back again.

"No booze, either," he said. "That's what got me started, Farley. I was an honest mechanic working in a safe factory until I began that. I'm off that, too. Give me my money and I'll be moving?"

"Money?" grunted Farley. "What money?"

A faint panic seized the Driller.

"You haven't forgotten, Farley?" he pleaded. "That two hundred and fifty I left with you to keep for me."

"I ain't got no money of yours, Bickford; you're dreamin' things. Now, if it's dough you want, see Nimms. I think he can fix you up—a thousand."

Bickford's hands clenched.

"So that's your game, is it, Farley? Trying to sandbag me into pulling another job, are you?"

"If you want money, see Nimms. You don't get any from me."

Farley never made a direct proposition himself; he played safe through his chief lieutenant, Nimms. As a matter of fact, Farley had been counting the days for the Driller's return. A new State attorney was making things hot for Farley, and had gathered evidence that was to be presented to the grand jury within ten days. These incriminating documents were locked in the safe of the State attorney's home, and Farley was depending on Bickford to get them.

"I've wiped the slate clean, Farley," pleaded the Driller. "You can't bluff me into another job. That being settled, give me my two hundred and fifty."

"A cool thousand," tempted Farley. "Do what Nimms asks you to do, and you can go West and keep on going till you get to Hongkong, for all I care."

"I'm through," repeated the Driller doggedly. "I'm going to Montana to-night."

"Without dough?" sneered Farley. "It's mighty cold weather for ridin' th' rods."

"Have a heart, Farley. You remember

the girl in the red tam who sat beside me during the trial? It's on account of her, Farley; I gave her my word that I'd never pull another job—that I'd go straight. She is expecting me day after to-morrow; she's homesteaded a claim, and she's waiting for me. We're going to be married. The two fifty will just buy the ticket and pay up the claim. I'm only asking for the money that's mine, Farley."

Tom Farley sneered again; he considered sentiment only maudlin nonsense for women, weaklings and fools; added to that, his own need was desperate. He had depended on the Driller to open the new attorney's safe.

"See Nimms," he repeated shortly.

"I won't see Nimms!" shouted the Driller, leaping to his feet. "You give me my money, or—"

"Yes?" snarled Farley, his hand moving to his coat pocket where he always carried an automatic. "Swell chance you got of makin' me cough up dough. Sit down and be sensible."

But the Driller did not sit down; he raged toward the door, his jaw set and his eyes blazing.

"You dirty skunk!" he shouted. "I wouldn't pull a job for you—not if I have to walk to Montana first. Keep that two fifty of mine, you dirty crook, but I'll pull no jobs for you!"

As the door slammed Tom Farley relaxed into his chair with a grunt.

"He'll come round," he muttered. "It may take a couple of hours, but he'll come round. He's gotta have jack, and there ain't but one way he can get it."

III.

WHEN he saw the Driller slump out of Farley's office in beaten and dejected anger Smiley Lewis was not surprised. It was just what he had expected. In fact, so certain had he been that Bickford would fail to collect his two hundred and fifty dollars that he had already begun to prod his brain into action, seeking some way that he could help.

His sense of gratitude was very strong; the Driller had saved his life. In addition to that he had in his mind a vivid picture of "Bickford's moll" who had toiled and waited for five years.

Already he had the groping of an idea—a slip of paper he had seen in a frame over the hotel desk.

"Farley's held out on him; I knowed he'd do that," thought Smiley. "Tryin' t' rope him on a lay, I betcha!"

He got up from his chair as the Driller approached.

"You don't have to tell me, Driller," he said. "I kinda had th' hunch he'd throw you down; I know Farley's rep."

"Yes, he threw me down," replied the Driller bitterly. "Wouldn't come across with my own money. He thinks he's got me nailed to the mast, and—I've got to have money, Lewis. She's waiting for me out in Montana, and I can't disappoint her. I've got to have the money for a ticket, and I've got to have money to help finish paying for the homestead."

"Yeah," nodded Lewis, "you sure gotta have some dough."

"And there's only one way that I can get money," added Bickford. "I won't pull a job for Farley, but—"

"Tie a can to that stuff," interrupted Smiley almost sternly. "Y' promised her you wouldn't pull another job, an' a guy can't break a promise t' a moll like that."

"But there's no other way, Lewis; no other way that I can get money."

"No other way you can get it, mebbe, pal," said Smiley, "but that ain't sayin' nothin' about me. I ain't tied up with no promises. I gotta little scheme. I ain't promisin' that it 'll work, but I gotta hunch that mebbe I can get Tom Farley to part with that jack he owes you. How much dough you got on you?"

"Five the warden gave me and another five of my own."

"Gimme it, Driller."

"I don't understand," said Bickford.

"Aw, I ain't tryin' to con you, Driller," reassured Smiley. "I ain't *that* crooked. Gimme that ten an' take a little walk for yourself—just around the corner. I got fifteen bucks m'self that I'm aimin' to add to yours on a little scheme. If I can't put it over, you get your ten seeds back. It's

the only chance, Driller, the only chance for you to buy that railroad ticket to-night, an' we gotta hurry."

Still the Driller hesitated, but there was something convincing in Smiley's earnest tones. Slowly, still hesitatingly, Bickford drew forth his two lone five-dollar bills.

"Don't you worry about this ten berries," whispered Smiley. "I've done some mean tricks in my time, but I never double-crossed a guy what saved me from gettin' a knife between my ribs. If I can't put this over the ten goes back in your kick."

When the Driller had "taken a walk for himself," Lewis sauntered over to the hotel desk, let his gaze wander across the register and then up, as if by accident, to the neat frame which inclosed a placard announcing in emphatic capitals:

POSITIVELY NO CHECKS CASHED!

Below this firm edict appeared what was evidently the poignant reason—a worthless check for two hundred dollars, drawn upon an Iowa bank, payable to Tom Farley and signed by one "N. E. Bartley."

"I was just givin' the double-O to that little forget-me-not you got framed up there," remarked Smiley to the clerk.

"Yeh," grunted the latter, "and if you have got any notions of asking Farley to cash *your* check it means what it says. Tom wouldn't cash a check for the mayor."

"Y' wrong me, friend," grinned Smiley Lewis. "I was lookin' at that check for the sole reason that I think I know this same N. E. Bartley. That check is good."

"Gwan; Bartley was a low-down crook. Said he was a rich cattleman up in Iowa; lived at the hotel here a couple of weeks and got in with Farley. Played poker together. When Bartley had Farley thinkin' he was the real goods, a rich cattleman in the city on a tear, he put that check over. The town it's drawn from never heard of any N. E. Bartley."

"Just the same," insisted Smiley, "that check's good—if Bartley could be found."

"Yeh—if he could be found," snorted the clerk.

