ARGOSY

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

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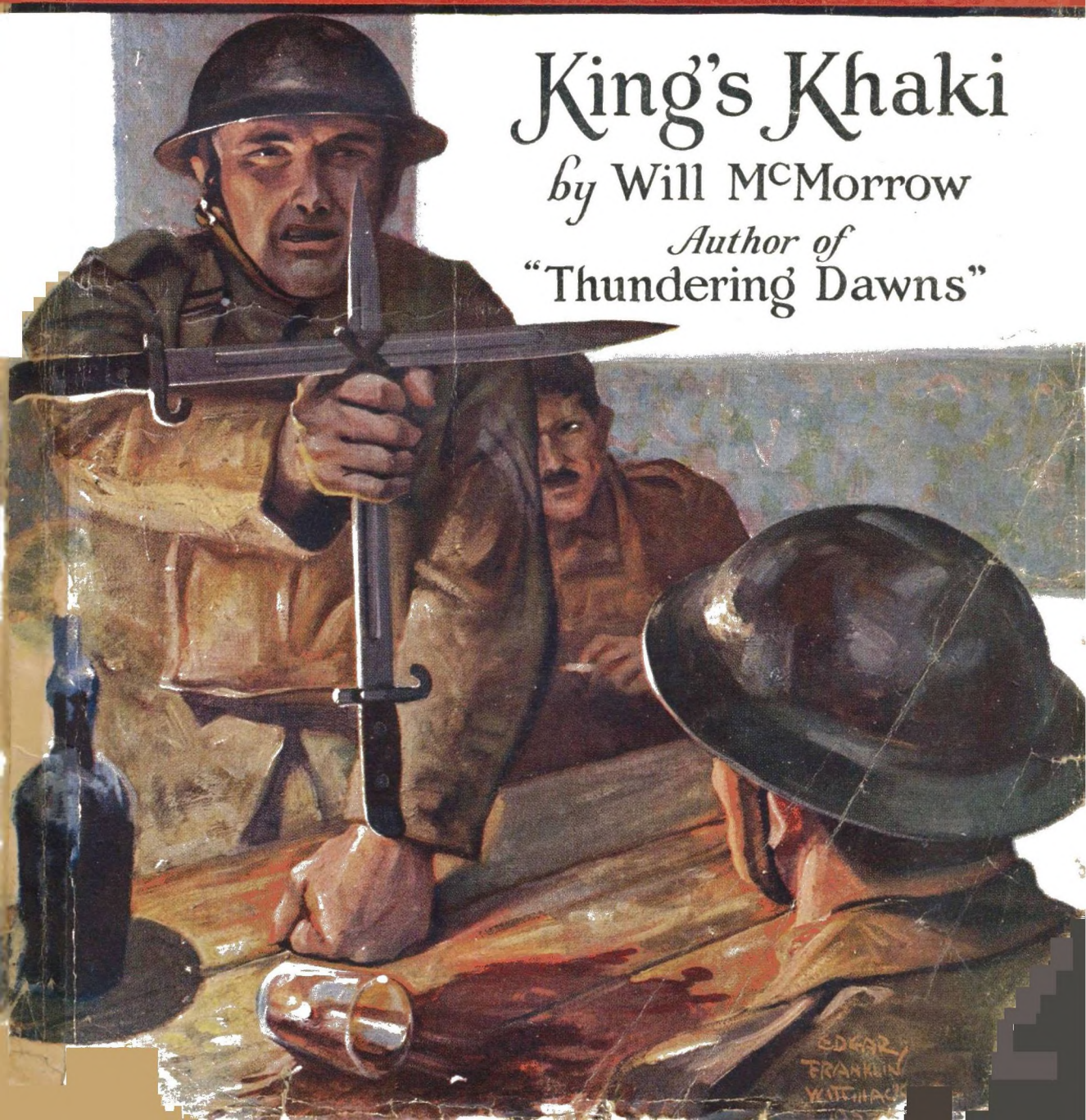

King's Khaki

by Will McMorrow

Author of
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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOLUME 189 CONTENTS FOR SEPTEMBER 24, 1927 NUMBER 3

FOUR SERIAL STORIES

ONE COMPLETE NOVELETTE

FIVE SHORT STORIES

POETRY

A yarn of the West in the days when men were judged by the movement of the hand to the hip; a yarn that moves as fast as the hero's finger.

TICKETS TO PARADISE

By GEORGE M. JOHNSON

Next week the first of three parts will appear.

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WEEKLY

VOLUME 189 SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 1927 NUMBER 3

King's Khaki

By WILL McMORROW

Author of "Thundering Dawns," etc.

A REMINDER TO THE READER

WILL McMORROW, author of "King's Khaki," recites from the book of his own memory when he speaks of the life of the British infantryman. As supercargo on a horse transport in 1915, as one of a famous British regiment—the Grenadier Guards—and as a soldier of fortune in that body of a million men known as "Kitchener's Army," he was one of many young Americans who journeyed overseas early in the war to join the Allied armies in the field. He saw action in the Somme and saw—and felt—some of that stern discipline he describes, in the severest "soldier factory" in Europe—the Guards' Depot at Caterham, Surrey. In matters military we are inclined to believe he "knows his vegetables"—or at least the explosive variety that were being tossed and fired and generally distributed rather carelessly in the Ypres Salient at that time.

CHAPTER I.

HORSES!

"GEE WHIZ!"

Without opening his eyes, Harmon raised a shaking hand to his throbbing forehead and groaned again—the heartfelt moan of a man who awakens in the morning to the memory of a joyous but devastating night. He felt sick and miserable and the bed seemed to be all hard bumps and sharp corners.

It was all Surfee's fault—fat-headed Surfee, the office manager, who couldn't take a

little joke from an assistant bookkeeper who had taken a week's vacation on the firm's time just when every one was busy getting out that munitions contract for the Allies. Surfee had said a few unsympathetic things, and Harmon had found them very amusing. Now Harmon would have to find another job.

Dorine was partly to blame, too. It's a shock when a man has spent every nickel of his little inheritance, left him by his parents, on a gay person of the footlights, and then discovers that she is married and separated from the stage manager, and has a son fifteen years old. A distinct shock, not lessened by having her turn her constant but spent-out admirer loose on the world. It was a lesson to a fellow, and now he could look for a job, with the war on and jobs of any kind scarce.

The world heaved upward and subsided with sickening suddenness, and Harmon's outraged stomach heaved and subsided too. He threw an arm across his eyes to protect them from the sunlight that streamed in on him. That had been terrible stuff that cross-eyed fellow in the water-front saloon had treated him to. But a man must drown his troubles somewhere, and the cross-eyed bird had been sympathetic, even going to the trouble of putting Harmon on the ferryboat which Harmon took nightly to his home in Staten Island.

What a time getting aboard! He remembered that part of it very well. Going across a gangplank, he had shown the cross-eyed fellow how he, Harmon of Halford Tech, had carried the ball across the line that time. He was in better shape then, of course, that being three years ago and before he had started out to have a real time.

The cross-eyed bird had tackled him easily, and then they had a long discussion about the ferryboat, and Harmon had explained thoroughly his reasons for wanting to take the ferry for Staten Island, and then they had sung some old songs with some remarkably homely chaps in rough clothes, and one old fellow with a broken nose had wept bitterly at the singing of "Mother Machree." Then there were more drinks and cheers for Halford Tech, and Harmon had demonstrated how he could stand on his head—unsuccessfully. What a night!

He rolled over, struck his head against a man's foot, and sat up. He was in a kind of wide berth that ran around three sides of an odorous and unpleasant place. Underneath him was a ticking mattress, apparently stuffed with rocks and burrs and a little straw, and overhead men's muddy shoes projected beyond a similar berth. Alongside of Harmon an unshaven person in blue flannel shirt and overalls snored on his back. Other men, young and old, bearded and beardless, but uniformly dirty, sprawled on the mattresses.

There was mingled in the fetid atmosphere the taint of stale whisky, the odor of packed humanity, and the salt tang of the sea. Pervading all and adding its crowning flavor to all things was the strong smell of horses.

Sunlight stabbed into the murky interior through the oblong of a doorway, elevated several inches from the ground. A horse's tail flicked across the opening. The world heaved mightily again, and there came a thunder of iron-shod hoofs that, starting near at hand, faded into distance.

Harmon's mind was not operating on full schedule yet, but he connected satisfactorily the odor of horseflesh with the average ferryboat. But what he didn't like was the idea of having spent the night with the unwashed crew.

If it was the cross-eyed man's idea of a joke, Harmon didn't agree with him. Moreover, it was high time to get ashore and wash up and look around for a job.

He lurched to his feet and held on to a conveniently placed post until his head stopped its revolutions. Then he felt in his pockets. The Staten Island ferry was at St. George, and there would be a trolley fare to pay to reach the rooming house in Tottenville where Harmon made his home. His hand came away empty.

He searched his pockets diligently and found only a couple of papers, one a seaman's discharge made out in the name of Pete Lane, and the other an empty envelope addressed to the same person. Harmon shoved them back in his pocket and

whistled dolefully. The cross-eyed roisterer had robbed him of the remnant of the two weeks' pay received from Surfee. Nice boys in those water-front saloons!

Harmon shook his head and made for the doorway. It opened out into an aisle, flooded with sunshine—an aisle that had a square, canvas-covered affair on one side about three feet high, and a ten-foot wooden shed on the other, opening on the aisle and crowded with horses' heads in a long row.

On the other side of the way, beyond the center affair, was another long line of horse heads, placidly chewing hay and gazing at Harmon with mild interest.

At the end of the aisle was a tall structure, with doors and round portholes above and below, and two iron ladders running halfway to the top. Leaning on the railing above and surveying the horses and Harmon with a casual distaste was a thick-set, tanned party in a blue serge suit, quite wrinkled, and a uniform cap, quite tarnished.

Harmon tottered along the iron deck. His knowledge of ferries and ships was limited, but here obviously was an official or gate tender or ticket chopper that might be of assistance. Harmon felt he could not walk all the way from the ferry slip to Tottenville.

The man in the uniform cap watched Harmon's approach coldly, chewing the end of a ragged cigar.

"By the way, old man," Harmon said, reaching the bottom of the ladder, "I'm kind of stuck here on board your ferry, you know."

The man above smiled sourly without removing the cigar.

"We all are," he said. "What do you want?"

Harmon coughed apologetically.

"I—er—it's really rather an imposition. I know you fellows don't make much money, but—I'm kind of in a hole. I've been sleeping with the crew back there—a little party last night—and traveling back and forth across the bay all night, I wouldn't be surprised. What I wanted to ask you was—will you lend me a nickel when we get in?"

"Lend you a nick—" He caught the cigar just in time as it dropped. "What's the idea?"

"Why," Harmon explained, "I need my fare home. I've got to get to the other end of the island. Trolley fare, you know. I'll be coming back this way to-day some time, and I'll—"

"Your trolley fare home," the stocky man breathed in awe. "Well, I'll go to hell! I've seen 'em before, but by jiminy! So you want to take the trolley! Is there anything else?"

Harmon grinned appreciatively. The humor of that last remark was lost on him. Ticket choppers probably had a subtle humor of their own. But it would not do to antagonize the only source of help.

"Nothing else, old man—except your boat is taking a good time to get in this morning. We must have just left the Battery when I woke up. Seem to be doing quite a business in horses to-day. More than usual, eh?"

The other removed his cigar and pointed with it toward the place Harmon had left. His manner was severe, but not unkindly.

"Better go back and sleep some more, my man," he advised. "You'll feel better by and by. You'll only get in trouble wandering around this way."

"But look here," protested Harmon, "I am perfectly sober. I've got to get back and look around for a job—all kidding aside. If you don't want to help me, at least you can show me the way off this thing. I'm closed in here."

The man above frowned. This thin young man, clinging to the bottom of the ladder, belonged back there with the rest of the riffraff, in spite of his well-cut clothes and honest, though bloodshot, gray eyes. At the same time it was an odd hallucination he suffered from.

"So you want to get off and take a trolley," pursued the man with the cigar soothingly. "You wouldn't fancy takin' a bus, now—a nice green bus, with a conductor standin' aft and a jolly horn blowin' and all!"

Harmon blinked impatiently.

"Say, what are you talking about? Are you crazy, or am I?"

"You can't see much from down there, can you?" asked the other.

"Not with all these sheds around me. I can't even see the New York skyline. Maybe I'd better—"

"And what ferry did you say it was?"

"Staten Island, I thought," Harmon answered, puzzled by this talkative ticket chopper. "But what has that got to do—Say, did that ass put me on the wrong ferry? Don't tell me this is the Jersey City boat! It looks diff—"

"Grab hold of that ladder," suggested the man above, "and come up here and take a look for yourself. I don't usually waste time on you chaps, but maybe you can get cured before you begin seein' pink elephants and what not. Look sharp now! Climb up."

Harmon climbed the iron rungs slowly. Three years before he would have taken them three at a time without losing breath. A large and muscular hand, roughened with wind and weather, yanked him up.

"Thanks," said Harmon, and looked around.

He grasped the rail, his mouth opening in blank dismay.

There was no sign of the New York skyline or anything else, as far as the eye could search in any direction—nothing but a blue-gray waste of water, rolling in oily smoothness to meet the blank line of horizon!

He stumbled to the side of the superstructure and looked ahead. The bow of the boat dipped slowly and showed a similar desert of water and unrelieved horizon. Harmon had never been at sea in his life, but he didn't need a naval education to realize that he was now—literally and figuratively.

The "hang-over" of the night before was swept away by the force of this sobering fact. He walked back to the officer, who had been watching him with an interested grin.

"I thought that would fetch you up," the latter commented. "Not seeing any blue mice or New York skyscrapers now, are you?"

"But I don't understand," muttered Harmon, shaking his head. "This is the ocean—and a steamship—"

"Right-o!" the other agreed shortly. "The North Atlantic, and the freighter Barbarossa, outward bound with 'orses, for Liverpool and his majesty's jolly old army—if we ever get the blighters there alive!"

"Horses! But what—what am I doing here?"

"A very fair question, too," agreed the man in the uniform cap readily. "And, not to make a short story long, you're 'ere to feed them same 'orses, and I'd advise you to get back aft under the poop deck, where you belong, my lad, before the old man, or maybe Grease Lunn, your foreman, finds you wanderin' loose on the bridge deck."

He turned to walk away, but Harmon grasped his arm—a surprisingly hard arm underneath the wrinkled blue serge.

"But, listen," the young man pleaded, "I must get this straight. I don't remember how I came aboard or anything. There is a mistake somewhere."

"D'you mean you don't remember signin' on at the vice-consul's office with the rest of the 'orse-feeders?"

Harmon shook his head decidedly.

"Well," the officer scratched his square chin judicially, "maybe you got a case of what they call aphasia, or a case of plain drunk—the job you signed on for ain't one for decent young fellows, and that's a fact—especially in wartime. Best be sure of what you say first. It ain't everybody will take the time to talk to you like I done, and Grease Lunn don't like chaps that claim they was shanghaied."

"Who says he was shanghaied?"

CHAPTER II.

HARMON MEETS A SOLDIER OF MISFORTUNE.

HARMON turned quickly around. Behind him stood a scowling man in a dirty white sweater and a dirtier gray cap—a broad, bow-legged person with long arms, cauliflower ears and a face protectively heavy of jaw and brow—a typical human punching-bag of the training camps.

"What's this bum tellin' you, Mr. Fay?" he snarled. "Claims he was shanghaied, does he?"

"Not exactly, Lunn," Fay answered carefully. "He hasn't claimed anything so far, except he doesn't remember comin' aboard in Brooklyn. It's none of my business, seein' as you're the foreman 'ere, but he's entitled to lay his complaint before the old man—"

"I'll give him somethin' to complain of!" Lunn started forward, one fist jerked back for the swing. Harmon stood his ground, though he had a feeling his guard would be weak against that onslaught.

Fay's large and capable hand interposed between them.

"Easy does it," he said coolly. "Discipline is discipline, mate, but there won't be no manhandlin' on this deck—not while I'm second mate on this bleedin', floatin' menagerie. Do all your scrappin' under the poop."

Lunn scowled threateningly for a moment, but only for a moment. There was something particularly clean and hard and unafraid about the seaman, schooled in the placid courage of the seas, so different from the ratlike ferocity of the docks. Lunn's little black eyes shifted uneasily.

"I ain't startin' nothin' yet," he growled. "But I ain't goin' to stand for any chatter from this bum here. He signed on wid the rest for forty bucks to make the trip—"

"I didn't sign on at all!" protested Harmon. "I was tricked into coming aboard by a fellow I met last night."

"Sure." Lunn's mouth twisted sidewise into a grin. "That's what they all say. You came from the labor agency wid the rest of the scum, an' now you want to squeal out of it. What's yer name?"

Harmon's fists clenched. "Richard Harmon."

"I t'ought so!" scoffed Lunn. "Think up another one. Here's my list I got from the shipper. They ain't no Harmon on it."

He shoved a much-thumbed piece of paper under Harmon's nose.

Fay turned to Harmon.

"Got any proof?" he asked.

Harmon slapped his pockets and produced the only papers in his possession—both bearing the name of Pete Lane. Lunn reached out and snatched them away.

"Here you are! Dere's de name—Pete Lane! Here it is on me list."

"This fellow Lane must have shoved it in my pocket," Harmon explained, "and put me on board in his place. This is outrageous! Why, look here! This Lane doesn't look like me at all. He's cross-eyed and about forty—"

"You'll be cross-eyed, too, if I take a crack at you," grated Lunn. "Get back there in the kennel wid the rest of the mutts an' get ready to feed them plugs, an' don't let's hear a yap outa you!"

Harmon looked at Fay, but the mate was not consoling.

"You'll have to do your duty with the rest, my man. You're down as Pete Lane, and you can't prove contrary to that. We don't carry a wireless, so you can't get in touch with the shore. If you 'ave a complaint you'll 'ave to make it on the other side through your consul, and maybe they'll ship you back as a stowaway.

"Fair is fair, an' you can see the old man when he wakes up, but he'll tell you the same. We don't carry passengers. You may be Pete Lane or Peter the bleedin' Great of Rooshia, but you'll 'ave to do your bit. Do it cheery-like an' willin' an' there won't any 'arm come to you."