"An' I might buy that check at some reasonable figure, just on th' chance of runnin' into my old pal Bartley," said Smiley. "Let's have a look at it."

The clerk, seeing a chance to help Farley realize on the worthless piece of paper, took down the frame, removed the cardboard back, and permitted Lewis to examine the check.

Smiley was greatly interested in the reverse side—and found that it was as he had hoped.

"Yep," he said; "that's Bartley's check, all right. Tell Farley I'll give him twenty-five bucks for it, on the chance of me runnin' into Bartley some time."

"I'll speak to the boss about it," said the clerk. "I think you've bought something."

He went back to the private office and came back in a moment with Farley.

The latter looked Lewis over suspiciously.

"Did that bird who calls himself Bartley send you around here to get that check back?" he demanded.

"You wrong me," replied Smiley. "As I was tellin' this guy here, I know Bartley, an' I know that he'll make it good if I could find him."

"He'll make it good if *I* ever find him," grunted Farley, his fist clenching. "Where is Bartley?"

"I dunno," answered Lewis. "I was just willin' to take a chance on runnin' into him. As I said, I'll give you twenty-five bucks for it."

"Fifty, an' it's yours," bargained Tom Farley.

"Nothin' doin'; fifty's too big a gamble for me. If twenty-five don't interest you, I'll be movin' on."

"I got a feelin' that you're actin' for Bartley—gettin' th' evidence away from me—but twenty-five's twenty-five more'n I expected to get. Take it, but if you see that Bartley tell him I'm packin' a big wallop for him."

Smiley Lewis paid the twenty-five dollars, which left him only a few cents in change. He put the worthless check into his pocket and left the hotel, hurrying over to Madison Street, walking swiftly toward

the Loop until he came to a stationery store. Here he purchased a bottle of ink eradicator for ten cents.

This essential article in his pocket, he retraced his steps, stopping in at the Gault Hotel, where he made use of a writing desk and proceeded to perform his somewhat simple operation on the bad check. He had to work fast, for it was nearing the hour of the bank's closing time.

" I ain't no professional check artist," he muttered, " but I'm tellin' the world that this is one neat little trick!"

The rubber stamp on the back of the check had told him that it had been banked with the Union Station National Bank, which meant that Tom Farley kept his account there. The bank was only five blocks away and he hurried there. Boldly he walked up to the teller's cage and shoved the check through the wicker window.

" Mr. Farley wants it in small bills," he said crisply; the teller, after a brief glance at the back of the check, counted out two hundred dollars in five and ten dollar bills.

" I put it over!" murmured Smiley under his breath, as he walked slowly out of the bank, curbing the impulse to break into a run. But no warning shout came from behind, and he walked back to Farley's hotel. Around the corner Driller Bickford was waiting and looked up with relief when he saw that Smiley Lewis had not decamped with his ten dollars.

" Gettin' nervous, wasn't you, Driller?" chuckled Lewis. " Well, I got it; I made Farley cough up two hundred dollars, an' you'll have to make that do. That means no weddin' outfit, pal, but it 'll buy the railroad ticket and leave you over a hundred. Let's go over an' buy that ticket."

The Driller stared.

" You mean that Farley — that Farley gave you the money?" he gasped. " How—"

" We'll hop over to the station an' get that ticket," said Smiley. " I'll do the explainin' later. What's the name of that town in Montana?"

The Driller told him, and together they went to the ticket office. Here they discovered that a west-bound train left in just half an hour.

" You won't have to wait until night, pal." Smiley thrust the ticket and what remained of the two hundred dollars into Bickford's hand.

" Now that you're all fixed up, I gotta tell you how it was done. I got the dough from Farley—only he don't know it yet.

" Y'see, Driller, I hadda hunch Farley was gonna hold out on you, an' I trailed along with you. While I was waitin' in the lobby, I sees a bum check in a frame—an' I gets the idea. So I takes a chance an' buys that check off'n Farley. Real genius, pal!"

" But—but I don't understand," stammered the Driller. " If the check was no good—"

" It was good when I gets through with it," grinned Lewis. " I take it right down to Farley's bank an' collected two hundred dollars on it. Just a minute; I'm gettin' around t' it.

" Y'see, when Farley banked that check in the first place, he hadda write his name on the back of it—th' regular endorsement guaranteein' payment, y'know. Then there was a rubber stamp on the back, too, showin' that Farley's bank was th' Union Station National.

" Of course there was three or four rubber stamps on the back, too, showin' it had been through the clearin' house, but a dime's worth of ink eradicator fixed that—took the rubber stamp print off just as slick as washin' a window. See?

" Then I writes over Farley's indorsement, ' Pay to Bearer.' I writes it sort of blunt like an' while I ain't no regular check artist, it does look somethin' like Farley's writin'. The signature was what the bank teller was concerned about. Then I used the ink eradicator some more, takin' off ' No Funds ' what was written on by the bank on which this Bartley guy drawed it.

" See? When I gets through with it there wasn't nothin' to show that it had ever been cashed before. Farley doin' business at the Union Station National they knows his signature, an' knows he's good for two hundred dollars. They wasn't concerned about who I was, account of that ' Pay to Bearer ' I wrote over Farley's name. Farley's indorsement made it good. Now y' get it?"

The Driller nodded slowly.

"But you said you got the money from Farley," he protested; "you stung the bank."

"I ain't stung the bank at all," chuckled Smiley. "When that check comes back a second time, marked 'No Funds,' Farley's gotta make it good all over again, account of his name bein' indorsed on the back of it. Get me? I guess he'll think it's kinda tough, bein' stung twice on the same bum check, but he had it comin' to him.

"I guess your train's ready, Driller. Y'better be gettin' on board. So long, old pal; glad I was given the chance to show my gratitood for that little favor you done for me back in the big house that time. G'wan now, cully; don't start no blubberin'. Keep the old number nines on the straight an' narrow; always be on the level with that gal what waited for you, Driller."

The Driller's eyes were moist as he gripped Lewis's hand and moved toward the train-shed.

"You ought to come out West, too, Lewis," he urged. "I don't want to see you go back—"

"Fergit it," grunted Smiley. "I'll stick to the big town; I ain't got nobody waitin' for me in Montana—or nowheres. So-long, pal; so-long."

They gripped again and the Driller moved away. As the gate clanged shut, Smiley turned toward the exit. He puckered his mouth into a forced whistle and strolled toward Madison Street. In front of a restaurant he paused and started in. Then his jaw dropped and his hands went to his pocket.

"Now, whattaya think of that!" he muttered. "I got so blame interested in seein' the Driller off that I didn't think to take my fifteen bucks outta that two hundred. Five lonely Lincolns, that's the pile; busted—busted flat!"

But Smiley Lewis only broke into a broad smile as he tightened his belt a notch. He had no regrets.