He nodded shortly and walked off. Harmon turned for the ladder and found Lunn's out-thrust jaw a couple of inches away.

"And I'm your boss the whole way, see?"

Harmon shrugged with an assumption of disdain and climbed slowly down the iron rungs. The prospect of horse-feeding under "Grease" Lunn did not appear bright. Better a hundred years of Surfee.

He did not hear Lunn behind him. The foreman walked with the soft-footed tread of a cat. Harmon, stepping carefully along the aisle between the hatches and the horses, felt a strong grip on his coat collar and the seat of his trousers, and unwillingly but speedily he found himself pattering along the iron deck with Lunn urging him from the rear.

One of the special virtues of what is called the "bum's rush" is the inability of the man in front to interfere with the mo-

mentum of his reluctant travels. If his feet stop moving he goes ingloriously on his face. He proceeds rapidly, his feet slapping the ground in quick succession, his mind relieved of any responsibility in the matter but uneasy as to his destination. As a means of progression it is undignified.

A final heave from the motive power in the rear sent Harmon sailing through the door leading into the black hole where the horse-feeders lodged. He described a parabolic curve that ended on the stomach of a large, soft man who was yawning comfortably into wakefulness.

"Captain's come aboard!" some one called sarcastically.

Harmon rolled off the large man, whose yawn had ended in a gasp, and pounded him on the back to help him get his breath back. The object of the ministrations choked, rolled his eyes, snorted and sat up.

"What's up?" he wheezed. "That's no way to wake a man—"

"Sorry," Harmon apologized, feeling his own bruised head. "I didn't have anything to say about it. The foreman, Lunn, helped me through the door."

The large man waved the apology aside good naturedly and twisted the end of a fiery red mustache between a soiled forefinger and thumb.

"Lunn, hey? I've heard of him. He's got a reputation for bein' a bad *hombre* in this trade. Well, I've seen them bad and good in my day and I'm still alive and kickin'. You're the young feller that came aboard stewed last night, ain't you?"

Harmon nodded despondently.

"My name is Tuesday—Bob Tuesday, once known as Colonel Tuesday, down in Salvador, when I was in complete command of a regiment of eight men—but that don't count now. I'm just a bum like the rest of you, feedin' and nursin' a ship-load of crow-bait—"

"A soldier of fortune!" Harmon exclaimed, ignoring the uncomplimentary part of the speech, and shaking the extended hand.

"Soldier of misfortune'd be more like it, my boy. I never thought I'd come to this. It's a punishment. I backed the wrong horse and now I gotta take care of two hundred of them. It's foolish to gamble and sinful—"

His hand, groping in his coat-pocket—he had evidently slept in the coat from motives of caution—came out holding a pair of dice.

"This is what did me up," he muttered, shaking his head. "I ought to throw them overboard—there's no good ever comes of gambling. I betcha—"

He looked up speculatively. In spite of the years of maturity there was a kind of youthful enthusiasm in the blue eyes. The martial mustache seemed strangely artificial and grown-up.

"I betcha I couldn't roll a seven to save my life."

He trickled the cubes across the blanket carelessly, picked them up and rattled them thoughtfully.

"How long," asked Harmon, interrupting the seer, "is this trip going to last?"

"Hey? Oh, a couple of weeks. Let's see—this is the middle of April. We'll hit Liverpool about the first of the month. This is a slow tramp from the China trade. So a guy told me at the dock. It reminds me of the one I took one time to Chile with a cargo of mules. That captain played a mean poker game, believe me. By the time we got to Valparaiso I only owned one mule. I sold him to pay my passage back."

He smoothed the dingy blanket with his hand and rolled the dice out.

"Yes, sir, I'll chuck these things overboard right now and when I get to Liverpool I'm goin' to start saving—"

His eyes glistened. He pointed to the exposed faces of the dice and jumped to his feet, slapping himself on the chest.

"Read 'em! Little seven first throw! Lucky old Bob Tuesday—watch him roll 'em. Any of you gents got a quarter lookin' for a home? Step up, gents. I'm the horse's slippers an' I'm going to gallop right through you!"

"Grease" Lunn's bullet head appeared in the doorway. He pointed to Bob Tuesday's bulging chest.

"Hey, you! Come gallopin' out here an' bust open a bale of hay before I bust you on that red beak!"

"Talkin' to me?" asked Tuesday fiercely. "Just a minute, gents, till I attend to this bird."

He hitched up his trousers and swayed to the door. Whatever his method of attending to Lunn was to consist of was not made clear immediately, for just as he reached the door he caught a neat and smashing swing on the point of the jaw and landed back on the berth on top of Harmon.

"You know," he said five minutes later, after Harmon had thrown a pail of water on him, "it's lucky for that guy he was a pug. That swing I started would have taken his head off if it ever landed!"

CHAPTER III.

HARD LABOR.

"WHAT did you say your name was?" inquired a seedy individual in a broken derby. "You say Tuesday was it?"

The owner of the name nodded and felt his chin where Lunn had landed.

"Y'orter change it," suggested the derbied horse-feeder, with a toothless grin, "to Friday. If I ain't mistook Grease knocked you into the middle of next week."

Tuesday lifted his two hundred pounds off the creaking boards.

"Maybe you'd like to try and change the calendar yourself," he glowered, advancing slowly. The other man retreated through the door, backward.

"A fine bunch of rats for a man like me to be associatin' with," Tuesday confided to Harmon. "They tell me they can't get anything else nowadays, with the war in Europe and a good chance of being hit by a submarine an' havin' to swim around in the cold water with a couple of horses on your neck—"

"Submarines!" Harmon exclaimed. "Would they bother us?"

"Sure! We're carryin' horses for the Allies aren't we? An' a terrible lot of skinners they are too. But the shipper doesn't worry. He's paid before they come aboard. Likely most of 'em will die before we get to the other side anyway. All he does is pile a few bales of hay and feed on board, gather up a gang of bums down on their luck an' guys dodgin' the law an' maybe a gentleman of fortune like myself that's temporarily broke, and shoves us out in an old tub like this an' wishes us luck. If we get sunk they ain't much loss to any one."

"How about the officers and crew?" More than ever Harmon began to regret the comfortable desk under Surfee and the room in 110th Street.

"The crew," Tuesday said contemptuously, "are a lot of Chinks and they don't count an' the officers belong to the British merchant marine. It's all part of their job. Pretty decent guys but they got nothing to do with us. We're under Lunn—the same bird that I'm goin' to knock from under his hat before this trip is over!"

Harmon looked doubtful.

"That was an unfair blow," Tuesday said confidently. "I wasn't quite ready. I can lick that guy the best day he ever lived. You watch the next time he picks on me. There goes the whistle now! We gotta feed."

The frowzy crew of horse-handlers tumbled out into the bright sunlight, stretching and rubbing their bleary eyes. There was a pail of clean water on the nearest hatch and Harmon splashed some of it on his face and hands drying himself with his pocket-handkerchief. None of the others made an attempt at a morning toilette, even Bob Tuesday satisfying himself with a twirl of his red mustache and a long drink of water from a hose with which another of the gang was filling a dozen tin buckets.

Two men broke out a bale of hay from a pile under the bridge-deck and tumbled it down to the others who attacked it with pitch-forks, tossing the sweet-smelling fodder in heaps along the line of eager horses' heads. From above Grease Lunn directed operations.

"Grab a couple of dem pails an' do your stuff!" he shouted at Harmon. "Six of you guys get up for'ard an' water dem horses on the for'ard deck!"

Harmon tugged at the heavy pails, managed to lift them off the hatch after spill-

ing half the contents of one down his sleeve, and staggered to the nearest pair of horses. Four thirsty heads tried to fit into each pail. Harmon pushed aside the interlopers, spilled more water down his shoe-tops and rested the pails on a railing that held the feed-troughs.

The pails were heavy to carry and became heavier at each successive trip. There were one hundred horses on the aft deck and four men carrying water. By the time Harmon had satisfied twenty thirsty animals his back had a kink in it and his arms seemed about to leave their sockets. Once, when he had traveled to the furthermost end of the deck the Barbarossa gave a playful roll and Harmon and both pails landed in a heap. Lunn barked out a stream of oaths that cracked over Harmon's head like a whip.

Harmon stumbled back to replenish the pails.

"Talk about carrying water to the elephant," Tuesday puffed. "These are the thirstiest horses I've ever seen. You're lookin' kind of all in."

"I am," Harmon confessed. "I'm not used to it yet."

"I betcha you're sorry you ever signed on now. You're a kind of a decent young feller by the look of you. What did you do—rob a bank?"

"Hey, you!" Lunn's finger pointed at Harmon. "Keep movin' dem pails!"

After the watering there was hay to be spread, bags of oats to be opened and carried around to fill the feed-troughs. But all things come to an end sooner or later, and with the last hungry animal supplied, Lunn disappeared and Harmon threw himself down on a bale exhausted.

It had been years since he had done any kind of physical exercise beyond driving a high-powered car and stepping a tango and this wrestling with water-pails and feed-bags was real work. He could feel it in the ache of his muscles and the sting of blistered hands—fat muscles and soft hands unprepared for a sudden call to labor. And labor it was going to be by the look of things on the good ship Barbarossa.

He lay back, blinking in the glare of a cloudless sky, and took a mental inventory of the situation. Here he was, Richard Harmon, with no living relatives and no friends worthy of the name, without even a cigarette in his pockets, no money, no baggage, no prospects, on his way to a strange country that was at war, on board a dinky little boat that smelled like a livery stable and wallowed through the Atlantic at ten miles an hour or so, and with a crowd of fellow-passengers that represented the jetsam of the shores as the Barbarossa represented the flotsam of the seas.

Not a pleasant prospect—and still Harmon had sufficient sense of humor, which means a sense of balance, to be honest with himself and admit that no one was to blame but himself—not even the cross-eyed Pete Lane, who had regretted his oversea venture in time to put Harmon in his place.

Even if the floating stable reached Liverpool safely, Harmon would find it difficult to get funds to cable home—and if he did cable there was no one he could call on for funds—not the boon companions of the cabarets surely. He had no relatives living nearer than second cousins that he had never seen.

"Come on an' get your chow!"

Harmon looked around. Bob Tuesday and his recent enemy in the derby hat—who confessed to the name of Henberry—were carrying a steaming tin, about the size of a wash-boiler, aft toward the horsemen's quarters. Another man behind them, carried a platter of bread and a tin bucket of tea. Harmon rolled off the bale of hay stiffly and followed.

Later on, when the ozone and sunlight had done their part, Harmon was to appreciate the coarse, satisfying food. Right then it nauseated rather than attracted him. He passed up the greasy stew altogether and made a breakfast of tea and ship's bread, using one of the heavy earthenware cups, without handles, that lay in a box beneath the berths.

If his appetite was finicky that of the other men under the poop was not. They shoveled the stew on to their unwashed plates and shoveled it into their mouths. Tuesday, who had arrogated to himself the supervision of the food, distributed the thick slices of bread evenly and impartially.

His late defeat at the hands of Lunn had not humbled him to any extent. He blustered, swaggered, rapped the knuckles of Henberry when that individual tried to gather more than his share, and, tossed Harmon a pack of cigarettes when the meal was over.

"Smoke up, buddy," he waved his huge hand affably. "I know what it is to be without butts myself. I got plenty."

Harmon had an opportunity for the first time to examine his shipmates. They were what might be expected. A haphazard gathering of jobless and masterless men, broken men, fugitive men, listless men, the type that slouches in the bread-line and shivers in the parks—out of step with their more fortunate, more clever brethren who are not their keepers—men spawned and forgotten in the backwaters.

There was Lorrson with the gray, bedraggled mustache and the watery blue eyes, gazing out at the world after sixty years of dish-washing and odd-jobbing, with as little idea of what it was all about as he had at the beginning. There was Tressidon, the Cornishman, sobering up after a week on shore from a cattle-boat and ready to spend his hard-earned forty dollars on a spree as soon as the Barbarossa docked.

There was Francisco, the Porto Rican, with yellow, consumptive face and accordion, on which he fancied himself as an artist; and a brawny youth known as "Scotty" who was a harmless half-wit; and two unintelligible Poles—christened by Tuesday, North and South Pole—who were making their way back to their own country; and old Devlin, with one eye, a boozy ancient who had sailed before the mast in "windjammers" and knew at least three improper and improbable stories for every port in the civilized world.

He started on a long-winded yarn about a half-caste light of love he met in '87 in the Straits Settlements, and mumbled along toothlessly mouthing the risque glories of his youthful days. Harmon stepped outside where the air and the conversation was fresher and more healthful. Bob Tuesday joined him.

"Never did care much for them kind of tales, buddy," he said, tearing off an oversize bite from a plug of tobacco. "I remember one time I knocked the lights out of a guy down in Maracaibo—"

"Hey! Either of you guys know any-t'ing about horses?"

Grease Lunn's belligerent face looked down from the bridge-deck.

Tuesday slapped himself on the chest. "You bet I do! I was brung up—"

"I don't care a hoot where you was brung up. You may be a lion tamer or a bare-back rider. I'm askin' you can you doctor a sick plug?"

"Doctor 'em?" Tuesday laughed easily. "Lead me to it."

"Well, get those big dogs of yours movin' up for'ard. You come along too, Lane, to help him."

CHAPTER IV.

THE COMPLETE HORSE DOCTOR.

LUNN led the way along the bridge deck and they climbed down onto the forward deck, where a scaffolding similar to the one aft ran along both sides of the boat, protecting the horses from the heavy seas and salt spray. At the farther end the inside bar had been let down from a section and a big bay horse led out to the open deck.

He was lying down on a few handfuls of straw, heaving heavily and with the glassy look of approaching death already in his liquid eyes. A group of blue-overalled Chinese from the forecastle jabbered from their position overhead and pointed skinny forefingers. The officer on watch lounged behind the canvas windbreak of the bridge and watched proceedings.

Tuesday swaggered up with an important frown, folded his arms across his chest, twirled his mustache, scratched his head, and gazed down at the unfortunate animal for a couple of minutes, nodding sagely from time to time.

"What are yer tryin' to do—mesmerize him?" growled Lunn. "Quit tryin' the power of the human eye an' get busy."

"He needs a veterinarian," Tuesday observed, shaking his head.

Lunn spat forcibly on the deck. "Any darned fool knows that. Well, we ain't got no veterinarian on board—the guy who had the job got stewed somewhere. Here's a box of medicines. Figure 'em out. Maybe you're not so dumb as you look."

Tuesday pawed over the box, selected a bottle of reddish powder at random, smelled it, and sneezed violently.

"Kinda got in my nose," he opined, wiping his eyes and reading the label. "*Mercuric oxide.* This ought to do him some good."

He knelt down and put his ear to the horse's laboring chest, motioning Lunn and Harmon to silence. Then he stood up, dusted his knees off, and rolled up his coat sleeves, exposing a pair of thick forearms. He motioned Harmon to bring the box of medicines nearer.

"His heart is still goin', but his tubes ain't so good," Tuesday informed them. "What that animal needs is something heating and also in the line of a cathartic. Lots of horses get worse diseases. I wisht I had a nickel fer every horse I've treated in my day."

"Well, if you know them medicines," Lunn conceded, impressed in spite of himself, "go to it. What's this stuff you got here?"

"One of the best," Tuesday said. "We'll just take the chill off him with that. Got a bottle? There's one over there."

Harmon picked up an empty beer bottle that rolled in the scuppers and filled it with water under Tuesday's direction. The volunteer veterinarian dropped a generous portion of the red powder in the water and shook it up vigorously. He considered for a moment and then added a little from each of the other two bottles in the medicine box.

"Can't be too sure," he explained. "Now open his mouth."

Harmon pried the horse's teeth open and held his lower jaw firmly while Tuesday poured the mixture down.

"You're sure this will straighten him out?" Harmon asked, doubtfully eying the patient. "He looks kind of bad."

"Say, if I had a dollar for every one of them I've doctored—"

"You were talking nickels before," Lunn scowled. "You're gettin' kinda cocky about it."

He turned to look at the bay horse. "What the— Hey, what's up?"

The unfortunate animal had been in a bad way indeed, but Tuesday had put the finishing touch—the last straw in a life of hardship. The worn hoofs beat a tattoo on the deck, stiffened and stopped, and the haltered head flopped down.

Tuesday took a quick look at the skinny carcass and, grabbing his coat, tiptoed away. The moment did not seem appropriate for explanations.

Lunn straightened up and looked around for the amateur horse doctor.

"Fixed him, did you, you big bum?" he snarled, doubling his fists. "An' me docked fer every skinner that dies on the trip. Where did he go?"

Tuesday's head was just disappearing behind the bridge deck.

"I'll—I'll call him back," Harmon suggested, starting off.

Lunn jerked his head toward a door leading off the deck.

"Naw, you won't, buddy. You'd like to duck a job. Give 'em a shout down that door to the engine room to put steam on No. 1 winch. We'll swing this bag of bones to de sharks. Hey, you Chinks! T'row a rope down!"

Harmon, glad to escape the venomous vicinity of Grease Lunn, did as he was told. An answering shout from the rumbling inferno of sliding pistons and hot oil far below him came back, and a vapor of steam hissed from the machinery of the winch between the forward hatches. The tall boom swung out, and, with Lunn manipulating the levers, dropped its steel hook to the deck at the end of the cable.

The officer on the bridge barked an order, and the Chinese boson jabbered at the tawny crew. Skinny arms fastened the rope quickly about the horse's neck, hitched it around the steel hook and jumped clear, as Lunn shouted.

Harmon was not quick enough. Jerked from the deck by the pull of the steam-driven engine, the dead horse seemed to leap into life, one hoof swinging around

stiffly and catching Harmon neatly in the solar plexus. He fell back against the hatch, gasping for breath.

"Learn to look sharp, Moping Maggie," Lunn derided. "First thing you know he'll bite yer."

Dangling at the end of the cable, hoofs outspread, the horse seemed to be executing a kind of *danse macabre,* for the benefit of the gaping Chinese and horse handlers, as he revolved slowly and swung over the wooden scaffolding.

The other horses backed stamping to the rear of their shelter, nostrils wide and heads upthrown. Lunn let the hook and its burden down on top of the scaffolding a foot or two from the edge, and ready hands threw the bight of the rope from the hook.

"Shove him over! Give a hand there, you Lane!" Lunn shouted.