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A PHILOSOPHER IN THE FIELD

HOW I study in the fields
All the beauties summer yields!
And a meadow's deep perfume
Gives me soul and elbow-room:
Little poems of the mind,
But a thought I seldom find;
Little poems of the heart,
But they seldom leave a smart.
Thus I close my eyes to life,
Dreaming with a rustic fife
In the lyric mind's abode,
Heedless of the open road—
Yet my lashes steal apart
At the sound of wheel or cart.

Charles Divine

An Empire's Human

by

Howard Philip Rhoades

MARRIAGE has set many a good ball player on the bench, and, believe me, I know what them boys over at Swale was up against when they tried to persuade Jack Kane to play that game! Course they didn't know what a ring-dinger of a game it was going to turn out. What finally got him was when they mentioned Bud Click.

You see, Jack he got married over two years ago. Got a nice little girl, only not very strong, and kind of excitable. The first summer he played. But, after they got that baby — well, you know how it goes. The baby—an awful pretty youngster, but not very stout—it got to carrying on at night. Sally Kane, being the right kind, said Jack couldn't do his work and lose his rest. So Jack he didn't walk the floor with little Ruth—much.

Not that they was any tacks, for Sally Kane kept that little bungalow they live in—you know that little white house with the pretty lawn there at Locust and Center—she kept that place like a pin.

That was just it. She worked too hard and got all run down like brides do sometimes. She'd cry and get excited easy, and Jack, being the right sort of a boy, he turned in and took all the work off her he could. Fact he was beginning to get gummed to that bench where you feel pretty comfortable with your paper, and your pipe, and the kids, and you get to playing your games on the sport page, and finally feel the old rheumatiz when you stand up to stretch in the seventh.

Well, they darn near had to grab Jack off that bench the Wednesday night before the big game with Heck Corners. He'd been playing a little, off and on, but his mind wasn't on the game. He'd been thinking of Sally and that little Ruth. I mind the day she was born. I was over at Swale and I stopped in front of Jack's to talk to Uncle Jake Shuster.

"They sure ought to name it after a ball player," he says.

That was right, its father being the best player in Swale, and the hardest hitter in Paw-paw Valley. But just then Miss Betsey Riebel stuck her head out and says: "I guess not. This child's a girl!"

"That's all right," says Uncle Jake Shuster, who's the village cut-up over at Swale. "Considering her father's batting ability, what's the matter with calling her Ruth?"

Well, to get back to this Wednesday night. They asked Jack to play, and he looked over at his wife and the baby and says: "I'm sorry, fellers, but I don't think I ought to."

"But, Jack," they says, "Bud Click is back at Heck Corners and going to play."

"That right?" Now they had him in-

terested. Jack, the best batter in the valley, and Bud Click the supposed best pitcher had always been rivals. They'd kind of been leaders in their two villages. Bud, who was a smart feeling cuss, had been working over at Zanesville, and pitching in the city league there, until he got laid off his work and came home.

Well, that settled it. Jack couldn't stand to see the Swale team go up against a pitcher like Bud Click without him. Then, as I say, they'd always been some feeling there. Bud was the kind of a smarty who likes to dress up and let on to be a big city sport. But Jack was just the other way, big and quiet, with broad shoulders and blue eyes—and a batter! Man, he'd knocked the old sphere clean over the Pennsy tracks off the Swale diamond five times in games!

That settled it—after one thing. Jack went over to Sally, a pretty little girl, only twenty, with black hair and brown eyes—daughter of Old Eph Slaughter there at Paint Creek beyond the bridge—he went over to her and says: "How about it, honey? Can you spare me a-Saturday afternoon?"

"Jack, you go right ahead," she says, a-holding his hand and rubbing her head against his arm. "Don't think," she says to the committee, "that I'm holding him back. I'd like him to play every game. He likes it—and I don't believe in a man being tied down at home."

Jack—to show you what kind of a feller he is—comes back: "Never mind, honey, my place is with you. Only—specially if Bud Click plays—I'd just like to have one more crack—"

"You go along and practice," she says. "If I get to feeling better I want to go over and see that game myself. And, if I do, I want to see you put one clean over the tracks with three men on base!"

Say, them boys sure was jubilant! That's when they got me on the phone and asked if I'd empire. I thought it over a minute. Well, when a man's running for office he's got to stay in the public eye. Besides, they respect an empire here. Just let a feller be anywheres near square and they'll stand by anything he says.

"All right, boys," I says. "And when you put it in the paper don't forget to tell that editor that Elmer Betts, candidate for county commissioner, will empire. Remember now, Elmer Betts, candidate for county commissioner!"

Believe me, they wasn't much talked of, either in Swale or Heck Corners, the rest of that week, but the big game of the season. And say, Seth Tucker's field over there by the Pennsy tracks in Swale was sure packed when Saturday afternoon came! Nobody worked at the oil wells, or cut any corn, or dug any potatoes *that* afternoon. The village of Swale, which got the game on its diamond by reason of alternation from year to year, was as dead as a door nail from Blue Stone Church right through to the railroad station at the upper end—all except the ball field!

There was tin lizzies along the road as far as you could see, and horses and buggies, even a big motor bus that brought over the Heck Corners team and town officials. Then there was motorcycles, and right down by first base line a gray one with a side-car attached. Sally Kane was better, and there she set with little Babe Ruth — that's what they all called the youngster—all ready to see the game.

When that big motor bus, carrying the Heck Corners crowd, drove on the field there was Bud Click right up in front with the driver, where nobody'd miss him, waving and hollering in that smart way of his, just like they'd got up the game to let him show off. Same time, as I looked over toward first, here's Jack Kane bending over that side-car with little Ruth—an awful sweet kid with blue eyes like her father, and a soft pink face—she a-holding to his finger and cooing, and Sally Kane looking on like she never seen anything in the world like the two of them!

Well, they was plenty of excitement as they warmed up. Underneath the general kidding match I could sort of feel the tension. They was all good-natured, but they was in earnest, and most of all Jack Kane, the best batter we've ever had around here, and Bud Click, who was to be on the mound for Heck Corners.

Someway I felt nervous as they got

ready to start—not just nervous—but dry around the mouth and shaky. Wasn't no reason for it. I've empired the biggest games around here for years. Some call me the best empire in Hawk County. It was just like I felt what was coming. Only course I didn't. I'll say I didn't!

After the first few innings I got steadier. It was just like any game—at first. The boys on both sides played clean and careful. Bud Click was holding down the Swale boys, no doubt about that. On the other hand Heck Corners wasn't setting the world on fire. The game went pretty much like any game—up to the eighth.

Heck Corners got a man on first in that inning. He slides safe to second on a bad throw. That started the Heck Corners bunch to yelling. They yelled louder when Bud Click came up to bat with that smart smile on his face. He landed on one that sent the first man home and took him to third.