Harmon and Lorrson and a couple of others, tugging at halter and tail, edged the dead animal to the side. The body teetered on the edge.

"One—two—stand clear!"

Harmon, gripping the halter, felt the jerk of the dead horse's weight going over the side, felt himself pulled off his balance, had a frightening vision of the green water boiling alongside, and suddenly felt a strong hold dragging him to safety.

He turned gratefully. Bob Tuesday, releasing his grip, grinned.

"Not thinkin' of ridin' that horse, was you? You almost follered him in. It wouldn't 'a' been healthy, buddy. Watch him, now."

The horse, coming to the surface some distance behind, bobbed on the swell, an ear and a hip bone sticking above the water. Harmon watched the receding bulk, marveling at the rate with which it traveled with the surprise that sea voyagers experience when they discover that they are not, after all, standing still with churning propellers on a changeless ocean.

While he watched, a black fin cut the water near the dead horse. Another fin appeared on the other side. Far off now as it was, Harmon could see the water whipping into white foam about the animal.

"Sharks," Tuesday informed him.

Harmon shuddered.

"They follow a horse boat or a cattle boat for days," Tuesday went on. "Some of the guys what know say the sharks can smell the horses. Believe me, they'd not have to smell hard to trace this livery stable. Well, they's one poor beast that won't have to be blowed up in France. He's better off. Two weeks is all they figure on a horse's life at the front, and that's where these skinners are goin'."

He looked around, saw Grease Lunn's back turned, and walked back toward the poop.

Harmon followed.

"You figure, then, Bob," he laughed, "that you did the horse a favor. Tell the truth, what did you know about the medicines in that box?"

Tuesday rubbed his chin.

"Never heard of a darned one of them. I never doctored a horse in my life. The only thing I ever done is bet on them. But you wouldn't have me take water from that four-flusher Lunn, would you?"

CHAPTER V.

GREASE LUNN STARTS SOMETHING.

HARMON leaned over the railing of the poop deck and watched the swirl of the white and marbled wake the Barbarossa was leaving behind in its slow mile-by-mile, hour-by-hour, day-by-day crawl across the North Atlantic. Astern the widening wake tumbled, subsided, smoothed out, and melted into the even hair-line of the far horizon. Clear, shadowless, sparkling, the wide acres of the ocean, unbroken and to all appearances untouched by the hand of man, twinkled peacefully in the sunlight. It was a case where everything is beautiful and only the Barbarossa was vile.

Vile smelling it certainly was, as Harmon could sense from the rancid whiffs of seasick horses and uncleaned stalls that reached his nostrils. But the air on the poop was nectarine compared with the manifold and combined aromas of the horse feeders' quarters below. Choosing between the lords of creation and the dumb brutes, Harmon chose the horses gladly.

He shifted a bale of hay out of the way and sat on another bale, resting his feet comfortably on the railing. Two weeks before, when he landed aboard the horse boat, Harmon could not have budged that bale of hay without a struggle. He was hardening now. The ozone blowing freshly from the sea and the outdoor work of feeding, wrestling with feed bags and about every other job that Grease Lunn could find for Harmon to do—and Lunn seemed particularly anxious to give Harmon the hardest and most disagreeable of the work—had combined to recall to Harmon's flaccid muscles the strength that the "white lights" had dissipated.

But, given youth and a firm foundation of early athletics to work on, and two short weeks will work wonders in sinew and brawn. Harmon felt and looked now more like a man than he had for three years past.

Lunn's voice—snarling and strident, the high-pitched yapping of the dock-rat—came from the deck below. Harmon twisted about in his seat and looked down. He grinned joyfully when he discovered the source of the wordy uproar.

There were one hundred and ninety horses aboard the Barbarossa—the winches had made nine more trips to the side since Tuesday's medicinal experiment—and they were of all kinds and degrees, the worst degree being represented by a thin and malicious black mare in the middle of the starboard row aft. Harmon himself had barely missed the animal's teeth on the few occasions that brought him near her.

She had a habit of reaching out for the unwary passing between the hatch and the stall. Her disposition and the treatment she had been accorded by mankind were displayed in a dozen scars on her narrow forehead and nose; she had the mental outlook of a tortured leopard and was known to the horse handlers as the She-Devil. It was the She-Devil that Grease Lunn was having trouble with.

Evidently, in passing along the deck, he had gone inside the danger zone, and the mare had managed to grab hold of a mouthful of sweater, between the foreman's shoulders, and she seemed to have no intention of letting go. Unable to twist around, Lunn was venting his rage in rare and obscene oaths and futile backward blows with his right hand. With his left he was holding fast to a stall-stanchion to prevent being dragged closer to the pawing hoofs.

With every blow the mare jerked her head up, dragging the sweater halfway over Lunn's bullet-shaped head, and adding to his discomfiture. It was an unequal tug of war, and something was bound to give. There was a sound of tearing yarn, and Lunn landed on his face with a fraction of his sweater around his neck and most of the back of his shirt gone. The mare tossed her head triumphantly.

Lunn picked himself up, glared savagely around, and caught sight of old Lorrson emerging from the horsemen's quarters.

"Whyn't you give me a hand, damn you?"

"I ban not see you, Mr. Lunn," the old Swede protested mildly. "I yust was sleepin', an' I ban thinkin' I hear noise—"

"Aw, dry up!" Lunn turned venomous black eyes toward the mare. "I'll make you wish you was never born, horsey! Get up there on the scaffolding, Lorrson, and pull her head up high. Here's the halter rope!"

Lorrson did as he was told, without clearly understanding the reason. Standing above, he yanked the mare's nose into the air. Lunn looked around, saw a pitchfork lying near by, and grabbed it up by the pronged end. Wielding the handle as a club, he brought it down with sickening force on the mare's tender nose. She snorted and backed. Lunn struck again, bringing a spray of blood from a tiny cut beneath the mare's eye.

"I'll learn you," he shrieked, and poised for another stunning blow, as the mare's nose came down quickly.

She backed to the rear of the stall.

"What did you let go for, Lorrson?" Lunn panted. "Get back there!"

The old man climbed slowly down to the deck, shaking his head.

"You ban kill that horse, Mr. Lunn," he protested. "I yust think—"

"Of course I'm goin' to kill her. I'm

goin' to beat her lights out. I lost nine plugs, an' I can lose anodder. Pull her head up again, you!"

"Please, Mr. Lunn, you moost not hit her so much—"

"You blasted old square-head! You'll tell me what—"

His feet padded quickly on the deck, Lorrson threw up his arms in a vain attempt to guard his face, and received a paralyzing jab in the midriff that sent him toppling back against the hatch. He leaned over, gasping for wind, his blue-veined hands, gnarled and distorted by hard labor, clasped to his aching stomach, his face as gray as his bedraggled whiskers.

"Like it?" Lunn's lips twitched away from his stained teeth in a cold grin. He had forgotten the bleeding horse now that he had another object to vent his spleen on. He jerked his arm back again.

"Try dis one—"

But the second blow directed at the cowering Lorrson was stopped before it started—stopped by a sudden grasp and wrench from the rear that almost sent Lunn off his balance.

Harmon had been watching proceedings from the poop deck. The first swing of the fork handle on the mare's nose had brought Harmon off the hay bale—reluctantly, for he realized keenly enough the ability of Grease Lunn as a rough-and-tumble fighter. In spite of two weeks of the best of training Harmon hardly considered himself the foreman's equal.

But between fear of Lunn's prowess and indignation at the brutality to the unfortunate Lorrson, the latter feeling won out, Harmon had a shrewd suspicion, as the enraged Lunn swung around, that said Harmon was about to take a thorough licking for conscience sake.

Grease Lunn's system of fighting was simple. It was to hit first, hit hard, show no mercy and obey no known rules. With the class of men he dealt with—unschooled in self-defense and imperfect in physique—the system was successful.

It usually went no further than one blow, delivered when the other was off his guard, and several more delivered downward while Lunn had one knee on his opponent's chest. Kicking, gouging, holding, and head bumping depended on the prevailing public opinion at the moment of battle.

Lunn went through no preliminary sparring. He jerked his wrist from Harmon's grasp and crouched, drawing his chin down low and elevating his shoulders. His hands swung open before him, ready to strike or grab as the occasion warranted.

"Buttin' in, hey?" he muttered hoarsely, and moved quickly.

His first movement to the side was followed immediately by a leap to close quarters. Harmon struck blindly at the face that ducked beneath his arm, felt a smashing blow high up near the shoulder, and struck again as he fell backward, stopping Lunn's advance by a neat, though unintentional, straight to the broken nose.

It served to sting Lunn into furious action, and also gave Harmon a chance to scramble to his feet before the next rush. Somehow Harmon felt more confident in the heat of battle than he had before it started. He had forgotten to be afraid of Lunn, the man-killer.

As the foreman lunged in again with both arms flying, Harmon met the attack with a whipping right swing that side-swiped Lunn's unshaven jaw. The foreman lost his footing on the slippery, straw-strewn deck and fell, and Harmon felt his knuckles, hoping he had done as much damage to Lunn as to himself.

"Work your feet on him! Quick! Before he gets up!" Tuesday's throaty voice boomed in Harmon's ears unheeded. He waited for Lunn to get to his feet, pushing back the horse handlers who crowded into the open space.

The foreman edged forward, crouching, and suddenly rushed. Harmon felt his feet tripped from beneath him and the next thing he knew he was lying on his back with Lunn astride his chest, knee pinioning Harmon's right hand to the deck.

Lunn's little eyes, mere slits now, gleamed as he struck downward. Harmon's movement of his head to the side saved him from more than a scraping bruise on the cheek. He struggled to free himself, knowing the helplessness of his position.

Lunn grinned and pressed down more heavily. He seemed to be enjoying the prospect.

"I'll spoil dat map of yourn first, you—"

Harmon had a glimpse of Tuesday's red face over Lunn's shoulder and the shine of a water pail describing a rapid arc over Lunn's head.

The heavy tin clanged loudly as it struck Lunn and Harmon found himself underneath a regular football scrimmage, with half a dozen horse feeders piling on top of their foreman and all trying to hit him at once.

Harmon wriggled from beneath the heap.

"Hey, there! Pile off that chap!" a voice shouted from the bridge deck.

The second mate was leaning on the railing calmly overseeing the fray and chewing unhurriedly on the customary ragged cigar.

The horse feeders, aided by Harmon and Tuesday, disentangled themselves from the foreman. He lurched to his feet, swaying dizzily.

"One at a time," the mate shouted. "Don't let's 'ave any bally mutiny or I'll shove you all in the brig. Discipline is discipline, Lunn, an' you can 'ave 'elp if you can't 'andle them chaps. If you ask me, I'd say you brought it on yourself, but I'll see you get fair play if you want to take one of them chaps on single."

Lunn scowled and rubbed the spot where Tuesday's pail had landed. He hated the second mate and he hated the horse feeders, but he was not of the stuff that heroes are made of. He had received a couple of stiff jolts from Harmon and a neat clip over the head with a horse pail, sufficient to cool his ardor. He preferred old Lorrson as an antagonist.

"I ain't lookin' fer scraps," he whined. "Dis guy Lane started it."

"Righto. No one's askin' you to fight if you don't want. Now, get aft, you men, where you belong."

Tuesday swaggered back to the quarters arm linked with Harmon's.

"We won't hear nothin' from Grease Lunn this trip, buddy. He'll pipe down from now on. I know his kind. He'll open up like a roaring lion on his next trip when there's nobody but a bunch of poor hoboes to call his bluff."

He kicked the dented water bucket out of his way.

"Say! Didn't I ring that on his dome? I tole you I was goin' to lick that guy before this trip was over—an' I did!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE STARBOARD STAMPEDE.

HARMON awoke the next morning in the stuffy confines of the horse feeders' "black hole of Calcutta," feeling as if he were riding up and down in a fast passenger elevator, that had also a disconcerting habit of swinging sidewise when it reached the tenth story. He had an uneasy feeling in the pit of his stomach that the Barbarossa had been doing a combination of giant swing and gigantic "shimmy" most of the night.

He swung his feet to the floor, stood up to stretch, and found himself doing a graceful nose dive into the farthest corner. Picking himself up, he started back and landed with a rush on top of Tuesday, who was putting on his number eleven shoes, with one elbow braced around a wooden post that supported the upper berths.

"Kickin' up a bit, isn't it?" Tuesday said, wriggling clear from Harmon's hasty embrace. "That was my ear you was holdin'. Grab the post."

"Excuse me." Harmon made a jump for the post as everything tilted up in the air, missed the post, but caught hold of South Pole's foot on the downward slide and brought the surprised foreigner out of bed with a bump. He muttered reproachfully at Harmon and climbed back into the blankets.

The Barbarossa dipped into a hollow, nosed its way upward to the crest of a mountain of water and the screw rumbled beneath Harmon's feet as it raced under the exposed stern. From the decks came the thunder of horses' hoofs, from end to end of the boat, as the animals caught their footing staggering for equilibrium at every heave of the deck. Harmon, dressing, could hear the splash of water tumbling

over the sides of the scaffolding and gurgling out again through the scuppers.

"Swell job we'll have feedin' to-day," grumbled Tuesday. "Some of them poor plugs will go overboard if this keeps up."

"It's a wonder to me," Harmon said, getting into his once-fashionable coat, "they can stand up at all the way the tub is rolling."

"They gotta. None of 'em has room to lay down on these trips an' if they do they're a gone horse. The others will tramp 'em to death. I was hoping we wouldn't strike rough weather. First they'll get seasick an' then go off their feed an' they'll be dying like flies.

"I wish the guys that ship 'em had to go through what them poor nags do, standin' cold and sick for two or three weeks in dirty stalls with water up to their knees half the time an' nothin' to look forward to but bein' blowed up in the artillery—maybe them guys wouldn't be so hungry for a dollar."

"Well, everybody's making money out of the war," Harmon said philosophically. "My firm was selling munitions, too. Everybody's doing it."

"Them horses didn't start the war," Tuesday insisted. "They was shanghaied aboard same as you. But if we get torpedoed they won't get a place in the lifeboats like us. They can go down with the ship or break out an' swim around till the sharks gets 'em—"

The second mate appeared in the doorway. He was wearing a wet watch coat and sea boots. Water glistened on his red face.

"On deck, you chaps!" he ordered. "No feeding this morning. Water them blasted 'orses an' stand by for trouble. You take charge, Lane. The foreman is laid up. Rouse those men with a broom handle. Can't afford to 'ave any one else seasick. I'll have the water up for you right away."

"Yes, sir," Harmon answered promptly. "Is Lunn seasick?"

"Seasick or drunk, or both. Blowed if I know. Get all your hands out."

He disappeared, and Tuesday, appointing himself Harmon's assistant on the spot, bullied the reluctant horse feeders through the door.

Harmon waited for a moment for a chance to escape a wetting. It was a gray, drizzling day—gray in the wind-swept sky and gray on the rolling, white-capped ocean. The horses swayed, up to the hocks in the swirling water that crashed to the deck and boiled back to sea through the scuppers. In the center of the starboard row a hoof, with its gleaming horseshoe, stuck stiffly up into the air, showing where another animal had died during the night.

Harmon pushed through the horse feeders and made a run for the ladder leading to the bridge deck. He reached it just as the Barbarossa rolled and shipped several tons of Atlantic Ocean. Wet through, Harmon climbed up.

Watering was a ticklish business, especially up forward, where the seas were breaking over the frail wooden scaffolding with every roll of the ship. If a man managed to balance along the slippery deck and reach the wooden barrier with his pail intact, there was an even chance that it would be half sea water by the time it reached the horse.

Moreover, half the boards were down that divided one horse from another in the long row and the halter ropes, frayed by the wearing action of tossing heads, had almost all broken during the previous two weeks, and Lunn had not had them replaced. Beneath the shed horses were facing in all directions, and only the waist-high barrier and their own crowding—like the jamming aboard a subway express at rush hour—kept them in place.

Harmon directed the proceedings from the elevated position that Lunn had assumed, dividing the feeders into two sections for the forward deck and the aft deck, and spending his time hurrying back and forth. If he had felt seasick before, he had no time to think of it now—which is as good a cure as any. Once he passed the "old man," on his way to the chart house.

He was a lean, blue-eyed Welshman, who took his position as master of a thirty-five-hundred-ton freighter and his duties—which, since he stood no watches, were not heavy—with becoming gravity.

"You in charge of that crew now?" he questioned sharply.

"That's right," Harmon nodded.

The third engineer, up from the inferno for a breath of air and nicotine, nudged Harmon, and he amended his reply to a prompt "Yes, sir."

"Keep your eye on that scaffolding for-'ard. That's where the pounding is. It won't last at this rate. If the damned lubber that built it and turned my ship into a blasted menagerie had any sense he'd 'a' made it fast right. I'll have blurry horses walkin' through my stateroom first thing I know."

"By the way, captain," Harmon said, glad of the opportunity, "I—er—came aboard kind of unwillingly. What are the chances of getting back to the States?"

"Getting back? I've nothing to do with that. See the owner's representatives in London. Maybe they'll let you work your way back cleaning ship, though we have usually more hands than we want—"

Crash! The ship shook with the force of the comber that struck the forward deck. To Harmon's startled ears came the sound of splintering wood and a series of minor crashes, a wild scramble of hoofs and the frightened shouts of the horse handlers. He darted in the direction of the sound, stopping at the top of the ladder leading to the forward deck.

Below him was chaos.

For a distance of thirty or forty feet along the starboard side of the Barbarossa the shed protecting the horses had been carried away—smashed inward by the terrific force of the water tonnage. Struggling in the water that washed the deck, underneath, around and between the planks, beams and boards that were strewn everywhere, were some fifty horses.

Half a dozen scrambled for a footing on top of the hatches. Others appeared in a tangle of snorting heads and pawing hoofs. Two lay beneath heavy beams that had fallen when the shed gave way. The rest stumbled and slid here and there, wide-eyed with fear, crashing into the port-side shed and threatening to break open the remaining barrier that kept back the frightened animals across the way. The feeders clung to the ladders out of reach of the bedlam below.

As Harmon watched, uncertain what to do or where to start straightening out the mess, the Barbarossa pitched into the trough of a wave, one of the panic-stricken horses jumped to the top of a pile of broken beams, and, struggling to regain his balance, tumbled into the sea.