"Where's Kane?" the Heck Corners bunch was yelling. "Click outpitches them—he outbats them!" Slim Purdam, the Swale pitcher, right there ahead of me, set his teeth and done his best to fool the next man up. But it was just one of them things you can't stop. Crack she goes and Bud Click comes home. They got the runner when he tried to steal second, and that finished Heck Corners. But it left them one to the good. The score was 8 to 7.

I ain't never cared much for Bud Click. But I got to admit he let Swale down that last half nice. He fanned one. Then he fielded a hot grounder over to first. After that he struck out the third—one—two—three!

That put Heck Corners in for their last bats. Swale hadn't settled down, and, before the inning was over they fooled around and let another run in. So the last half of the ninth, Swale's last innings, started off with Jack Kane and his team-mates two points behind. Not since the second inning had they made more than one run an inning. That, with the way they got retired the last time, made things look pretty blue for them.

But there was one thing in their favor. Jack Kane was third up. He'd already had three times at bat, connecting each time, but only making one clean hit. The other two times he'd cracked them right out in the hands of fielders. Seemed like he could hit the ball all right—only he didn't have his mind on placing them. I noticed he'd spent most of his time when Swale was in up toward first base where Sally and the baby was setting in the side car. Once when he came back his face was serious, like he was worried.

As this last chance for Swale to win came along—the score was 9 to 7 favor of Heck Corners—I seen him go right from the field over to the side car and bend over his wife and the baby. Then he started up toward the home plate smiling and freelike.

And he didn't have no cause to drop that smile. Bud Click posed for a minute like you've seen pitchers do who hate themselves. Then he sent one up all set to hear it go smack in the catcher's mitt. Only it didn't. There was a sharp crack, and when the Heck Corners infielders is done fumbling a Swale man is on first.

Bud Click wound himself all up in a knot again—so tight he was too slow to catch the Swale man, who stole second. Then the second Swale man up connected. Man, you should have seen them go! Right here let me say something. Maybe you think I being empire of this game I oughten to take sides, and tell you how sick this feller Click makes me anyhow, and how it kind of hit you to see that big young feller, Kane, look out at that side car and wave as he took his bat and marched up for the climax of the game.

Maybe. But, don't you forget it, an empire's human! If my decisions has always been so fair they call me the best empire in Hawk County, that ain't never kept me from having a heart.

Now, here was Jack Kane up, the best batter in the valley, his team two points behind, and two men on base ahead of him. He could fill the bases with a single, score one sure with a double, tie the score with a triple, and, man, what he could do with a home run!

That was what the whole valley—especially Swale—always looked to Jack for. Twice year before last, three times last year,

he'd knocked the ball clean over that railroad embankment, where it cuts in sharp toward left field. Now, with the game depending on Jack, and the wildest and most excited yells going up from both sides, something peculiar happened.

The audience, for the moment, was increased. Right along the track there by left field came one of those fast trains of long, low, dark cars with small screened windows, pulled by a big hogback engine. It was an all-Pullman express, the kind that goes tearing along at fifty or sixty and never notices Swale any more than if it was a silo.

That is—usually. Now, they must have been a block of some kind up at the crossing about Highway Station. For the Pullman slowed down, and very near stopped, just as it came near the diamond. The Swale crowd, nearly crazy with excitement, had been hollering: "Put her over the track, Jack! Put her over the track, Jack!"

Now it took up a new yell: "Put her over the train, Kane! Put her over the train, Kane!" Uncle Jake Shuster, who's always getting off some funny crack, invented that one, and they all joined in, including the Heck Corners crowd which wanted to fuss Jack.

Kane didn't keep them in suspense. The first was a strike. Bud Click winked at me knowing, as he turned to send the second, as if to say: "Ain't it a sin how I play with this feller?" Then he sends up one just to show off. It was slow and simple, so much so that if Jack Kane'd chopped on it he'd have been just about done for, and Bud Click would have been cheered to the skies.

But Jack didn't. He just brought around his bat, the heaviest and strongest one they ever saw in these parts, and he walloped that ball right on its nose, the hardest and truest lick he ever gave in his life. There was one of them high-sounding, piercing cracks, like a gun's been shot off, and that ball went up just like it was one which had lived a good life and was being called straight to heaven.

Two things happened in the middle of that wild excitement. Some claims they saw both. I don't allow so. I was the empire and *I* wasn't any too sure of either of them for a minute myself. I was watching the ball when I heard a scream off toward first base. Looking that way I see Jack just approaching the sack when somebody runs out toward him. It was his wife and she had the baby in her arms. I didn't hear what she said. The crowd sounded like a regiment of wild Indians all performing in a boiler shop. But I did see her face, and I'll say it scared me. So what must it have done to Jack!

He stopped, like he was shot, and ran over to her. He put his arm around her and the baby and dragged them over to the motorcycle with the side-car. It roars and off they go like mad people before you can catch your breath. One feller tried to stop Jack and remind him he was supposed to be making a home run. But pshaw—he was just talking to thin air! Jack was nearly to the road, his whole darn family in that bouncing little bathtub, moving like all the gas in the Standard Oil Company was tearing through them cylinders!

And the ball? Well, they was divided at first about taking the feller's word for it, him being just a hunky coming down the track on his way home from section work. *He* said it came within a few feet of clearing the train, but smashed through a window—"a beeg-a wide one." That must have been the dining car. Seems like the train was just starting off at good speed when the ball came, and, as the hunky pointed down the track, where it was now disappearing, Si Hayes, left fielder for Heck Corners, found some broken glass on the track and says: "Darned if I don't believe him!"

Ever empire a ball game—one like that? You see what I was up against. But, as I say, an empire's word comes pretty near being law in Paw-paw Valley. Ain't had a rule book here in years. The empires settle the fine points, and dad burn if I believe a rule book would of done any good in this case. Here's a man knocking a home run and stopping half way around to run off with a girl—specially one he's maried to. What was the matter with that man, Kane, anyhow? I went over to find out.

"She allowed the baby was choking to death," says Uncle Jake Shuster. "Hollered for him to come take it to the doctor—"

"With me," speaks up Doc Hornblower, "right here on the field! They're worked up over that baby, like a lot of young married folks, without no reason. But I didn't see them go. I was watching the ball."

One of the Swale boys says: "Elmer, can't we let another man finish that run for Jack—seeing his family needs him?"

"I don't know how," I says. "He wasn't hurt, or anything. The rule book don't cover domestic interferences like this and—"

"Anyhow it's a lost ball," somebody says.

"The deuce it is," hollers up Bud Click. "We know right where that ball is. It's on that train. Say, Mr. Betts, if we got it back and touched home Kane would be out!"

I thought a minute. There wasn't no reason to call it a dead ball. It was moving right that moment fifty miles an hour, maybe. Also I didn't see how he was going to get it back. So I says: "If Jack gets back before you get the ball and tags home, he's safe and Swale wins, cause they got two runs in on that hit, and the score's tied."

Bud Click looks at me funny, and hesitates. Then he seems to decide something, and says: "All right, Mr. Betts. Remember!" and he's off.

Pretty soon here comes a feller in a machine, driving like all get out, and hollering for Dock Hornblower. Seems like when Jack Kane got out to doc's house, in the south end of town, and found doc wasn't there, Sally Kane she ups and faints. So there she was now, out there in a hammick, and they couldn't bring her to.

"How about the baby?" I hollers. "Is it dead?"

"Not so's you can notice," this feller says. "Some simp gave the kid a piece of candy while her mother was watching the game, and it stuck in her throat. It melted and went down—only, by that time, Sally Kane had fainted."

As they hurried off up blows another feller in a lizzie. "Listen, Elmer," he says. "Know what Bud Click's doing? He's wired his friend in the railroad tower at Roundesville, and promised him a ten spot if he gets that ball off the express, and on the local which comes by there a minute later, and which stops here. The express stops at Roundesville for water."

He looks at his watch and goes on: "He's putting that ball on the local right now, if it worked, and it stands to be in here in less than ten minutes, and Bud Click says you said—"

Ever empire a game like that? Besides this here tangle about the ball there's Jack Kane out in the far end of town with his wife fainted.

Well, I'd given my word to Bud. The only thing I could do, to be fair, was to see both sides knew about it. I had them phone to Jack.

The feller who talked came back looking a little worried. "I talked to doc," he says. "Jack wouldn't leave her yet. But doc says she's coming around and Jack will start in just a minute—if she comes along all right."

"Well, boys," I says. "The first one that gets to home plate—runner or ball—that side wins. And you can't fool me on the ball. It's got a peculiar little cut right—well, I know where! I'll be down at the field waiting."

I said that strong-like. But, man, I was wabbly, for it was funny business. The whole gang comes along after me and there we stand like a lot of prisoners waiting for first degree murder juries to come in. Then we nearly had heart trouble. Away off down the track comes a whistle. Then the local puffs in. Did she bring the ball?

Pretty soon, away down toward the station, I see some one running. It's a man in a Heck Corners suit—Bud Click. Maybe I better not say how I felt. 'Tain't that I don't like Bud, so much as that I *do* like a fair race. Course the Heck Corners bunch was nearly yelling its head off. Then, all at once, there was an explosion that must have been heard clean over at the county seat!

Down the road, the other way, came a feller on a motorcycle. Dod darn him, he'd stuck to make sure that girl of his was all right, then he'd started. Come on, Jack! My mouth gaped like a sunfish's and my eyes leaked to see that boy move!

Next I'm at home-plate, and the crowd back off to give them room. Bud's short-cutting across the field. Jack's a little ahead, but he's slick. He don't leave them no ground to kick. He takes up the course

right where he left off, and rounds second. That motorcycle's tearing up the earth in big gobs, and folks is screaming crazy. Jack's around third and flying home. Bud gets one of his grand-standing bees. He'll catch him off base and tab him, rather than tab home. It would look fancier!

So he cuts over after Jack. Man, that old motorcycle just spits fire as Jack dodges. Then Bud comes around. The motorcycle sticks for a minute, and it looks like it's all up. Bud's going to ketch him—*no!*

Jack just ups on that seat like a cowboy, and, with the old side-car careening, just as Bud's about to tab him, he dives off that machine and slides home!

"Safe!"

I might as well have talked to the ocean on its busy day. They closed in and grabbed him like wild idiots. Bud Click couldn't get to me for a minute. When he did he says, all mad and scowling: "Darn it, Betts, that wasn't fair."

"You're the feller who suggested this kind of an end," I reminds. "What ain't fair?"

"Him coming on a motorcycle."

"If you field with a railroad train, why not him run bases on a motorcycle," I says.

He couldn't answer that. Now, wasn't I fair and square? Aside from Jack, the good feller he is, and Bud being such a smarty, it came out just as it should. Besides, they poll four hundred and fifty-seven votes at Swale against only two hundred and eighty-three at Heck Corners and—I'm human.

Hired Burglars

by *Lyon Mearson*

AGATHA WARREN bit meditatively into an olive and regarded little bespectacled Tommy Tucker who returned her gaze with adoring eyes.

"The spirit of romance," she said to her mother, "is gone out of the race. This is a drab, unheroic age. Men aren't what they used to be."

"And they never were," returned her mother significantly, looking intently at her undersized husband, Dr. Warren.

"But, my dear Susanna, I remember the time when you told me I was your hero," returned the doctor mildly, his blue eyes blinking a little at his large, full bosomed, determined wife.

"Did I, Gamaliel? I don't remember—"

"But things are different nowadays," cut in Tommy, coming to the rescue of his host, "There isn't the opportunity to be heroic, as there was in the old days. There was little law and less order in those days, and you could grab the woman of your choice firmly by the hair, drag her to your cave, and beat her with the knobby head of your favorite club until you made a good impression on her. Nowadays, with a cop on every corner—"

"Tommy Tucker, you're talking pure, unadulterated rot," interrupted Agatha. "There's nothing heroic about beating a woman with a club. You'd probably slice or top your strokes, anyway."

Tommy laughed.

"Imagine driving your wife into a bunker and having to use your mashie on her—"

"Tommy Tucker!" He was silenced by Agatha, but she could not repress the ghost of a smile around her red—natural—lips. As for her father, he laughed outright.

Incurably romantic, both Agatha and her mother. Agatha's father had suffered under it for years, so it is to be presumed that he was used to it. As for Tommy, well, he was willing to suffer—if only the adorable Agatha would consent to be his wife. This, however, he had not yet been able to persuade her to become. There was nobody else—he knew that. It was just that he was so mild and insignificant generally; so peaceful in appearance and so unexcitable in action.

"For the thirty-ninth time, Agatha," he whispered to her late that evening, just before leaving, "will you—"

"Heaven's sake, Tommy, are you proposing to me again?" she cut in.

He nodded. "Sure am—always will, too, until you say the word. Listen, Agatha, dear girl, you do care for me a little, don't you?" he pleaded.

She nodded slightly. "I do—a little, Tommy."

"Then what is it—" he commenced.

"Oh, I don't know." She shook her head. "I think it's just that you don't—er—thrill me, Tommy. A woman likes to be loved by a brave man, a hero—one who would go through fire and water for her—"

"But I'd do that for you, Agatha," he protested.