"Come on, you fellows," Harmon called, starting down the ladder. "We'll lose 'em all in a minute."

He wasn't particularly anxious to venture down into that bedlam. Fifty milling horses in a confined space are bad enough on land, but on a pitching deck with one side practically open to the sea, the prospect was not enticing. The horse feeders hung back.

Tuesday appeared suddenly at the bottom of the ladder and pushed by Harmon, jumping to the deck.

"Just let me handle this, buddy. I'll gather them wandering sheep in."

"Watch your step," Harmon cautioned doubtfully. "It isn't as easy as— Look out! Look—"

His warning was too late. Tuesday, grabbing a plunging horse by the headstall, had his back turned for a moment. The Barbarossa lifted her bow high in the air, an avalanche of horseflesh slid, with a thunder of hoofs, along the deck, and Tuesday disappeared underneath. Harmon took a flying leap into the midst of the mêlée.

He had a glimpse of a horse's belly over his head, as the animal reared. Harmon ducked beneath the lashing legs, felt the glancing blow of another horse that was kicking on its back, and reached Tuesday. The big man lay face upward, blood flowing from a cut on his forehead, unconscious of the iron-shod death that pounded the deck and pawed the air around him. A dappled gray animal—a heavy Percheron breed—lay dead, his broken neck across Tuesday's knees, pinning them to the deck.

Harmon struck at the horse that reared overhead, turning him aside, and tugged at Tuesday's shoulders to drag him away. He heaved frantically, fearful of another such roll of the Barbarossa, sending another

crushing stampede on top of both of them. He reached the shelter of the engine room door just in time and dragged the senseless man inside. There was no time to see how badly he was hurt. The deck was becoming a hell of frenzied horses.

As Harmon stepped out again to the open he grabbed a halter rope that whipped by the door and clung on at the risk of being crushed against the hatch. The ship wallowed in the trough of a wave and a green flood smashed on to the deck. Harmon struggled knee deep for his balance.

"Hold this one," he called to Lorrson. "The rest of you herd them up for'ard. Quick! Before they get started again!"

With the wreckage of the scaffolding the frightened horse handlers threw up a temporary barricade, the Chinese of the crew driven by the second mate lashing the boards together with ropes and broken halters and whatever came handy. Wedged into the narrow confines, part of the cargo —badly cut about the legs—were made safe for the time being.

The others, except for two that went overboard from the lurching deck, were gathered in as they careened by. The ship's carpenter, aided by the crew, started to work on the fallen shed with hammers and nails and pieces of old canvas, while Harmon and Tressidon, who seemed to know something about the business, doctored cut legs and fetlocks with a mixture of sulphur and lard.

It was a busy morning on board the Barbarossa.

Tuesday showed up with a bandaged head in time for a late breakfast in the horse handlers' quarters.

"Some kick I got," he grinned. "But it ain't a marker to the kick the old man gave Lunn when he found him duckin' the mess back there. The skipper put him to work shootin' them two horses with the broken legs. That makes an even six gone, countin' the one that broke his neck trippin' over my feet—or so they say—and three overboard.

"The winches will be busy this afternoon. I'm goin' to hit the hay for a couple of hours till they call us. I'm soaked. Say, there's been some excitement on this trip, hey? I wouldn't miss it for anything. Better than traveling with them Willy-boys on the Lusitania in a dress suit."

Harmon shivered in his wet clothes and buried his face in a mug of hot coffee, satisfying in spite of its taste of boiled rubber boots and rancid cigars. He rubbed his shoulder where a horseshoe had left its imprint.

"Sure. It's lots of fun. More—er—excitement, as you say. You can have it, old man. If the Barbarossa is the only ship I can climb aboard, I'll wait until they build a tunnel across. I don't want to see a horse for the rest of my life."

Tuesday lay back on the berth and looked at his toes, which was an easy matter since all ten protruded from holes in his socks.

"We get in to-morrow. What are you goin' to do? Enlist in the war?"

Harmon laughed. "I see myself enlisting. Darned if I know what to do. What are you going in for yourself?"

"Darned if I know, either," Tuesday grunted and rolled into his blanket.

"One thing I won't do," Harmon maintained, "and that's go to war!"

"Nor me," Tuesday scoffed. "Not this one. I've had plenty. No, siree!"

On which valiant assertion they rested, unaware of the intangible and groping tentacles of war that were spread over the world, searching for the adventurous or foolhardy or restless, touching drab lives with the glamour of a lost romance, drawing far-off sons into the fighting fold, gathering the brave and faint of heart for the trial by fire, reaching over land and sea—even to the Barbarossa, plowing through a leaden ocean with its cargo of doomed horses and masterless men, ignorant of their destinies.

CHAPTER VII.

A SEA CAPTAIN AND A SERGEANT-MAJOR.

THE second assistant to the first assistant to the assistant American vice-consul paused in his duties of filling inkwells in the anteroom and meditating on affairs of state, to look disapprovingly

at Harmon and Bob Tuesday. When a man has risen by his own unaided efforts from the lowly position of door-opening to the responsible post of inkwell filler, he is entitled to be approached more respectfully.

"I'm afraid we can't do anything for you here," he said, quoting an oft-repeated speech of the assistant-assistant to the prospective borrowers. "We have no funds available for stranded Americans. You'll have to apply elsewhere. There is a committee for that sort of thing somewhere. Of course, as distressed seamen—"

"Nothing about seamen," broke in Tuesday belligerently. "This guy has to get back home, he says. Me too. I've had enough of London. We need some dough to cable. Is your boss in?"

"No," the thin young man frowned, "and I told you we can't do anything for you. I don't know why you fellows keep drifting over here broke. How did you come over anyway?"

"On a boat," Tuesday shouted, "with some horses. An' we got forty bucks for the job, and now we're spent out."

"Find some more horses," suggested the thin young man lightly, "and take a boat back. I've got some important business—"

"Look here, young feller," Tuesday bellowed, hitching up his trousers and slamming a large hand down on the desk, "we are American citizens and—"

"I'll take your names." The second assistant to the first assistant reached hurriedly for a pen. "The assistant viceconsul will be back in about a week, and he may write over for instructions or something and then if you can identify yourselves satisfactorily—"

"Hell! That's goin' to take a month. We'll be dead—starved to death—by that time."

"That would solve it, too," nodded the thin young man. "You've got a seaman's discharge, I suppose."

Harmon handed his discharge over. It had rested in his pocket since he received it at Liverpool.

"Lane," the office man read. "What's this you're giving me? You're a native Britisher!"

Harmon explained, shutting off Tuesday, who was suggesting in a hoarse whisper to Harmon to "punch him in the jaw." The young man shook his head, yawned, and looked out the window.

"Not a chance," he said when Harmon finished. "Even if you were an American citizen, it wouldn't make much difference—"

"But what are you here for?" Harmon exclaimed hotly. "I thought your job was to take care of Americans—"

"Wait a minute!" the other interrupted, struck by a brilliant thought. "I've got the very thing for you and your friend here. Why not take a ship for somewhere? There's a man over there looking for hands to ship for South Africa. Nice long cruise and a chance to see the world!"

"South Africa," Harmon murmured. "It's a long way from home."

"Is that where the diamond mines are?" questioned Tuesday eagerly.

"Exactly. Diamonds and rubies and everything. Oh, Captain Jones!"

A huge lump of a man, bigger than Tuesday, left the counter that he had been leaning against and lumbered up to the desk. The tweed suit he wore would have been two sizes too large for Harmon, tall as he was, but it wrinkled tightly over Captain Jones's swelling biceps and stretched dangerously across the bulky chest. He frowned from beneath a bowler hat, set low over a bulging forehead, and shoved out a hand as big as a bunch of ripe bananas, but quite a lot hairier.

"Glad to know you," he rumbled, releasing Harmon's paralyzed digits. "Lookin' fer a ship, hey? Trip to Cape Town and back suit you?"

"Let's go, cap," Tuesday said jovially. "Cape Town's my meat! We'll get along fine together."

Captain Jones's somber eye measured him as if for future reference.

"We'll get along all right," he said slowly and meaningly. "I never have much trouble on my ship."

He turned to Harmon. "Been to sea before?"

Harmon nodded. "Not—not much, though."

"I'll make seamen out of both of you. Just follow me now. I've got to go down to the shipping office and get my articles. Sharp, now. I'm late."

They followed him out the door and down the steps, under the drooping American flag. Captain Jones, like a man who is accustomed to being obeyed, forged straight ahead through the twisting, narrow streets, shouldering passers-by unceremoniously out of the way. He did not even look behind.

Harmon and Tuesday trotted along in the rear, the latter in the best of spirits, the former doubtful of the whole proceeding. A week's sojourn in London town, living together in a lodging house, had taught Harmon to distrust Tuesday's ready enthusiasms.

"Say, Bob," Harmon whispered, as they turned into Lower Thames Street toward London Docks, "have you any idea how far it is to South Africa?"

"Darned if I know—coupla hundred miles."

"Somewhere around six thousand miles, as the crow flies—and we're not crows. We are going to be a couple of months on board ship with this big boy, and I don't like the looks of those hams he calls hands. He'll be a tough boss—and on board ship the captain is the boss. The farther I go, the less I like the way he swings his arms."

Tuesday watched the broad shoulders in front pushing through the crowd, took another look at the big bowler hat set above a thick neck, and thought of the possibilities of a long ocean voyage. The life of a sailor on the ocean wave began to lose its attraction. There was something very uncompromising about Captain Jones.

"Not so good," Tuesday admitted. "I have a feeling him and me wouldn't hit it off together after all. He weighs about three hundred and ten—all muscle."

"Well," Harmon grinned, "you made the arrangements. Tell him we've changed our minds."

Tuesday shook his head. "Maybe he hasn't changed his. I'm duckin' now."

He tugged at Harmon's sleeve and turned off into an alley on the left, beckoning to Harmon to follow. Once around the corner Tuesday took it on the run. Harmon stared, laughed, and followed, leaving Captain Jones plowing his way through the noonday clerks and landlubbers, on his way to the shipping office, serenely unconscious that his two prospects had deserted.

Harmon did not catch up with the hurrying Tuesday until he had reached Bishopsgate Street, several squares away. Tuesday stopped and wiped his perspiring forehead with a soiled handkerchief. It was the only one he possessed. His baggage, Harmon had discovered, consisted of a toothbrush, a pack of cards, a bottle of whisky and an extra shirt. Tuesday believed in traveling light.

"Phew! Gettin' hot here," he puffed. "I'm not the runner I used to be. Now, what's the next move? Get a job, I suppose. I wisht I hadn't rolled the bones with that guy in Liverpool."

Harmon nodded soberly. He wished Tuesday hadn't, too. He had a sneaking fondness for the self-styled soldier of fortune, and it went against the grain to see him in want of a meal or a night's lodging. But forty dollars doesn't go far even in England with two to support. The steamship company had paid Harmon's fare to London, thereby repatriating Pete Lane and closing the incident. Tuesday had elected to go along rather than work his way back on the Barbarossa. Alone for the first time in a strange land, Harmon had been glad to have him.

They strolled back through Cheapside, diverged off through Paternoster Row, and wandered along Fleet Street and the Strand. Neither had been in that busy section of London during their few days. Harmon jingled two shillings in his pocket and frowned moodily, while Tuesday read the heavy headlines on the news-stands.

"Lusitania sunk! Get that, Dick! Eleven hundred and fifty-three drowned. One hundred and fourteen Americans. Well! Well! What d'ye know about that? I'll bet the Germans had a hand in that. Say, this war is gettin' terrible."

They turned into Trafalgar Square. Above the heads of the resting stone lions of the monument wide bunting blazed forth its announcement: "England Expects Every Man To Do His Duty!" Across

the façade of a huge store facing on the broad square six-foot letters carried the slogan: "Kitchener Wants a Million Men!"

"Who's this guy Kitchener?" Tuesday asked. "The name's familiar."

Harmon did not answer readily. He was getting used to some of the abysmal ignorances of his traveling companion. Besides, there were more important matters to consider—such, for instance, as whether or not a young man could sleep comfortably on a park bench, without being asked for the customary ticket by the park ticket collector. To a young man with two shillings and a hungry friend these matters are as important as the fall of empires or the ambitions of kaisers.

Around the base of the monument a miscellaneous crowd seethed in the fervor of the war spirit. Above their heads fluttered a cluster of flags. A spruce sergeant-major, with swagger stick and waxed mustache, harangued, pleaded, argued, besought them to join the colors. A brass band pounded along with every brazen throat to the stirring notes of "Tipperary."

The crowd cheered. Tuesday joined heartily from the outskirts, waving a battered felt hat in time to the sound of the bass drum. His eyes shone with the naïve enjoyment of a small boy watching a circus parade.

The trim sergeant-major pointed his swagger stick at the crowd. His voice rang out with the clarion call of one preaching a crusade—the ancient call to arms to resist oppression, to join the forces of righteousness against the powers of darkness. His keen eyes probed in to the faces of the men below him, trying to reach the secret corners of their hearts—trying to touch them with the fire of his own enthusiasm.

He was terribly in earnest—not a regular soldier type, but rather a man wisely chosen for a special work on account of the driving force within him.

"Come now!" he cried. "Now—before it's too late! The Hun is at the gate—at the gates of London! Our London! Our England! You heard what he did in Belgium. Do you want to see his guns parked here in Trafalgar Square? Do you want to see the horrors of Louvain here at your doorsteps? He is breaking through. A million men are needed now—now—now! Kitchener wants them—the country needs them—a million Englishmen to fight with their backs to the wall for king and country—for their women and children—for their homes and firesides! For England! For old England and the right!"

His voice dropped another octave.

"I've been over there. I've seen them—the hordes of Kaiser Wilhelm pouring through a land of blazing homes and outraged people—pouring through from the east—thousands of them—millions—horse, foot and guns! Listen, and you can hear the roar of their guns blasting through to Calais! Coming closer every day—every hour—while Englishmen wait. Wake up! Wake up before it's too late! Who'll come up here and stand beside me for freedom?"

His eyes searched the faces of the men, caught sight of Bob Tuesday's gleaming red face above the others, and the swagger stick pointed.

"You!" he called. "Kitchener wants you! Step up, man!"

Tuesday grinned feebly and started through the crowd.

"Hey!" Harmon called. "Where are you going?"

"Darned if I know. This guy wants to see me about something. I don't get it all, but it sounds like he's startin' a revolution here, an' that's my gravy. I was in one wunst in Costa Rica started just like this."

The crowd gave way and cheered as Tuesday jumped to the platform. He hitched up his torn trousers, grinned, and ducked his head in acknowledgment.

"Gents," he shouted, "this guy's got the right dope. We'll start off right here in the plaza before the guns get here. Tuesday's my name—Colonel Tuesday from America, an' believe me—"

"America! You hear that?" the sergeant-major cried. He was a man of ready wit and by virtue of his calling an opportunist. "America is coming in! Who hesitates now? Three rousing cheers for America! Hip! Hip!"

Loud huzzas roared from the crowd, drowning the ear-splitting blare of the band.

Two more men leaped to the platform. Others followed—silk-hatted men, unshaven men, men with sweatcloths about their hairy throats, and men fresh from the tailors of Bond Street—all touched with the flame of sacrifice, wise men and fools, princes and paupers and prize fighters and preachers, caste and class and creed for the moment forgotten.

The spring of 1915 saw strange sights in old London town.

The sergeant-major motioned to the bandmaster. The band swung into formation and started a lively quick step across the square. Behind them, marshaled by the sergeant-major, marched the recruits, Piccadilly and Limehouse, Mayfair and Whitechapel, Oxford Circus and Canning Town, side by side. As the column swung into Whitehall new blood joined it from the crowds on the sidewalks.

Harmon pushed through to where Tuesday, right up in front, strode along, bowing right and left in acknowledgment of the cheers that greeted the recruits along their line of march.

"You poor bonehead"—he nudged Tuesday out of his trance—"do you know what you're doing? These fellows are enlisting in the British—"

"Keep in line now like a good chap," the sergeant-major urged, touching Harmon's back with his stick. "We haven't got far to go now."

CHAPTER VIII.

TWO GO TO WAR.

HARMON marched along for some time in silence. He could not have made himself heard even if Tuesday wanted to listen. The straggling column of nondescript and assorted citizenry were wafted on their way on a wave of sound—shouts, hurrahs, bursts of handclapping, and the din from a brass band directly in front and doing its level best to dominate the bedlam.

Harmon turned to the man marching by his side—an elderly person in the stiff collar and worn frock coat of the clerical class, obviously unfitted for military service, but striding along with his cane held sword-fashion and his chin held high.

"Where are we going?" shouted Harmon.

The clerk looked faintly surprised.

"Eh? Going? To the Horse Guards Parade, of course! We apply there for enlistment—the London Light Infantry is the regiment. Fancy not knowing that! I say, there go the Guards! Ripping, isn't it!"

The route taken by the recruiting march was roundabout so as to pick up as many as possible, instead of directly to the finishing point, and they had reached the intersection of Victoria Street and Buckingham Palace Road. The bandmaster threw up his baton, the bobby at the crossing held his white-gloved hand up and the recruiting column came to a quick halt, stumbling on the heels of those in front.

A military band in bright scarlet gold-braided tunics, huge bearskin shakos on their heads, swung smartly across the street intersection. Behind them tall young giants, automatons in khaki, stepped in perfect rhythm, every shining rifle and gleaming bayonet in line at the slope, every polished brass button and buckle in place along the rigid lines, every arm swinging in cadence.

Along the flanks stalked drill sergeants with mustaches waxed to needle points, and sergeant-majors with silver-headed sticks, and the royal coat of arms embroidered on their sleeves. The officers, slight in comparison to the stalwart six-footers they led, marched in front, long swords held at arm's length and upright before them.

"Our Guards," the clerkly one proudly informed Harmon, "Grenadier Guards from Chelsea Barracks. They're on their way to Buckingham Palace to change the guard—take turns, you know, with the Scots Guards. You're a stranger, I fancy."

"I'm an American," Harmon answered.

"Really? Jolly of you to come over here to help us out. But don't say anything about that to the recruiting officer. There's no Foreign Legion, you know, in the British Army. Foreigners aren't eligible. You can't be too careful, you know. They turn you down for the slightest thing. I've been rejected four times already. I'm hoping this time—"

"Well, they're not going to get a chance to reject me. No, thanks."