And so on, *ad lib,* for perhaps half or three-quarters of an hour. The argument was never concluded—they were always at it when they were alone, and the matter was never settled.

Tommy thought he would have to do something heroic to get her into his arms; something smacking of knights in armor, lances at rest, battlements, drawbridges, moats, straining hand to hand combats, revolvers spitting fire at each other, left hooks to the jaw—in fact, anything suggestive of heroism and romance.

After deciding on this, it came to pass that a few days later Tommy Tucker was earnestly engaged in whispered conversation with one Ignatz the Rat, a low-browed, lantern-jawed, sweater-clad denizen of the East Side. There is no need to relate the mental processes that led Tommy to this rendezvous. The reader can imagine them quite easily.

"I'll leave a little side door open about twelve-thirty and then you come in," went on Tommy earnestly. "And I think you'd better gather together a little of the silver, you know—just to make it look O. K. Then I come in and cover you with my revolver and—"

"Nothing doin'!" broke in the Rat. "Ya don't come at me wit' no gat, see! Didja ever shoot off a gat in—"

"No," said Tommy. "But there won't be anything in it. It won't be loaded."

"Nix," declared the Rat. "Half of me frien's has been croaked wit' unloaded gats. Hard woikin', self-respectin' boiglars dey wuz, too—"

"Nonsense," said Tommy. The subject was argued for a short time, and it ended by Tommy winning his point. The revolver was necessary; it was part of the local color, a piece of the atmosphere of romance.

"When they begin to come downstairs I let you go," said Tommy, going on with the plan. "That gives you plenty of time to clear out, and then—"

"Then ya cops off the bimbo, eh?"

"The bimbo?" queried Tommy. "I don't quite understand just what is—"

"The bimbo!" repeated the Rat loudly, evidently on the theory that shouting would help him to understand. "The Jane, the dame—"

"Oh, you mean the lady?"

"Sure—that's what I mean. Don't ya understand English?" The Rat looked at Tommy belligerently.

"Have you got that straight, now?" asked Tommy.

"Yeh," said the Rat. "But supposin' somethin' goes wrong—supposin' I don't make me get-away in time—"

"Of course you will," reassured Tommy. "I'll see to that."

"Now, about the mazuma—" began the Rat.

"How much do you want?"

The Rat made a rapid calculation. He was not sure just how much the traffic would bear, but he wanted as much as he could possibly get.

"Two hundred berries, kiddo."

"Two hundred! What makes it so high?"

"The overhead, see!" explained the Rat, sarcastically. "Me advertisin', see, an' me salesmen. That's me price and—"

"All right, two hundred it is, then," agreed Tommy.

"An' I gits it now, too," demanded the Rat.

"Now? Why, how do I know you'll fulfill your part of the agreement? How do I—"

"Say!" the Rat leaned his ugly face forward until it was directly in front of Tommy's. Tommy shrank back. "D'youse mean to say ya t'ink I'd cheat ya?" The Rat glared at him angrily for this implied slur upon his professional honor. "If ya do, why—"

"No, no! Certainly not," Tommy added hastily. "We'll call it two hundred, in advance." He peeled off the amount from a fat roll of bills.

"Say," asked the Rat, "how comes it you're up there at that time—"

"Well, it's a country home, you know, and I'm there for the week-end. There'll be nobody home but the old man and a couple of women and myself, and two or three servants who sleep at the other end of the house. You'd better go up there in a day or two and plan your—er—get-away. Look over the ground."

"Sure t'ing," promised the Rat. "Ya kin depend on me, kiddo."

II.

SATURDAY night, the night to be crowned by the visit of Ignatz the Rat to the house of the Warrens, found Tommy Tucker enjoying himself there hugely in pleasant anticipation. He actually basked in the presence of Agatha, and even went so far as to agree with her heartily when she brought up the subject of romance and heroism. Why shouldn't he? He intended to show her something very soon that would take her breath away.

She wanted heroism, did she? Well, she would have it. He would save her and the whole family from wholesale robbery and perhaps murder. True, he would allow the midnight marauder to get away, but there would be glory enough and to spare in having stopped the robbery; in having dashed in fearlessly and recklessly to battle for his lady. He turned their conversation to robbery and murder; he told them in no uncertain terms just how he would behave if a robber should come into any house wherein he, Tommy Tucker, was staying.

The evening wore too slowly away to its conclusion. Suppose Ignatz the Rat should not show up? There was nothing to prevent him from taking Tommy's money and failing to carry out his part of the agreement. Nothing, decided Tommy; yet he had a feeling that Ignatz the Rat was a respectable burglar whose professional pride would force him to fulfill his contract.

At last good nights were exchanged and all retired. One by one the bedroom lights were extinguished and the occupants of the house sank into slumber. Outside a pale moon shone, casting a wan, yellow shaft into Tommy's room. He scrambled out of bed, clad in pink and white silk pyjamas—those with his initial in lavender worked on the left sleeve—he had chosen purposely for the impending occasion.

He put on a gorgeous dressing gown of exotic pattern. Into its pocket he slipped an old revolver he had found at home. On tiptoe he stole downstairs, almost holding his breath. No one was stirring. The house was wrapped in quiet darkness. He unlatched the little side door and stole back into the living room, there to wait, fearfully, in the shadow of the stairs.

He looked at his luminous dialed wrist watch. It was twelve-thirty. It was time for the Rat to appear. Suppose he did not come? The thought persisted in Tommy's mind that he was foolish to trust the man.

Yet what else could he have done? You can't draw up a written contract with a burglar, can you? The minutes slipped away, and Tommy began to lose hope.

Of course the Rat wouldn't come! Why should—

Tommy drew his breath sharply here. There was some one in the room.

Tommy saw a dim, shadowy form tiptoeing cautiously. Then there came the beam of a dark lantern, making a ghostly little circle on whatever it happened to alight. The Rat had come.

The intruder placed a bag on the floor and began to look around for what he could find. Tommy, breathing heavily, decided to let him gather together a bit of loot before he apprehended him.

When the burglar stole past a window a beam of moonlight struck his face. Tommy stood petrified. The burglar was not Ignatz the Rat!

Tommy's knees began to shake and his teeth rattled so alarmingly he was afraid the burglar would hear. He restrained them with difficulty. What should he do? He could not escape upstairs for fear of being seen by the burglar.

"Oh, what an idiot I was to start anything like this," he muttered to himself between shivers of fright. He did not dare attack the burglar for fear of being smashed to a pulp. Still it was but a question of moments until he would be discovered.

And then! He hesitated to think what would happen to him when this desperate man found him. He shivered violently and again looked longingly at the stairs.

There was a slight creak at the door, and Tommy caught his breath sharply as another figure crept stealthily in.

It was Ignatz the Rat.