"But what are you doing here, then?"

"Doing?" Harmon exclaimed impatiently. "I'm trying to get to that big bum up in front and—"

He was interrupted by a slight disturbance in front. Tuesday was trying to push his way through toward the passing Guards.

"Let's go!" he urged. "If they ain't no revolution startin', I'll join up with that gang there in the red sweaters—"

The sergeant-major held him back and looked around for help. Half a dozen arms gripped Tuesday. Horror was reflected on every face.

"I say"—the sergeant-major's hoarse voice announced the awful fact—"he was about to walk through the center of the king's guard — the Buckingham Palace guard!"

"Good Lord!" the clerkly man murmured. "What a disgrace! The king's—"

"All right—all right!" Tuesday snorted. "I wasn't goin' to hurt them none. I thought it was just another parade."

The band started with renewed zest and the column followed the winding route that ended on the broad open space of the Horse Guards Parade.

Temporary huts were scattered here and there. Recruiting meetings were going on everywhere with flags and bass drums and perspiring speakers. Lines of men waited outside the huts for their turn to sign up and get their physical examination. Open motor trucks rolled in and out, carrying banners and festooned flags. It reminded Harmon of a red-hot election campaign back home.

Enthusiasm is contagious—when the sun shines brightly in a spring sky and everywhere is color and movement. Harmon began to feel that a soldier's life might not be so bad. The sergeant-major bustled along the line, shepherding his flock in the direction of one of the canvas huts.

Harmon sought out Tuesday, who was engaged in telling a long and improbable tale of a South American revolution to two admiring individuals in shabby clothes.

"Still think you'd like to join up?" Harmon queried.

"Sure thing!" Tuesday grinned. "Havin' the time of my life. Might look around though, first. I wonder what that outfit is?"

He pointed to a near-by queue of men waiting outside an enlistment hut. The sergeant-major was out of sight.

Tuesday ducked quickly across to the line.

"What's this, buddy?" he asked the last man. "The regiment, I mean?"

"Welsh Horse," he answered. "Come on in. Jolly good chance to see action, and you'll have a horse to—"

"Not me. I've seen plenty of horses for awhile. I know when I'm well off." He slipped back to his place.

"You know," Harmon said doubtfully, "I'm not sure—we might still get a job without enlisting—"

"Step up, now," the sergeant-major urged. "Keep moving. We'll start a new batch with you two. In you go, and the best of luck!"

He pushed Tuesday and Harmon jovially through a doorway, and they found themselves before a table behind which sat several men in uniform.

A keen and businesslike young subaltern pulled a blue form toward him and dipped his pen in the ink.

"Name! Age! Address! Married or Single! Birthplace!"

All were given to him. When Harmon answered the last question, giving New York City as his place of birth, the officer leaned back, looking hurt. He had the pained expression of one detecting his opponent cheating at cards.

"No," he said testily. "That won't do at all. We can't enlist foreigners. You mustn't say such things here."

A sergeant slipped up behind the two Americans.

"Born in England—London," he whispered. The officer hummed and looked out the window and stroked his unsuccessful mustache.

"Come now," he said. "Let's have it again. Birthplace?"

"England," Harmon grinned. The other questions answered he signed where directed, agreeing to serve in the armies of

his majesty for three years or "the duration of the war." Tuesday, tongue in cheek, painfully scrawled a fair imitation of "Bob Tuesday" when his turn came.

The officer tossed two half crowns across the table. Harmon looked at them, uncertain what to do.

"Pick 'em up," the officer snapped. "One for each of you. You've signed for them. Righto! Now pass through there for your physical examination. Sharp now! Next man!"

Twenty minutes later Harmon and Tuesday stepped back into the sunlight full-fledged members of his majesty's London Light Infantry. Harmon was still wondering. Tuesday tossed his half crown in the air, caught it neatly and pointed a large forefinger toward Whitehall.

"Over there, beyond the two guys on horseback, I seen a barroom. Let's go an' wet our whistles with a little snifter of warm ale. We got the price now an' the drinks is on the king, anyway. Say, I thought we done away with the kings in 1776. You was tellin' me your folks was in that scrap. I thought we came over here an' chased the king out."

"If we did you and I will have to make up for it now by taking a crack at his enemies," Harmon laughed. "Well, it's better than sleeping in the park. They'll have to feed us, anyway."

In the dingy atmosphere of the barroom the two new recruits sipped the warm English ale by themselves in a corner until Tuesday caught sight of a man in uniform with the brass letters L. L. I. on his shoulder straps, and invited him over to join them.

"We just joined your outfit, buddy. The London Light Infantry. We're goin' to the trainin' depot in the morning. Here's how!"

The soldier wiped his drooping mustache with the back of his hand and set down his glass. He was evidently a man direct of speech.

"More blurry fool, you," he said, discouragingly. "You'll find the trainin' depot the 'ottest spot you ever landed in, I'll take my oath. I don't drink no man's beer an' tell 'im lies. If you want discipline an' you can take punishment, then the trainin' depot is the werry place for you. But if you'll take my advice, mates, you'll 'op it now before they gets you in uniform. They's easier jobs goin' nor that billet."

"Maybe we—we won't find it so bad," faltered Harmon.

"Bad?" The soldier shook his head. "I'm not in the recruitin' line, mate. I'm givin' you straight talk. You'll find the 'ardest lot of drill sergeants in the world right in that same trainin' depot. I was through it ten years ago an' I wouldn't 'ave it again for no money. You'll bleedin' well wish you was dead an' buried before you're through."

With this cheerful reflection he finished his beer and wandered off.

Harmon looked at Tuesday, the man who had started this stampede into the army, and looked as doleful as the soldier who had just left.

"You know what I think, Bob?"

"What?" Tuesday asked uneasily.

"I think we've got ourselves into a fine mess. Tell the truth, how much military experience have you had?"

Tuesday coughed, rubbed the back of his neck and grinned pleasantly.

"Why, not so much, Dick," he confessed. "That war I was in down in South America only lasted two days an' I was the only guy owned a gun in my squad. Mostly I worked as a fireman on one of them fruit steamers. But I seen a lot of fightin' in my time."

Harmon nodded.

"Something tells me you'll see a lot more before we get out, too."

CHAPTER IX.

THE LION TAMERS OF CAMBERHAM.

THE London Light Infantry thought pretty well of itself and there is no denying it had a right to be proud of its historic past. Organized to follow Marlborough to France and the Netherlands in the very beginning of the eighteenth century, it had inscribed on its roll of honor the names of most of the battles engaged in by British soldiers, from Blenheim, Ra-

millies, Oudenarde, and Malplaquet, right down through Napoleonic times—when it drank its beer and stacked its muskets in the plazas of peninsular Spain—gathering the laurels of Waterloo and later on the frozen victories of the Crimea.

Its battalions chased the Mad Mahdi in the Soudan and took their licking with the rest in the South African veldts, lost at Saratoga and retrieved its fortunes at Sebastopol. Its stubborn squares had held their ground on field and desert and jungle, in spite of bullet and spear, blazing sun and blasting cold, charging curassier and screaming savage—and it believed firmly in the virtues of discipline.

Its barracks were on the outskirts of London—near Woolwich—and consisted of a solid block of ancient, smoke-incrusted buildings facing on an asphalted drill square, and housed in peace time a single battalion. Now, with twelve battalions in France and two at Gallipoli, it was used as a clearing station for the drafts that went off at irregular intervals to the war.

Being a regular army unit the London Light Infantry had its nucleus of professional officers and soldiers—enlisted for three years with the colors and nine with the reserve—some of them in France, remnants of the First Hundred Thousand, and others instructing in the training depot the hordes of recruits crowding in as volunteers for the duration of the war.

And being a regular army regiment, and a proud one to boot, the recruits were hidden discreetly from sight at the training depot in Surrey, at a place called Camberham, until they were fit to be seen and acknowledged as London Light Infantrymen.

It was to Camberham that Harmon and Bob Tuesday were sent, as raw material might be sent to the factory to be beaten into shape, and molded to form and sandpapered and hand rubbed—and incidentally sworn at and chased around and hectored and shouted at and turned out as a finished product, a first class fighting man, model 1915.

There were other factories in England turning out soldiers, just as there were factories for airplanes and machine guns and steel helmets and all the necessary equipment for the intricate and colossal business of war, but the L. L. I. prided themselves justly on the thoroughness and efficiency of theirs.

"After a man's passed through Camberham," they boasted, "nothing will scare him. He'll find a battle-field a quiet, healthy place by comparison."

Harmon and Tuesday, disembarking from the third class compartment, with a motley assortment of recruits, the following morning, made their way up a long, rocky hill to a plateau, where the recruit depot stood.

It covered about fifty acres of ground, and was mostly three-story stone barrack buildings, a lot of temporary wooden huts and a spacious drill ground covered with coarse, yellow gravel. All the barracks and huts faced on the drill ground, with the barrack church, Y. M. C. A., auditorium, headquarters, and officers' mess taking up one side, the whole surrounded by a high brick wall with barbwire atop, and an archway spanning the entrance gate, with the guard room conveniently near.

As the recruits struggled in through the gateway, a stiffly erect and frowning sergeant-major assigned them in groups to middle-aged, time-served soldiers—old reservists whose duty it was to take charge of the recruit huts and preserve order and decorum.

The sergeant-major pointed his stick at Harmon and Tuesday.

"You and you! Number nine hut! Stand over there!"

They did as they were told, finding themselves assigned to a veteran with drooping mustaches and cheerful, beery eyes.

"Now, you men," the sergeant-major snapped, glaring from under the shiny visor of his cap, "I'll give you a bit of advice. A good start is a good ending. You're 'ere to be made into soldiers. We're 'ere to make blurry soldiers out of you or break your blurry hearts!

"You try an' make it hard for us an' we'll make it damned hard for you! You may be as big and bold as bleedin' lions, but this is where we tame lions. We'll take no nonsense. You used to be civvies

and maybe you'll be soldiers, but just now you're nothin'.

" Your title on parade is Recruit So-and-so. You're to call the soldier in charge of the hut Trained Soldier So-and-so. You're to jump when you're spoken to, keep your mouths shut an' learn your drill. When you're in the army you're in. Try and buck it an' there's the spud hole waitin' an' worse. March them off!"

" That," said Harmon as they trudged toward hut number nine, behind their cheerful monitor, " is what I call giving a fellow a welcome."

The trained soldier shook his head.

" There's worse nor 'im, lad. 'E tells a bloke at least. There's some of 'em don't even do that."

He took the names of the new arrivals to send to the orderly room and then marched them all down to the quartermaster stores for uniforms. It was a rapid process.

In one room a soldier took a hasty measurement of Harmon's chest and waist and tossed him two khaki woolen uniforms. The line moved ahead and Harmon called out his head size, grabbed a cap on the fly and tried on a pair of heavy ammunition boots with hobnails on the bottom.

He was issued two pairs as well as three pairs of socks, two pairs of puttees, some very heavy woolen underwear, two bluish and unlovely shirts, a set of insignia for cap and shoulders, an overcoat, two blankets, sheets, pillow cases, a bedding bag that was to be filled with straw later on, knife, fork, spoon of pewter, button stick, toothbrush, button brush, comb, towels, razor, shaving brush, and a " housewife," which consisted of a case of needles, thread, and extra buttons.

By the time he was finished he looked like a walking Christmas tree.

The trained soldier then led them back to the hut, which held thirty low cots, and instructed them to change to the uniforms.

" We'll 'ave to go to get your regimental numbers stamped on your kit," he explained, " an' then your 'air cut an' a bath an' scrubbin' and you mustn't be found in civvies around 'ere."

" What do we do with our clothes?" asked Tuesday. " Don't we get a place to put 'em?"

" Civvy clothes? Gawd blimy! No one ain't allowed to 'ave civvies in barracks. You 'ave to send them 'ome or sell 'em. There's a chap comes around an' buys the castoffs. You can't keep them 'ere no more."

" Why?"

The soldier winked. " They don't chance you goin' over the 'ill—you know, desert. Lots of chaps goes over the hill the first week or so."

" Do they get caught?" Tuesday asked. " I got a feelin' this place—"

" Sometimes they gets clear. But the blokes what don't are brought back an' sometimes they only gets pack drills every day for a month an' sometimes they gets bread an' water and they lives in the barrack jail until they're finished training. Then they send them to London with two blokes with fixed bayonets, handcuffed, and they stick them in the next draft for France, and over they go."

" Why, it's like bein' in prison," a tall young recruit murmured, looking around with scared blue eyes. " They told me back home this was the finest regiment in the British Army. I had no idea such like things—"

" So it is, lad. So it is. But they got to learn you 'ow to be soldiers, an' it's no ladies' seminary you're at now. Discipline—"

The door slammed back, and a red-faced sergeant stood on the threshold. He glared about the room and jerked his hand over his shoulder.

" Come now! Come now!" he barked. " Get your lazy legs a-moving. That big lout there—stand up when I speak to you! March all of these men to the barber, trained soldier! Sharp, that same man! I'll put you where the dogs won't bite you in a minute—"

" All right, cap," Tuesday soothed. " Don't get excited now."

" Call me sergeant when you talk to me, my man. None of your lip."

" Aw, go to hell," Tuesday blurted. " I'm not so darned stuck on your army

from what I seen of it so far. You ain't scarin' me a bit."

The sergeant's very mustaches seemed to stiffen with indignation. He swung around toward the old soldier without a moment's hesitation.

"Two men from the guard. On the double now."

The old soldier whipped out the door with surprising alacrity for his years, a whistle blew, and inside of thirty seconds he was back with two puffing soldiers, both armed with rifles and fixed bayonets. The sergeant motioned Tuesday between the file.

"Off with him to the guard room and book him for hesitating to obey an order, insubordination, and abusing an N. C. O. Quick march!"

Tuesday looked at the gleaming bayonets in front and behind him.

"What the—"

He had no time to finish. Heavy toes trod on his heels, and he was urged rapidly and efficiently out the door and across the parade ground toward the little gray house near the gate.

The sergeant faced smartly around and strode away.

CHAPTER X.

INTRODUCING SERGEANT NARLEY.

HARMON awoke at seven o'clock the next morning with the barrack band blaring within five feet of his head, as it paraded in front of and around the barracks—a reveille custom older than the London Light Infantry.

> But when I told her I'd kissed a soldier,
> She wouldn't buy me a rubber doll,

the band crashed to a finish and countermarched back to its quarters, a single drum tapping the time.

"They wake you up with music, eh?" Harmon yawned, and watched the trained soldier in charge of the hut rub talcum powder on his face in lieu of a shave and rub his buttons up briskly with his coat sleeve.

"Old soldier's tricks," the veteran winked, "but don't you be copyin' them, lad. They'll inspect you with a magnifyin' glass later on. I'm what they call a 'trained sweat' an' different. Best 'op out of that now. Reveille blew five minutes ago, an' you've only got ten more for a shave, shine, an' breakfast parade. Better hurry."

Harmon looked around. Most of the recruits were up, shaving before the occasional wall mirror, hurrying to the outside washrooms or struggling with the unaccustomed intricacies of spiral puttees. Some of the men still stretched sleepily in bed. But not for long.

In the open door rushed a lean corporal with a savage eye and a still more savagely pointed mustache. Reaching down, he grasped the legs of the cot holding the nearest peaceful slumberer and heaved mightily, tipping the cot over and sliding the sleeper on to the floor with a rude bump.

He moved quickly to the next one and down the line. Harmon jumped up before his turn came and struggled into his trousers and heavy shoes. He was beginning to realize that one must obey promptly in the ranks of the L. L. I.

The straight razor issued to him he left in his kit, and managed to make a passable job of shaving and washing in the crowded washroom with his own safety razor. When it came to winding his puttees the trained sweat, whose job it was to act as wet nurse and encyclopædia to the new men, showed him the proper lapping twist favored by regimental custom.

Harmon took up the button-stick, a flat, brass U-shaped affair, about eight inches long, with a slot running through the center, and wondered how to use it. But the trained sweat showed him how to slide the slot along the front of his tunic, gathering the buttons in a bunch and at the same time protecting the khaki from being soiled while he polished the brass buttons with a little paste and a lot of elbow grease.

"When you're in an 'urry you can polish them with the palm of yer 'and, but with Sergeant Narley it ain't advisable. 'E 'as an eye like an 'awk. Later on you'll

get to France an' they won't be no polishin'. 'Urry on parade now. You'll have old Narley this mornin', an' Gawd 'elp you if—"

The rest of the warning was lost as Harmon scrambled out the door with the rest of the recruits.

They formed a ragged and wavering line in the early sunlight outside the hut, tall men, short men, stout and thin, bow-legged, knock-kneed, round-shouldered and straight—all trying to stand in line and making a hopeless mess of it in spite of the corporal instructor's frantic oaths and efforts. The thought of making a squad of soldiers out of that crew would have daunted many an able drillmaster—unless he were of the hardy metal that staffed the training depot of Camberham.

Out of the corners of his eyes Harmon caught glimpses of other squads of recruits similarly lined up for inspection outside their quarters. He wondered what had happened to Tuesday and whether the soldier of misfort—

"*Stand still!*"

The words rasped out, each separately and menacingly, seemed to crack over the heads of the recruits like a whip, and had an immediate effect on the disorder that the corporal's oaths and prayers had not succeeded in remedying. The line of recruits froze into rigid stillness.

A tall, thin sergeant, carrying a black book beneath his arm, stalked across the front of the squad, stopped and faced the center of the line.

He stood stiffly erect, narrow, square shoulders slightly hunched up toward his large ears, chin upthrust, elbows tightly pressed to his sides, his narrow mustache waxed spikes that bisected his lean cheeks, his eyes, close-set above a narrow hawklike nose, darting along the line of men, with what seemed to Harmon an implacable and smothered ferocity.

"Eyes to the front!" he barked. "You'll see enough of me, I'll warrant, before we're through. Narley's the name—Sergeant Narley—old lady Narley's son—'ere to show you the blurry why an' the bloomin' wherefore of the bleedin' soldier's life, an' you're a fine dozy mob of blighters to 'ave to teach, too! Heads up! Keep yer eyes to the front an' give me your names as I go along—yer army name if you got two! First man!"

He snapped the book open, pointing the stub of a pencil at the man on the end of the line—a rather simple-looking, mild-mannered person with a forward stoop, ungainly hands and feet, and a constant foolish grin.

"Ruffit, sir," he mumbled, and seemed to think further explanations in order. "I works in a pub in Shepherd's Bush, cleanin' bar an' general 'andy—"

"You'll be cleanin' spuds in the cookhouse if you don't keep shut till you're spoken to," Narley interrupted. "Stick your silly 'ead up right!"

Ruffit made a gallant effort to throw his head back in soldierly style and succeeded only in toppling against the man in the rear rank.

"Hold 'im up!" barked Narley ironically. "He'll trip over 'is own legs right away. Strike me dead if 'e ain't a rare figure for a soldier. You'll take some breakin', my man.

"Next one!"

He proceeded down the line, noting the names in an illegible scrawl and misspelling the simplest ones as often as not. The education of Sergeant Narley had not progressed beyond the first year in the barrack school on his first enlistment.

Harmon gave his name when his time came.

"Canadian, ain't you?" asked Narley, noticing the strange accent.

"I am American." Harmon informed him.

"Well, that's Canadian, isn't it?" pursued Narley, not relishing the contradiction. "Who ever 'eard of an American not bein' a Canadian?"

"But, I'm not," Harmon insisted, a trifle nettled by the ridiculous argument. "The United States isn't in Canada by a long shot."

"Know more than I do about it, hey?" the sergeant snarled over the top of his book. "One of them artful chaps what thinks they know more than the sergeants—as if any ass didn't know the States is

part of Canada. Thought you'd spoof me a bit, eh?"

He turned to the attentive corporal and jerked his thumb toward Harmon.

"Keep your eye on this fly bloke, Corporal Robinson. 'E'll take some watchin', or my name ain't Sergeant Narley."

Harmon looked straight in front of him and said nothing. Camberham Barracks was teaching him a lesson he had never learned well before—to keep his temper and tongue under control. After the formation broke up he was beckoned to by Corporal Robinson, a sharp-eyed and humorous cockney, with a delicate mustache and a rakishly tilted cap.

"Don't argue wiv the sergeants, Harmon," he warned. "When they sye black is white, you sye, 'Yuss, sergeant,' and forget it. You won't see much of the orficers 'ere, an' they don't count for much—except when there's a bloomin' battle comin' orf or a swank parade. But sergeants is different. Not arf! You'd do better to tyke a nice runnin' kick at the lieutenant-colonel right in the middle of 'is new tylor-myde pants on parade than to rag the sergeants."

Four men were told off from the squad in No. 9 hut to get the breakfast. They carried the ration tins and teakettles to the cookhouse at the end of the barrack buildings, and returned with the meal, and each man brought his own heavy china cup and plate to the long, white-scrubbed table that ran along the center of the hut.

Meals, as Harmon discovered, were not varied at Camberham Barracks, breakfast consisting of a kind of watery stew, or fish once a week, tea and bread and canned butter or oleomargarine. Dinner in the middle of the day was usually a nutritious if greasy assortment of beef and boiled potatoes; and tea, at five o'clock, being a simple matter of bread, butter, jam, and tea.

There was no supper, except as purchased by the recruits individually at the "dry canteen." Sunday dinner meant huge slabs of pallid-looking "duff," a suet pudding sweetened with black molasses. In accordance with time-honored custom, rations were drawn from the stores on the basis of a pound of meat and a pound of bread a day per soldier; but the manner of preparing the food was uninviting to the finicky.

After breakfast the ration tins were returned to the cookhouse by the recruits assigned to the duty for the day—they were known as "swabs"—and Harmon found himself pushing a heavy broom over the floor in a cloud of dust as the men made up the hut for inspection. Under the direction of the trained soldier, Harmon made up his cot, folding his blankets and sheets after a certain established pattern, lining up his extra shoes and gymnasium slippers in a row on the shelf above, folding his overcoat carefully on the rack, and was finished just as the bugles began blowing for first parade on the drill square.

Hurrying out the door, Harmon met Tuesday.

"They let you out? I was wondering what—"

"Yeah, they let me out," Tuesday grunted, "after I slept all night on a bench with guys tramping in and out every two hours to go on guard. The cells was full—some drunks what was paid off yesterday. How these guys get stewed on seven shillings a week is beyond me."

"You should worry. You're out of there anyway. What happened?"

"Why, a guy with a gun stuck his bean in the door an' shouted 'Turn out the guard!' An' they all rushed out an' stood at attention with their guns in the air while an officer walked by, an' I rushed out with them. I stood on the end of the line, but the officer didn't look around, an' when they all beat it back inside I ducked."

"But," Harmon worried, "they'll trace you. Didn't you give them your name? That sergeant will—"

"No. He won't remember faces. I bet he puts guys in the hoosegow by the dozen. Sure I gave them a name. But they can't trace me by that. I gave them the name of U. S. Grant, and spelt it for them too. They never heard of it."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

ARCADIA PASSES

I WENT back after thirty years
To find my boyhood haunts again,
Prepared, of course, to find much changed
And all my quondam playmates men.
I knew that High Street had been paved
From Kendall's Corner to the Square;
I knew the Old First Church no more
Gleamed whitely from its bright parterre;
But though, I told myself, all else
Be changed past recognition,
The swimming hole's too far afield
To share the town's transition.

I found much changed, indeed, beyond
My expectations and my fears;
How busy vandal hands had been
In that old town those thirty years!
Laid low were all the splendid elms
That used to dot the market place;
To give, my grizzled guide explained,
The tourists' cars more parking space.
And as through once familiar streets
An alien thing I faltered,
The swimming hole, at least, I said,
I'll find unspoiled, unaltered!

Goths money-mad have blindly slashed
The sunny slopes of many a farm
To fashion sites for crowding roofs
Of doubtful permanence and charm:
They've lined the leafy roads that lead
To a potential city's gates
With garish hoardings that exploit
Their Heights and Gardens and Estates.
But in a lovelier spot is reached
The height of desecration:
They're filling in the swimming hole
To make a filling station!

Edward W. Barnard.

Don Juan of San Juan

By BEN CONLON

Author of "The Crawfordville Mystery," "Proper Judson Peckins," etc.

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

THE tall, fastidiously-dressed young man hastened through the spacious lobby of the Corwith Building, and as he did so compared the hands of his wrist watch with the globular illuminated clock which faced the main doorway.

Somehow, for all his quick gait and the air of intense living about him, he seemed hardly to belong in such a bustling temple of commerce as this mammoth pile which dominated the lower New York skyline. His general attitude might have been casually interpreted as one either of reverence or a sense of strangeness, not unlike the manner of a hurried tourist on a pilgrimage to some dim, Old World cathedral.

The young man had made but three previous visits to the new Corwith Building, and had only a hazy idea as to the location of the express elevators. He followed the crowd, however, and turned into a wide, humming aisle where a massive starter condescended to listen to his query and motioned him to one of the cars, following up the gesture with a click of the apparatus in his hand.

He stepped out at the forty-fourth floor, and once more looked at his wrist watch. It was four minutes past twelve, and the young man rather congratulated himself on the fact that he was only four minutes late.

One thing, he was not the kind of a young man who would try to alibi his tardiness. He was in excellent health, had no obligations, no wife, no *fiancée,* no job, no pressing business appointments. Sometimes he wondered what he did with his time.

Of course the night clubs kept him up late—that was what night clubs were for. And then there were theater parties, big prize fights at the Garden, racing on Long Island in season, blow-outs at the club in and out of season, and all that. He rather prided himself that every couple of months he managed to find time to visit his dentist.

He walked along the wide corridor, turned to the left and opened a door on which was lettered:

THE ABNER T. BUTTS AGENCY

Very few New Yorkers would have to be told that this was the unique Butts Detec-

tive Agency, so often referred to in the public prints. It had been founded some fifteen years before by a very unusual man who had been high in the United States Secret Service for a dozen years, a man who, by being the confidant of millionaires, had become a millionaire himself.

But a whippet, however well fed, cannot be changed into a house dog—there were still rabbits to be coursed in this great city of New York, and nine o'clock every morning found Abner T. Butts at his desk.

The young man smiled at the girl sitting at the polished table in the small reception room. She smiled back. For he was the kind of a young man that young ladies smile back at.

The black eyes were set at a slight angle. As he smiled the least bit obliquely, his strong white teeth gleamed white.

His olive skin looked even darker for the stipple of beard, blue-black despite the morning shave that had made him tardy. The sheen of youth and vigor was in his hair.

"He's waiting," the girl announced. And then, with a roguish glint in her eyes: "I'm afraid he's a little bit angry."

"Oh, a little bit isn't much," returned the young man, breezily. "I suppose I'd better bust right in."

"I suppose so," the girl agreed. "Bad boy!" she added, with an attempt at flirtation. "I've been waiting till you showed up. Had a date to have my lunch bought at twelve o'clock. Now, maybe the sheik has got sore and left me flat. You've probably cost me one lunch."

"I'll buy you one some time to make up for it," offered the young man, whose general attitude seemed to strangle the growth of any possible argument with the opposite sex anyhow. "Well, here goes. Pray for me, Molly."

"And I think you need it, in more ways than one, what I mean," the girl flung at him. She rather admired young men who needed prayers in more ways than one.

As the visitor continued along toward the private office of Abner T. Butts, the girl drew out a little hand mirror and gazed at herself, and wondered if the tall young man had admired her. Then, in spite of the fact that she was already late for her luncheon date, waited a couple of minutes to overhear any loud talk which might pos-

sibly filter through the door of the inner sanctum.

But Abner T. Butts was the shrewd, conventional type of Yankee who, if he had any words to utter, would see to it that they reached only the ears of the person for whom they were intended. He had, in his time, overheard a good many words not intended for his own ears—words through dictaphones, through thin partitions, air-shafts, tapped telephone wires.

"Good morning, dad," greeted the young man, as he entered the Butts sanctum and extended his hand.

The elder Butts took it, and shook it perfunctorily.

"Good afternoon," he said. He snapped out his watch, and examined it with irritating precision, but refrained from any verbal comment.

"It's started to snow, dad," went on the visitor.

"It's December," rejoined Butts, senior, dryly. At such times there was the faintest suggestion of a Down East tang, more of an inflection than an accent.

"So it is, dad," agreed young Butts, naïvely. "Say, Santa Claus would have a tough time getting down the chimney of this building, wouldn't he?"

"Put your hat and coat on the rack, and sit down," commanded the older man, ignoring the flippant question. "I'll have a smoke," as he drew a large, blunt-ended cigar from a humidor in his desk. "And I suppose," he added, a trace of intolerance in his tone, "that you'll have a cigarette."

Years in public affairs, two of them on the continent, found him still somewhat impatient of such things as cigarettes, cocktails and wrist watches. He himself often lit one Havana from the stub of another, thought prohibition a joke, and believed in keeping appointments to the split second.

He kindled his perfecto, and walked to the window and gazed contemplatively over the lower city while his son put his overcoat, hat and stick on the rack and, out of slightly amused eyes, watched the heavy shoulders and jutting jaw of his sire.

The face and figure, considering the sleuth's years, were much along the same lines as the younger man's, but there the resemblance ended. The coloring was radically different. The years had touched the stubborn hair of the older man about the temples. His mustache might have been an adornment in the nineties.

He had eyes the color of a gray Maine coast, and the eyes had been hardened by his trade. The overfleshed face was floridly fair. But, somehow, it was reverse attitudes toward life, rather than mere coloring, that made these men diametrically different types.

Young Butts sat down indolently. "Ready, dad," he announced.

The gray-haired man drew out his watch again.

"Ready," he repeated. "Ready, at eleven minutes past twelve. I asked you to be ready promptly at noon, John."

"I had to get a shave," was the defense of young Butts. "Sorry, dad. Let's blame it on the whiskers. They don't know how to tell time."

"Eleven minutes late," was Abner T. Butts's comment on this excuse. He slipped his watch back into his vest pocket. "If I had been eleven minutes late twenty-seven years ago, I could not have caught the Baltic at quarantine. There would have been a different ending to the Sebastian case. Eleven minutes late at the Hotel Angleterre in Paris would have meant no clew to follow Sebastian to Madrid. I'd never have risen in the secret service without the glory that the Sebastian coup brought me, possibly wouldn't have remained in the service at all. Then, very likely, there'd have been no Abner T. Butts Agency. I'd never have had occasion to go to Barcelona, never have met your mother. There'd have been no John Butts."

The younger man looked up with some slight accession of interest at the mention of his name.

"John Pedro Calderon de la Barca Butts," he corrected, smilingly. "Don't forget the Spanish filling, dad."

"I'm not likely to," rejoined old Abner T. Butts soberly, "since it was your mother's wish to call you after some remote Spanish kinsman of hers. And I think you ought to remember some of her wishes more

than you do, John. If she were on earth to-day she'd be disappointed in you. Has it ever occurred to you that it might be high time to turn your hand to something useful? What'll you do when you've smoked all the cigarettes, and guzzled all the cocktails in the world, and your Broadway beauties are cleaning office buildings?"

Young Butts flashed his disarming smile again. He knew Butts, senior, pretty well, he prided himself—knew that back of his hard-boiled manner was a certain sentimentality, amounting to blind, almost fanatical fidelity where his friends and family were concerned.

He also knew that his own air of flippant insolence was rather admired by his father.

"This starts out," young Butts observed, "like the stories where the great Napoleon of finance is about to cut off his ne'er-do-well scion with a farthing. Only, in those cases, the names are something like Stuyvesant Rutger Van Bleecker, senior and junior. I guess I'm safe. My name is Butts."

"But you've been living like the Stuyvesant Rutger Van Bleeckers," was the come-back of the elder Butts. "And it's high time you learned what was what. You're going to work, John."

II.

YOUNG John Butts looked over at his father with an incredulous, yet fearless stare. He would have had the same expression if his father had said: "You're going to die," instead of "you're going to work."

"Well, dad," he said, his face breaking into one of his disarming smiles, "that's what comes of my inheriting those wire-haired whiskers of yours. I stop to get a very necessary shave, it makes me eleven minutes late. Then you threaten me with work."

Old Abner Butts bristled.

"Was I ever eleven minutes late for an appointment?" he asked, with a challenging jut of his heavy jaw. "And didn't I have whiskers? No barbers for me at your age, young man, and plenty o' times, back in Maine, I shaved with the soap that my mother did the family washing with. The Butts family wasn't much for perfumed lah-de-dahs in those days."

"But you wouldn't take the bread out of the mouths of the poor barbers, would you, dad?"

"No, I suppose not," was the testy reply. "It seems to be my job to support the barbers and the bootleggers and the candy-stick makers and the florists. When I was a boy if I got a stick o' candy I'd have it for a week and take a lick at it every day. And flowers in the house meant that one of the Butts family was dead. John, you've become a fine gentleman all right, but I'm afraid the accent is on the 'gentle.' It's about time to make a man out of you.

"I send you to school in Madrid, so that you may learn to speak the language of your mother. You learn how to dance the tango"—this with a sniff—"and to smoke cigarettes. Then you go to Harvard, where I send you to get an education. You spend four years chasing a football, and driving a car that you couldn't earn a tire for, and playing all this Gentleman Jim business.

"Well, John, all that stopped to-day—at one minute past twelve. If you'd been here on time, I was going to suggest that you cut out some of your nonsense gradually, and maybe study law, or dawdle through some other respectable but not too tough a line."

"Law! Why, if I ever defended a man for jay walking, dad, they'd hang him for murder."

Abner Butts puffed sullenly on his big cigar.

"That's what you youngsters learn to-day!" he accused. "To shoot back these insolent, supposedly witty remarks at your parents, and make 'em like it. Well, if you're so witty, my boy, I've found a place for your wit. You've idled long enough. You're starting to-night as an operative for the Abner T. Butts Agency. You might possibly be worth twenty dollars a week. I'll give you fifty."

"Chance for advancement?" asked young John Butts, still with his undertone of banter.

"Damn little!" answered Abner T.

Secretly he was elated that his son had not squawked at the announcement. He was forcing himself to be severe. He knew that he would die for this strange, idle-minded son of his, with his mother's rich Latin coloring and the Butts vigor. "Fifty dollars a week!" he repeated.

"Couldn't make it a hundred, with no chance of advancement at all, could you?" asked young John, with a grin.

"You just guessed it!" retorted his father. "I couldn't."

"I surmised as much," John told him, his grin just as wide as before. "And what is all this work you have for me, dad?"

"Work you can do, if you're any good at all," replied Abner T. Butts. "I'll test your memory. Do you remember, while we were in Porto Rico, when your mother was living, taking a trip over from San Juan toward Barranquitas to the estate of a Spaniard who was a great friend of mine?"

"The time you bawled me out for driving so fast over those mountain roads?"

"The time that you risked our lives on the curves in your usual hare-brained way, yes. Do you remember the man's name? You'll recall that he had left for Havana, the day before. Well, I see from your face you don't recall his name. It was Ramon Lopez, an old friend I had met in Spain. Well, his daughter, Rosalie, is getting married to-night, and your first job will be to go to the wedding and mingle with the guests and keep your eyes on the presents. Ramon Lopez is one of the wealthiest Spaniards in New York, and there'll be hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of gifts on display at the reception at the Lopez home, and the guests will probably wear jewels worth several times that amount."

"Rather a responsible job, isn't it?" asked his son. "Seems to me not quite safe to hand it out to a new operative."

"I'll take a chance on you," Butts senior replied. "You can't get out of it that easy. And you're the type I want, for no one will suspect that you're any one but a guest. The average operative might as well have a sign marked 'Detective' on him. It's about time that I cashed in on this gentleman's education I gave you. You'll wear your dress clothes, of course."

"But will the Lopezes know—will they let me in?"

"That's all been taken care of. I've known Ramon Lopez since my Barcelona days. Biggest regret of his life seems to be that he wasn't in Porto Rico when I called on him unexpectedly that time. Peculiar man, Lopez. Realizes that crooks find ways to crash the gate at fashionable weddings, and he'd rather spend two or three of his millions, if necessary, than let a crook get away with anything. I told him all about you—some one that can look the part, and some one that I can trust, whatever your other failings."

"Well, is that all?" asked the younger Butts, as if this, indeed, had been little or nothing.

"That's all. Just going to start making a man out of you."