The first intruder looked up instantly. He heard the creak of the door. With violence he threw himself on the Rat. A sharp fight ensued during which Tommy Tucker crouched terror-stricken in his corner.

There was a sharp report, a flash of flame, and smoke filled the room. A heavy body thudded to the floor, and another—Ignatz the Rat—silently and speedily made his escape through the window.

Drawing his revolver without thinking—just wanting to feel something he could close his hands on—Tommy switched on the lights.

In the meantime the family had gathered from all parts of the house.

"What's going on here?" demanded the doctor from the stairs.

"What is it?" asked Agatha in a sweet and alarmed voice.

On the floor lay a still, burly figure.

Mustering all his courage Tommy declared, "Oh, nothing. I shot a burglar."

Holding his revolver carelessly he threw his chin in the air and looked at them with the kindly arrogance of a knightly protector. He was a hero and he meant to act the part.

The doctor made a hurried examination of the fallen burglar. "Just creased," he announced. "He'll be all right in a few minutes. Call up the police, Tommy, while I bandage him."

III.

LATER, as Tommy was making his way to his room, a small, bewitching figure in dressing gown, with hair plaited in a thick braid, and eyes shining with worship, met him in the hall.

"Tommy, my hero!" she whispered.

"It was nothing," he boasted calmly.

"You were brave! You saved our lives, Tommy. Tommy, dear, ask me for the fortieth time—"

"Oh, that." Tommy waved away the chance to propose with a careless shrug. "I'm not sure I want to settle down yet. I'm thinking of a trip to South America. There are a couple of revolutions going on that I might join in. Life is very dull around here. I've stood it as long as I can. And as for marriage, why—"

"Tommy Tucker," she almost shrieked. "How dare you! Ask me again immediately!"

He took her in his arms.

"You brave boy," she murmured.

It was still later, of course, when Tommy found himself in his own room. Elated, he put the revolver down on his table, and turned to his bed. There was a smothered knock on his door.

"It's me," said Dr. Warren, entering.

He seated himself on the bed and toyed with the revolver for a minute before turning to Tommy.

"Is this the gun you shot him with, Tommy?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Some shooting," commented the older man.

"Oh, nothing extraordinary." Tommy took the doubtful compliment lightly. "I've done much better with that gun. It's an old one that—"

"Indeed," murmured the doctor. After a moment he continued. "You see, Tommy, this revolver has no trigger."

"No trigger!" gasped Tommy. "Why—er—" he stuttered, recovering quickly. "Why—you see—I guess the recoil of the shot must have blown it away, don't you know. I've known many such cases in my experience—"

"Come, come, Tommy, snap out of it," laughed the doctor. "Think I was born yesterday? Tell me all about it," he persisted.

Tommy, seeing it was useless, laughingly told his future father-in-law the story.

"How much did you pay your burglar?" asked the doctor.

"Two hundred," replied Tommy.

"M-m-m, seems to be a union rate."

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing—except that it's exactly the same amount I paid my burglar—the fellow who got shot!"

"Your burglar!" ejaculated Tommy.

"Sure," affirmed the doctor. "I got tired of hearing all this moving picture dope about romance and heroism, and I decided to put an end to it by becoming a hero myself. Same as you did. It cost me another fifty to fix the cops to let him go. In my excitement to-night I guess I forgot to wind up my watch, so it stopped. That's the reason I wasn't down here to meet him when he came."

They both laughed. "My hero!" facetiously remarked the doctor to Tommy.

"Well, some one believes it, anyway," yawned Tommy.

QUESTIONS

WHO knows how many thousand years
The river hurried on its way,
Tumultuous in its wild delight
To reach the bay?

Who cares that on its crested waves
I ride my ship of dreams,
Careless of wind and rock, to search
For pale moonbeams?

Or that, rebellious as the stream
That once so gloriously free
Now breaks itself on man-made walls,
I never reach the sea?

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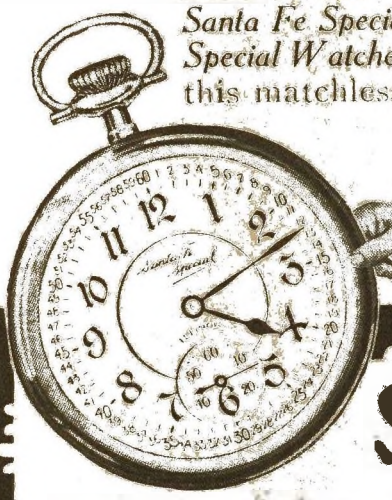

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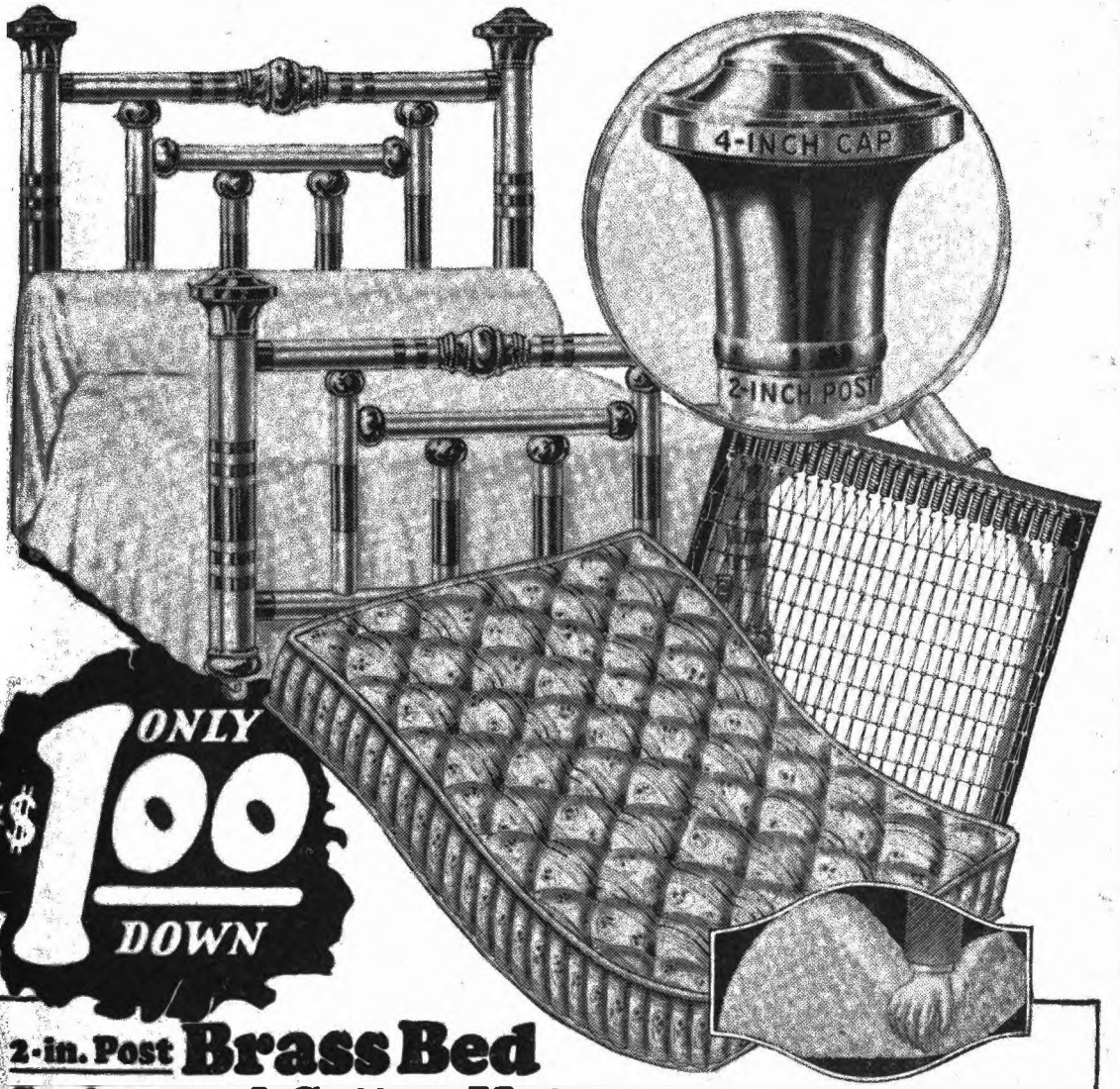

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Straus & Schram, Register A227 West 35th Street Chicago, Ill.

The Secret of Being a Convincing Talker

How I Learned It In One Evening

By George Raymond

"HAVE you heard the news about Frank Jordan?"

This question quickly brought me to the little group which had gathered in the center of the office. Jordan and I had started with the Great Eastern Machinery Co., within a month of each other, four years ago. A year ago, Jordan was taken into the accounting division and I was sent out as salesman. Neither of us was blessed with an unusual amount of brilliancy, but we "got by" in our new jobs well enough to hold them.

Imagine my amazement, then, when I heard:

"Jordan's just been made Treasurer of the Company!"

I could hardly believe my ears. But there was the "Notice to Employees" on the bulletin board telling about Jordan's good fortune.

Now I knew that Jordan was a capable fellow, quiet, and unassuming, but I never would have picked him for any such sudden rise. I knew, too, that the Treasurer of the Great Eastern had to be a big man, and I wondered how in the world Jordan landed the place.

The first chance I got, I walked into Jordan's new office, and after congratulating him warmly, I asked him to let me "in" on the details of how he jumped ahead so quickly. His story is so intensely interesting that I am going to repeat it as closely as I remember.

"I'll tell you just how it happened, George, because you may pick up a pointer or two that will help *you*.

"You remember how scared I used to be whenever I had to talk to the chief? You remember how confused I used to be every time I met new people? I couldn't say what I wanted to say when I wanted to say it; and I determined that if there was any possible chance to learn how to talk I was going to do it.

"The first thing I did was to buy a number of books on public speaking, but they seemed to be meant for those who wanted to become orators, whereas what I wanted to learn was not only how to speak in public but how to speak to individuals under various conditions in business and social life.

"A few weeks later, just as I was about to give up hope of ever learning how to talk interestingly, I read an announcement stating that Dr. Frederick Houk Law had just completed a new course in business talking and public speaking entitled 'Mastery of Speech.' The course was offered on a 'money back if dissatisfied' basis, so since I had nothing whatever to lose by examining the lessons, I sent for them and in a few days they arrived. I glanced through the entire eight lessons, and in about an hour the whole secret of effective speaking was opened to me.

"For example, I learned why I had always lacked confidence, why talking had always seemed something to be dreaded whereas it is really the simplest thing in the world to 'get up and talk.' I learned how to secure complete attention to what I was saying and how to make everything I said interesting, forceful and convincing. I learned the art of listening, the value of silence, and the power of brevity. Instead of being funny at the wrong time, I learned how and when to use humor with telling effect.

"But perhaps the most wonderful thing about the lessons were the actual examples of what things to say and when to say them to meet every condition. I found that there was a knack in making oral reports to my superiors. I found that there was a right way and a wrong way to present complaints, to give estimates, and to issue orders.

"Another thing that struck me forcibly was that instead of antagonizing people when I didn't agree with them, I learned how to bring them around to my way of thinking in the most pleasant sort of way. Then, of course, along with those lessons there were chapters on speaking before large audiences, and on how to find material for talking and speaking.

"Why, I got the secret the very first evening and it was only a short time before I was able to apply all of the principles and found that my words were beginning to have an almost magical effect upon everybody to whom I spoke. It seemed that I got things done instantly, where formerly, as you know, what I said 'went in one ear and out of the other.' I began to acquire an executive ability that surprised me. I smoothed out difficulties like a true diplomat. In my talks with the chief I spoke clearly, simply, convincingly. Then came my first promotion since I entered the accounting department. I was given the job of answering complaints, and I made good. From that I was given the job of making collections. When Mr. Buckley resigned I was made Treasurer. Between you and me, George, my salary is now $7,500 a year and I expect it will be more from the first of the year.

"And I want to tell you sincerely that I attribute my success solely to the fact that I learned how to talk to people."

* * *

When Jordan finished, I asked him for the address of the publishers of Dr. Law's course, and he gave it to me. I sent for it and found it to be exactly as he had stated. After studying the eight simple lessons I began to sell to people who had previously refused to listen to me at all. After four months of record-breaking sales during the dullest season of the year, I received a wire from the chief asking me to return to the home office. We had quite a long talk in which I explained how I was able to break sales records—and I was appointed Sales Manager at almost twice my former salary. I know that there was nothing in me that had changed except that I had acquired the ability to talk where formerly I simply used "words without reason." I can never thank Jordan enough for telling me about Dr. Law's Course in Business Talking and Public Speaking.

So confident is the Independent Corporation, publishers of "Mastery of Speech," Dr. Law's Course in Business Talking and Public Speaking, that once you have an opportunity to see in your own home how you can, in one hour, learn the secret of speaking and how you can apply the principles of effective speech under all conditions, that they are willing to send you the Course on free trial.

And for a short time only, this famous course, that has been sold to more than 100,000 people at $5 each, is offered to you for only $1.95.

Send no money; just put your name and address on the coupon, or send a letter if you prefer. The course will be mailed to you at once, and $1.95 (plus postage) to the postman will make it yours. Then if you are not fully satisfied in every particular, you may return it within five days after its receipt, and your money will be immediately refunded. *If more convenient, you may remit with coupon, but this is not necessary.*

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