"Well, the start isn't so bad, anyhow," young Butts conceded. "I don't care particularly about becoming a sleuth, but I'm all ready to take a shot at it. I can't figure where there's much excitement in gum-shoeing around after crooks. Looks like mere drudgery to me."

"You need a little drudgery," his father told him. "You've got to learn you can't get by in this world without some hard work. It's high time you supported yourself, and this is one way you can do it. If you can make fifty a week at some other job that's more to your taste, just go to it, my boy."

"Oh, I'll take this," said young Butts, easily. "There may be a little novelty in it, at that. As a matter of fact, I believe I've inherited some of your sleuthing ability, dad. I deduce, for instance, that you have a bottle of pre-war Scotch in one of the drawers in your desk, and I invite you and myself to have a drink."

"You're generous with your invitations," rejoined Abner T. with a twinkle highlighting his shrewd gray eyes. "If you're so clever at deductions, maybe you can tell me which drawer the bottle's in."

"Sure," snapped back the breezy younger man. "That's easy. It's in the drawer that's most convenient to reach, of course."

"Of course," repeated Abner T. Butts, "it's no such place. You're wrong as usual. When you're drawing deductions, always figure the characteristics of the other party and not those of your lazy self."

Then he reached down into a lower drawer and extracted from it a bottle of Highland Milk and set it on the desk.

"I suppose you'll want a highball," he said, with a tinge of the intolerant inflection as he also drew out a siphon of seltzer and a couple of glasses. "I never could understand why people spoil good whisky by putting vichy in it."

"Maybe that's because they like vichy better than Scotch. It isn't really the whisky they're after."

"Maybe not," said Abner T. dryly. "But I notice that it's never plain vichy that they take."

They had their refreshment, this oddly-assorted father and son, and then the former, looking again at his plain, old-fashioned watch, said:

"Be on your way now, son. I've idled away enough time with you now. And remember, I'm depending on you to prevent any thefts at the Lopez reception to-night. I'll see whether you have any of the Butts blood in you or not."

After a handshake and a brief conclusion to his breezy banter, young John Butts had slipped into his overcoat, crooked his stick over his arm, and made for the express elevators.

When the door closed behind him the elder Butts touched one of a row of buzzers on his desk. A few seconds later the door of his sanctum opened and a man entered, advancing to the desk back of which Butts was seated.

He stood quietly there and awaited the orders of his chief. The latter, perusing some documents, ignored for a moment the presence of the operative, who was a burly fellow, nearly six feet in height, with long, loosely-hanging arms and the lowering countenance of a gorilla.

"You understand, Grogan, that you're to cover the Lopez reception to-night?" asked Butts, finally looking up from his work.

"Yes, sir."

Butts opened one of his desk drawers and drew from it a photograph. It was a picture of his only son, and one that did ample justice to the handsome young man. He handed it to the operative.

"Ever see that fellow anywhere, Grogan?" he asked.

Grogan studied the picture carefully for a moment, and then slowly shook his head.

"Never," he said, conclusively. "He's a new one on me. Slick lookin' bird, ain't he?"

"M-mh! Think you'd know him if you should ever see him in the future?" asked Butts, taking back the photograph.

"You know me, chief," Grogan replied, confidently. "Once I mug a man, I got him for keeps."

"Well, then," said Butts, "it's just possible you might see this party at the Lopez wedding to-night, and if you do, I want you to keep your eyes on him. Just observe how he acts, and give me a report on him in the morning. No rough stuff. All I want is a report."

The eyes of the operative gleamed, and for the first time since he entered the office his immobile countenance showed signs of life.

"If he's goin' to try an' pull somethin', chief—if there's anything I ought to know about him—"

"I've told you all that I can," cut in Butts. "If you see him, do as I say, no more. No rough stuff, whatever happens. I know where to lay my hands on him, if necessary."

"But supposin'—"

"That's all for the present, Grogan."

The operative, trained to implicit obedience, and accustomed to receiving orders that often seemed strange and incomplete, retired without further words, and Abner T. Butts, lighting another perfecto, leaned back in his chair with a little smile of satisfaction on his face.

III.

In spite of his apparently careless attitude toward life, there was a good deal of Abner T. Butts in John, the son.

For instance, the latter permitted most

of his companions to assume that he was a steady and intensive drinker. Drinking was popular among young men of his set, and apparently he was following the vogue.

The facts of the matter were that he drank sparingly. He was too much the athlete to tear down his body for temporary exhilaration. There were times, also, when he came to the conclusion that during his years in college he had paid too much attention to athletics and too little consideration to his future.

A man who is the idol of those about him, who is a college football, baseball and boxing star may be excused for losing sight of the prosaic future in the glory of the present.

In a sense he was ashamed of the way he idled away his time, but was inclined to blame the many social demands which had been made upon him.

The first summer out of college he had spent in the Berkshires with Bob Derwent. The latter was heir to four or five millions by the will of his financial wizard of a father who died comparatively young, his energy prematurely consumed in fierce financial warfare.

Bob had never done a day's work in his life, and made no secret of the fact that he never intended to; he divided his time between his fraternity house in the city and his dead father's estate in the country, and what satisfaction he obtained from life came out of an endless succession of social engagements.

Always he was well ahead of the moderate income allowed him until he came into his full rights of heirship at twenty-seven. He was now twenty-six.

Young John Butts, after his summer in the Berkshires with Derwent, had drifted over to Spain to visit some of the relatives of his dead mother; from Spain he had gone to Paris and played around for a few expensive weeks. Young and ebullient, he had enjoyed the carefree life he had led in the Montparnasse and Montmartre sections. Scarcely realizing the direction in which he was drifting, he had returned to New York, bringing with him a bohemian attitude toward life.

Then there had been a tangle with a Follies girl which at first seemed serious. His father, however, had saved him from the consequences of his escapade by burrowing into one of the carefully guarded steel filing cases which lined a special office in the Butts suite—and to which only Abner T. Butts had the key.

Young John knew that his father had had one brief interview with a certain man of the underworld, and that the girl, thereafter, maintained her silence in regard to a threatened breach of promise suit which, in effect, had been a frame-up.

This affair had, to a certain degree, sobered young John, but nevertheless he had gone along his idling way, fully aware of the fact that he was being fair neither to himself nor his father. The ultimatum about the job as an operative had brought him a certain feeling of relief.

Now he would have to get to work. For the time being, the direction of his affairs was to be in hands that were older and more capable than his own.

He was smiling to himself as he left the Corwith Building and reached a point adjacent to City Hall Park, where he had parked his roadster. He hopped into the machine, and started uptown.

The sun was shining through a light and feathery fall of snow. The air was cold, but John, his hands protected by fur-lined gauntlets, was conscious only of a sense of exhilaration which the chill weather aroused in him.

He hadn't felt so happy in months, and he rightly attributed this to the fact that, at last, he had something definite to do. There wasn't much to his job, of course, but, after all, it was a job. The salary wouldn't keep him in gasoline and cigarettes and theater tickets, but then, with a job, he might not have the time to indulge in these luxuries.

With thoughts like these running through his mind he drove up to a street in the Forties and stopped in front of a clubhouse which stood between Fifth and Sixth Avenues. Parking his car, he strode into the building, giving the doorman an amiable greeting as he entered.

Thrusting his gloves into the pocket of his overcoat, he turned the latter, with his

hat, over to an attendant and made his way into the exquisitely-appointed lounging room of the club. He paused for a moment at the entrance, and then made his way toward a far corner of the room, where a young man, wearing an expression of weariness and boredom, was seated in a deep leather chair.

If his thoughts were as empty as the expression on his face, he must have been pondering over the problem of attaining a perfect vacuum.

"Hello, Bob!" John greeted. "What time do the funeral services begin?"

Derwent, at first startled, looked up wonderingly.

"Funeral services!" he repeated. "What funeral services? Who's dead now?"

"I'm not sure who's dead," replied John, "but from the expression on your face, I deduce that some one near and dear to you must have passed away. Your bootlegger, say?"

Derwent misunderstood the pleasantry. He reached into his hip pocket and withdrew an elaborately carved flask of silver and began to unscrew the top of it.

"Don't know how much is left" he began, "but—"

"Whoa!" commanded John. "Whoa! Back up! You got me wrong. I'm not wangling a drink. I just meant that your face, as I came in, looked about the saddest, most mournful phiz I ever saw. Tough life, isn't it?"

The wearied young Derwent decided that one movement would be required to put the flask back in his pocket, and that he could pour a drink without greater effort.

He did so, pouring it into the silver top, and then down his throat. Then he screwed the top back on and put the flask back in his pocket.

"The joke, if such it was, was a little involved," he charged, yawning. "I'm just resting, that's all. Dead tired."

"Then I deduce that you must have been up late last night," replied John, with a grin. "You were prowling around somewhere and didn't get home until morning, and I deduce—"

"Hey! Just a minute!" Derwent interposed with a trifle more spirit. "As a matter of fact, I was out on a party most of the night—but what's all this deduction stuff, anyhow? You sound like old *Sherlock* himself."

"I am," John admitted, smilingly. "Quite right, *Watson*, my man. That's what I came up here to tell you. I'm a detective now, and I suppose I have a right to deduce if I want to."

Derwent smiled through another yawn.

"What's the joke?" he demanded. "You seem to be acting a little goofy, Jack, if you don't mind my telling you."

"Nary a bit, nary a bit, *Watson*," replied Butts. "And there's no joke about it. These lily-white hands, Bob, these hands that have carried a football and toyed with the wheel of a motor car and all that—these hands must be desecrated with work, Bob, old man. I mean it—I've taken a job in my father's outfit. I'm an operative now, Bob, so you want to watch your step."

"No kidding!" exclaimed Derwent. "You don't mean to tell me that you're going to be a detective?"

"That's right. You tell me what I don't mean, and I'll correct you," went on the breezy John Butts. "Yes, that's just what I do mean. My father insisted that I get to work and offered me a job. I'm tired of loafing, anyhow, and I'll be glad to do something."

"But it's impossible!" Derwent declared. "Who ever heard of a gentleman becoming a detective? It just isn't done, you know."

"It's done this time!" John asserted. He was a little bit peeved at the attitude taken by Derwent.

"A gentleman is a gentleman, no matter what he does," he continued. "I don't have to sell bonds to my friends—who don't want them—to retain my gentility. The European idea of a gentleman has been all shot to pieces in this country, Bob, and you ought to wake up to the fact."

"Lord!" exclaimed Derwent. "I don't loaf just because I want to be a gentleman. I loaf because I like it. Work of any sort is such a dreadful bore!"

"How do you know?" asked John, "when you never tried it."

"Even thinking of it bores me," replied Bob. "And as for being a detective—"

He shrugged his shoulders expressively to complete the sentence.

He held up his hand as his friend was about to cut in, and continued: "Don't get me wrong in this matter, Jack. If you're going to say that your father is a detective, you might as well keep still. Your pater is one of the finest, from what I've seen of him, but he was never any ordinary detective such as you'll be," he went on, with the frankness of a tried friend. "He was a secret service sleuth, and you can't rank them with the general run of dicks. I imagine the thing got into his blood, and then when he left the service he just had to keep on working at his profession."

"That's just what happened, and do you know, Bob, when a profession is so alluring that you just can't stop practicing it, there must be something in it. Do you remember the name by which Pinkerton was known to the underworld?"

Derwent shook his head. "Oh, maybe they called him 'Pinky,'" was his stab.

"I see," said John, good-humoredly, "that you are grossly ignorant of the annals of crime and the detection of it, and the great sleuths. Pinkerton was called 'the Eye.' And when he died there was a sigh of relief from crookdom because 'the Eye' had at last closed. There's something poetic about that conception to me.

"A detective, especially a high class one, sees and hears things that most people know nothing about. I suppose the information that dad has in those files would be astonishing to either of us. It didn't take him long, you remember, to put the quietus on Maxine Lee when she was threatening that breach of promise suit. He found out that Lefty Bloom was behind her, and he called Bloom to his office. Bloom's a pretty heavy highbinder, you know, but when he heard his master's voice he came on the run. He was in the private office just a few minutes, but when he came out all danger of a suit was over."

"Maxine was a pretty little thing," said Bob quietly.

"And when I first knew her she was on the level," said John. "Then Bloom and his gang got hold of her, and it wasn't long before she was an ordinary gunman's moll."

The two friends were silent for a moment and then Derwent, in his hazy, drawling voice, spoke.

"How does a chap go about becoming a detective?" he asked. "Excuse me, old top, if I can't take you very seriously." He drew out his flask and took another nip.

"Well, I suppose I'm starting from the bottom," John replied, "but the first job I've got is to attend a wedding reception to-night and keep my eyes on the presents and the jewels worn by the guests."

"It'll be the most dangerous place in New York for honest people to be," said Bob, banteringly, "if they have to depend on you for protection. If you ask me, Jack, I think a clever crook could steal the shoes off your feet without your being any the wiser."

He looked down at the other's feet.

"Yes, they could," he added, "as I see you have low ones on. I'll admit that if you had high ones laced up, they might have a little difficulty. It can't be much of an affair if your father is sending you alone."

John grinned back at his friend. "He's sending me alone, and from what I understand, the house is going to resemble the inside of Aladdin's cave. It's the Sedgwick-Lopez wedding reception. Does that mean anything to you, dumb-bell?"

"Mean anything to me!" exclaimed Derwent, actually rising from his comfortable chair in his excitement. "Why, I'm going to be there myself!"

"You're going to be there! I didn't know that you knew the Lopezes."

"I know Dick Sedgwick very well, and I met the Lopezes through him. Attractive girl, this Rosalie Lopez. Her sister's the knockout though—Juanita. Bab-ee! Little brunette that could make a fortune in the Follies if old Lopez ever lost his millions.

"Well, I guess I'll leave my watch and wallet at home to-night, if you're going to be 'the Eye' at this reception. A good honest thief would never in the world have a better opportunity to turn a trick and get away safely. All I can say is that your pater must be putting up something hand-

some to old Lopez for the privilege of letting you practice your new profession at his shindig."

"All that may be true," John admitted, smilingly, "but I want to tell you that I'm not altogether dumb, and I wouldn't be surprised if I could spot a crook if I saw one. And if I get hep to any one trying to pull anything off to-night, there's going to be a fracas that'll surprise you. I've got an idea that dad rather thinks I'm an incompetent, and I'm out to show him I'm not. I won't be in this business very long, but while I am in it I'm going to make good in a way that'll surprise that doubting parent of mine."

"Go to it, lad," said Bob, "and don't let my laughter deter you. How do I know but that, after all, you may take your place some day beside the immortal *Sherlock Holmes?*"

"I'll see you to-night, then?" John asked, rising.

"Sure. But will I know you in your disguise? Going to wear false whiskers and a wig?"

"You'll know me, all right," John assured him. "And I'm telling you, boy, you want to watch your step."

IV.

Señor Ramon Lopez enjoyed an income approximating a million dollars a year, and therefore was well able to indulge in the luxury of a magnificent apartment on Park Avenue. It embraced the two upper floors, including the roof, of a towering edifice which was the last word in modernity.

This suite, of course, was simply the metropolitan home of Señor Lopez. He maintained an elaborate mansion in the Santurce suburb of San Juan, Porto Rico, and what he termed a simple villa in Biarritz. Then there was the Lopez *hacienda* in Cuba, and his provincial holdings in the interior of Porto Rico.

Truly, the vast sugar plantations from which his fortune was derived made life very sweet for the señor and the charming members of his aristocratic family.

Standing just within the entrance to the ballroom, he was indulging in something of a reverie as he watched the brilliant scene before him. The wedding had been held at the church earlier in the day, and now the reception was in progress.

The affair recalled to his mind his own wedding so many years before, and the thoughts of his marriage brought other memories to him. One of them was of a girl, Dolores, with whom he had thought himself very much in love before he had espoused his wife.

Ah! But Dolores had been so alluringly beautiful! He might well have married her, having been her chosen suitor, if it had not been for the sudden appearance of that Americano, Abner Butts. The latter, of course, had been on rather a romantic mission, and his first meeting with Dolores had been of a nature to fire the imagination of the girl who had lived such a secluded life.

But Señor Lopez remembered that he had not worried there in Barcelona when he suspected that he had an American rival. They were cold, these Americans, good business men, perhaps, but stammering lovers—so he had thought. And then had come the elopement, the marriage of Dolores and Abner Butts.

It had been hard for the young señor to forgive, but Dolores had pleaded so prettily and Butts, after all, proved to be such a fine gentleman, that he had become reconciled to his fate. Then he had met his own Ysabella and fallen deeply in love with her, and, after a brief courtship, married her.

This had completely healed the breach between himself and Butts, and the four of them had been together a great deal at various times through the years that followed. When, however, Lopez had gone to Porto Rico, his acquaintanceship with Abner Butts had gradually tapered off. From time to time he had enjoyed reunions with Abner, although he had never met John, the son.

He wondered now where young John Butts was, and why he had not presented his credentials. The señor had been approached earlier in the evening by a person who introduced himself as Grogan, and who had presented credentials indicating his

connection with the Butts Agency. Surely this Señor Grogan could not be John Butts in disguise.

His mind drifted away from the matter of detectives for a moment as he caught sight of his daughter, Rosalie, dancing with the handsome young Sedgwick boy who had become her husband. The elder Sedgwick was the American partner of Lopez, and the match between the two had been arranged for a long time.

The future of Rosalie had never given Señor Lopez or his wife the slightest concern, but both of them were inclined to be uneasy about that other daughter, Juanita. The eyes of the aristocratic, middle-aged man wandered through the ballroom, and he finally singled out his younger daughter. An almost imperceptible frown clouded his face as he saw that she was dancing with Vicente Ortiz, a sleek-haired, swarthy young Cuban.

Despite the years he had lived in the West Indies, Señor Lopez had never felt any kinship with most of the people of the islands. Both he and his wife were of Castile, and they had the inherent arrogance of their *conquistadore* stock toward the island breeds.

Too many times the señor had seen the working out of the inexorable law which decrees that a union between different basic races results in offspring with the worst qualities of each race. There was Ortiz, for instance, whose broad, high cheek boned face spoke only too eloquently of the infusion of the Carib strain.

He possessed a certain suavity and elegance characteristic of old Spain, and which made him the more dangerous if he possessed, as Lopez suspected, certain debasing instincts.

But Juanita, with her dark young beauty and her fiery temperament, seemed to be fascinated by Ortiz, and the señor wondered what he could do about it. He had, in fact, been wondering for some time past, ever since he had made some discreet inquiries, through the Butts Agency, about the young Cuban's antecedents.

He knew too much about women to make any attempt to warn his daughter against associating with Ortiz; knew that any opposition on the part of his wife or himself would simply inflame the desire of Juanita and, very probably, throw her right into the arms of the undesirable suitor.

Always he had been able to guide and direct Rosalie, but her sister had a mind of her own, and would go her own way to happiness or disaster.

Ortiz had rather an evil reputation through the White Light district of Broadway, and Lopez's investigation of him had unearthed some disturbing facts about various West Indians with whom Ortiz was acquainted in New York and whom, on occasion, he had presumed to bring to the Lopez apartment.

There were Jaime Zapater and Domingo Ramos, for instance. Lopez knew the parents of both of the young men, who had come from Porto Rico, and he had been astounded at the reputations they had in New York. They were intimates of Ortiz, and somehow had found their way to the reception.

So Señor Lopez, forgetting for the moment his concern for the welfare of Juanita, strolled through the ballroom toward the alcove in which the lavish gifts which his daughter had received were on display.

He smiled affably at Grogan, who was carelessly lounging in one corner of the alcove when he entered the draperied arch which separated it from the ballroom. He did not speak to the detective, however, as he felt that this would hardly be ethical. A man engaged in the duty of watching such a priceless array of gifts was not a person to be disturbed by idle conversation.

There were numerous guests about, and many were the soft-voiced exclamations at the beauty of the presents. The women lingered the longest, perhaps, over a small bejeweled crucifix which, it was known, the wealthy Señor Lopez had bestowed upon Rosalie. Lopez, who had a gift at telling of the value of possessions and yet, somehow, of never appearing boastful or *nouveau riche*, had mentioned that the crucifix had belonged to Queen Isabella of Castile and Leon, and that she had worn it when she was married to Ferdinand of Aragon. How many other aristocratic fingers had touched

and caressed it through the centuries was problematical, but, in any event, the piece was practically priceless.

Rumor gave it the additional value that it had been among the jewels that Queen Isabella had been ready to pledge in order to raise money to help Columbus go sailing toward unknown continents.

And there were other gems of lesser worth, but still unattainable to any one except a millionaire like Señor Lopez, and they winked and blazed and glinted on the dark surface of the long, carved table.

Grogan, who in his entire career as a detective had never seen such a display of wealth, was exceedingly alert despite the fact that he assumed an air of negligence and remained seated in a very easy chair partially concealed by decorative palms in a corner of the room. Part of the time he kept his eyes on the table, and at others watched a young man who was lingering in the alcove.

Here, then, was the original of the photograph which his chief had shown him in the office early that afternoon. Of course this smooth-looking guy was a crook. But what had the chief meant by "no rough stuff?" Grogan tried to figure it out.

He was more than puzzled by the orders given him by Butts. He had been explicitly told to keep his eye on the young fellow, and that was all.

Well, the chief generally knew his business, and, also, there was one thing that Grogan rather prided himself on, and that was the fact that he obeyed orders. He had been in the regular army as a young man, and was inclined to cultivate a sense of discipline at the expense of initiative.

So he sat where he was, and kept the jewels and his quarry under surveillance. He saw Lopez as the latter came into the alcove, and watched him as he greeted one guest and then another.

Then, for a moment, Lopez stood alone, and Grogan, of a sudden, became as tense as a pointer before a covey of quail.

The young fellow he had been ordered to watch had approached Lopez and was speaking to the old Spaniard. The latter, after listening to the other for a moment, extended his hand and greeted his guest in extremely hearty manner, and the pair started an animated conversation.

Grogan watched them carefully, seething with irritation because he was not within earshot. The young crook, he was sure, was laying the groundwork for some coup which he planned to pull later in the evening.

Grogan felt rather helpless; there was something untoward going on right under his eyes, and if he obeyed the instructions he received from Abner T. Butts, he was to a certain extent powerless to interfere.

It was possible, of course, that his boss had sent other men to cover the affair, operatives who also were alertly watching the man Grogan had been ordered to keep under surveillance. Butts often used peculiar but highly effective methods of working, and Grogan realized the unwisdom of not following his chief's instructions to the letter.

He decided that it would not do any harm, however, if he casually strolled past Lopez and the young man and tried to overhear a few words of their talk. So he followed this impulse, although not for an instant did he relax his vigilance toward the treasure on the table.

His only discovery, and a disappointing one it was, was that the two of them were speaking together in some foreign tongue, presumably Spanish, which he could not understand. So he circled the long table and drifted back to his chair among the palms, where he slumped down again more apprehensive than he had been before.

His increased anxiety was caused by the knowing and suspicious look with which the young man had regarded him.

"That bird seems to know who I am," thought the detective somberly, "but I'll be damned if I know him. I wonder why the chief didn't give me the dope on him. He's keeping one eye on me, even now."

That was just what John Butts was doing while he chatted with Lopez. He had gained admittance to the reception with the card his father had given him for the purpose, and for awhile had mingled with the guests.

He had formulated his own plan of operation on his way to the affair, and had de-

cided that the first thing to be done would be to familiarize himself with the layout of the place. He had made it a point to be there early, and he felt relieved when he was taken up eighteen or twenty floors in an elevator. A crook, he thought, would find it difficult to make his escape from such a place.

When the door of the elevator opened he had found himself in a magnificent foyer, in the midst of opulence that, for a moment, surprised him. He had told the haughty butler that he wished to speak to Mr. Lopez, and the servant had indicated that it might be wise to see his employer's secretary, who had charge of arrangements for the evening.

So John had located the secretary, an affable young Porto Rican, who accepted the young man's credentials without question, explained the layout of the two floors, and took him up to the glass-covered conservatory on the roof.

Upon entering the conservatory, John had hardly been able to refrain from an exclamation of amazement. He had found himself in a softly-lighted tropical garden that, apparently, covered the entire roof area of the building.

A row of stately, yet leaning, palm trees fringed the roof with the naturalness of palm trees fringing some tropic strand. Fountains tinkled, gayly-colored birds sang, tropical moths fluttered through the flowers.

It was very warm—as warm as the average tropical country. There was a wealth of bougainvillea which sent out its delicate fragrance. There were bamboo trees, and the flashing red and green of an umbrella-like *almendra*."

"What a paradise!" John murmured. "And this is New York! And then folks wonder why we love New York. What other city could have a bower like this tucked away on top of an apartment building?"

The secretary shrugged his shoulders genially.

"And yet," he argued, in friendly fashion, "what makes this beautiful is that it is a fragment of Porto Rico transplanted here. The *señor* was born in Spain, but his fortune came from Porto Rico. He loves it, I am sure, as he would love a foster mother who had been kind.

"This is all Porto Rico—all, that is, except the birds. It is true that bird life is not plentiful in the Island of Enchantment, but there is everything else. This sundial is a replica of the sundial on La Fortaleza at San Juan. Home sick, all these things make me.

"But I leave with my employers for San Juan to-morrow. We go on the Coamo, which sails at noon. We must make the great house near Barranquitas ready for the honeymooners, who will occupy it for the month of January."

"You are from San Juan?"

"From Cataño, just across the bay from San Juan. It thrills me to think that in less than a week I shall be back there. But here I am, Mr. Butts, rhapsodizing about my native land, and I suppose you are more interested in the layout of things.

"There is no way out through here, even supposing that a thief might try to get away in this direction. In fact, I don't see how a thief could possibly make an escape from the apartment at all. He has his choice of the elevator or the stairs, and it seems that we are so high up that only a thief with the wings of an angel, *señor*, would be able to depart from here without our knowledge."

The courteous secretary rambled on, but John was hardly listening to him now. His attention had been fastened on a girl who had appeared from behind some exotic shrubbery and was coming in his direction.

John had been vaguely aware that she was with four or five other young women, but his eyes were focused on her alone. Even in the soft light he had seen that she was very beautiful, and he noticed that she and her companions were carrying clusters of orchids which, apparently, they had just plucked somewhere back in the foliage.

The dark eyes of the girl met his own for an instant, and John felt a strange thrill at the visual contact.

"Good evening, Pablo," the girl had said, softly, smiling at Lopez's secretary.

"Good evening, Señorita Juanita." The secretary made a courteous bow.

Then she had passed on with her laughing friends, but John observed the little glance she cast as him as she went by. So the girl was Juanita Lopez, whom Bob Derwent had described in such superlative terms.

Well, Bob had not begun to do her justice. She was a real, high-class Spanish beauty, young and adorable, and John felt a quickening of his pulse as he inhaled the exotic odors which the passing of the girls had seemed to intensify.

He must have been in a deep reverie, for only gradually did he become aware that the young man with him was speaking.

" — and so I don't think we need worry about the roof or the first floor of the apartment," the secretary was saying. " It is the ballroom floor, the one right beneath us, that must be watched carefully. Ah! Doubtless everything will go off peacefully."

John had collected his thoughts and replied to the suggestion of his companion.

" I believe that the doors leading to the main stairway of the building should all be locked," he suggested. " In that case, any light-fingered gentry would have to depend on the elevator, and an escape that way is practically impossible. As you say, I am sure everything will go off very smoothly indeed."

So Pablo, the secretary, and John Butts, or, to be more explicit, John Pedro Calderon de la Barca Butts, completed their survey of the apartment and returned to the next floor below.

V.

THE guests had danced and visited and —it must be admitted—drunk rather freely, some of them, of the government-banned refreshments which flowed copiously in the Lopez menage, when John Butts finished his third dance with Juanita Lopez. He had been standing close to the *señor* when the latter's younger daughter had entered the room to ask her father a question—indeed, it probably was very unimportant as a question, but the result was an introduction to the handsome young man who was in conversation with her parent.

Lopez had made no mention of John's profession, had merely stated that here was the son of an old and dear friend of his. In the moments that followed, John Butts perhaps became a trifle lax, for his mind was not now filled with thoughts of his duty at the Lopez home, but of the beautiful younger daughter of his father's friend.

And very likely Juanita was just as much interested. For a girl can be asked to dance, but is not forced to accept. Juanita accepted—every time. And the jet black eyes of Vicente Ortiz followed the pair about the room jealously.

At the end of the third dance, the Cuban approached the girl.

" You seem to be enjoying yourself," he said in Spanish. His eyes were satirical.

" Sure, why not?" replied Juanita, in English. But Ortiz continued to speak in Spanish.

This breezy stranger with the girl of his desire probably did not understand it, he thought. It might be rude, this speaking a strange language in front of this man, but he was not concerned about that. He felt resentful and sullen.

Ortiz claimed the next dance, and led off Juanita, whose eyes still remained anchored toward John. The latter smiled back pleasantly, and, turning, walked toward the alcove.

He was wondering where he had seen this Vicente Ortiz before. That it was in one of the Longacre Square night clubs he felt certain. He disliked the man on sight.

But that, he considered, might be because he seemed on intimate terms with this beautiful Juanita Lopez. After all, the man probably disliked him as instinctively.

" Fifty-fifty," he said to himself, smilingly, as he continued toward the alcove, and once more the big fellow who sat so glumly beside the gift table appeared to bore him through with a glance.

Who was this big chap? The man wore dinner clothes, yet somehow did not have the air of belonging here.

He might be some business associate of Lopez, one of the many selfmade millionaires whose money failed to remove the common touch. He might possibly be one

of his father's detectives, but, if so, he wondered why his father had not mentioned the fact that he was sending some one else.

Or the man might even be a crook. Not likely, of course, but just possible. Maybe the *señor* could give him a line on this fellow.

He refused the drink offered him by the waiter, and started over toward Lopez.

At that instant a gong sounded in the outer corridor. Simultaneously the lights went out.

A murmur of surprise passed over the gathering, and almost immediately a thin ribbon of illumination from an electric torch cut through the darkness, and John Butts saw that an automatic was in the hand of the burly stranger whose presence had been puzzling him.

Then this big chap *was* a crook, was he? John Butts took a step forward, and threw an overhand right to the point of the burly man's jaw.

The mysterious stranger crumbled to the floor. The flash light clattered and broke. In the pitch darkness, there was the sound of receding footsteps along the outer corridor.

John Butts felt his way to the door, and streaked after the fleeing figure. By the light of the electrolier in the outer hall he made out the fugitive.

It was the waiter who had offered him a drink from the tray only a moment before. The man was already close to the elevator, the door of which was being held open by a tall, slim man, while the colored elevator boy goggled in astonishment which turned into fear as the tall, slim man poked an automatic in his ribs and spat out some brief but emphatic command.

The fleeing waiter made the cage, the frightened negro pulled the lever, and the car shot downward, but John Butts, too late to reach the car itself, had sufficient presence of mind to stick out his foot and stop the safety gate from clicking.

Then, as the car proceeded downward, he slid back the gate, and leaped for the cable. There was a strange, sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach as the cable let him down swiftly; then there was an abrupt stop.

He heard the thieves below bark an angry command to the colored boy to open the gate and be quick about it, heard a blubbering reply. Then the gate opened, and the footsteps of the crooks could be heard across the tiling of the ground floor lobby.

"Send her lower!" he yelled to the elevator boy. "Lower the car until I tell you to stop it. Quick, do you hear?"

After a heart-breaking delay, he managed to make himself clear to the panic-stricken negro and, once even with the ground floor, scrambled through the open gateway and into the lobby. As he raced through to the exit, however, he realized that already he might be too late.

A powerful car was already slipping down the avenue with a roar, and John raced to a lone taxicab parked on the opposite side of the street. But here luck was also against him.

The taxi was driverless, the chauffeur, perhaps, gossiping with some doorman in one of the near-by warm apartment house lobbies. John tried to crank the car. The motor was cold and unresponsive.

An elaborate town car was pulling up under the porte-cochère on the opposite side of the street. Before it had stopped, John was across and up beside the liveried chauffeur.

"Quick!" he yelled. "Keep it going! Down Park Avenue! All the speed you got! Police work! Step on it, man!"

The chauffeur looked back at his employer with irritating calm.

"Is it all right, sir?" he asked.

"Quite all right, I think," came the lazy drawl of Bob Derwent. And as the driver put the engine in high gear and raced down the street, Bob continued: "My! But you excite one, Jack, old dear. Something up already, I suppose. Why not come back here and tell your old pal all about it?"

"No comedy, Bob!" John pleaded. "For the love o' Mike, faster!" he shouted to the driver. "Straight down Park."

The driver continued to send the Rolls along at a lively clip, but a comparatively short distance was sufficient to prove the futility of the chase. The powerful roadster had already turned into one of the East Forties and disappeared.

It was a discouraged John Butts who rode back to the Lopez apartment in the Derwent town car, and gave a more detailed explanation of the fiasco to his friend.

"And so," he concluded, "I've fallen down on my first assignment. But I think I laid one of the crooks out upstairs, Bob. Unless he got away, we might get some dope through him."

"How is 'the Eye' this evening?" asked Derwent, banteringly. "Nice game, this detective business, isn't it? Think you'll carry on the Butts tradition, and all that?"

John Butts grinned ruefully. He had become inured to the malicious humor of Bob Derwent.

"Yes, I think I shall," he answered. "Abner T. Butts never quit on a case. I guess you've heard him called 'Bulldog Butts,' haven't you? All right. Bulldogs don't sire yellow dogs. Yes, Bob, old top, it just occurs to me now that this detective business can be made quite interesting. Let's see if we can find this elevator boy, then go back up and face the music."

VI.

THE Lopez apartment was a welter of excitement, doubt, fear, dismay, consternation. A woman screamed, another laughed hysterically.

"Ooh! Baby!" yelled a somewhat alcoholic male. "There must have been wood alcohol in those cocktails. I've gone blind! I can't see a thing, I tell you!"

The splendor of the place was gone, for its splendor was drowned in darkness. The beautifully appointed ballroom might as well have been a cheap dance hall.

The guests sensed irregularity, even danger. The sounds from the inky alcove had told them that a man had been knocked down; in the rays of a flash light they had seen an ugly automatic being brandished, and they knew that some one had scurried from the unlighted room and escaped into the elevator.

Darkness itself would have left them unmoved, maybe even amused, for a fuse might have burned out, something they could not understand fully, something that only an electrician or some other craftsman would know all about and would attend to; but they had seen those glittering presents on the long table in the alcove, had heard the scuffling, the thud of a body, the scampering of feet, the shouts.

And now many of the well-poised guests instinctively cringed into the corners of the room—for under these conditions it was not impossible that the next sound might be the angry bark of a revolver, and the gayety of the dance might turn into tragedy.

The voice of Señor Lopez cut through the darkness.

"My good friends," he pleaded, speaking his careful English. "Be not alarmed, I implore you. Pablo!" he called.

"Yes, sir," came the voice of Pablo, his secretary. "I am right here, Señor Lopez."

"Please to see what happened to the lights, Pablo," Lopez requested. "You are familiar with the house. Feel your way back to the storeroom where the switch is located, and see if—"

The lights flashed on before he could complete the sentence. "Ah! It is unnecessary, Pablo."

The *señor* looked about him, his glance sweeping the gift table. The court crucifix was gone.

"Please to start the music," he called to the orchestra leader on the palm-bordered platform. "And, my guests, please continue dancing. There has been a little irregularity, but absolutely no cause for alarm."

The orchestra started a swingy fox trot. The dancers, most of them still curious, began to dance, if only to please the *señor*. That smooth-voiced pleading of his had more force than a command.

Pablo, at the suggestion of his employer, gathered up the rest of the jewelry in a silver casket in which checks for the bride had been held, and started toward the safe in another section of the apartment. The *señor* followed him out of the room.

"Summon the elevator boy up here," he commanded. "But first circulate through the various rooms, make a mental note of who is here and who is not. Under no condition let any guest feel that he or she is under suspicion. The crucifix, it is gone. We cannot catch the thief. Our only

course is to check up and see who is missing, get our clews and have the Butts agency work quietly upon them."

Grogan, the Butts operative, who had climbed groggily to his feet, was at the heels of the *señor*. His hand was upon the automatic in his pocket.

"Lock all doors, Mr. Lopez!" he pleaded. "The crooks might still be here. I'll phone the cops. Where's the phone?"

"Wait!" Lopez insisted. "The police must not get wind of this! If the thief is gone, he is gone. The police cannot be called into my home, while my guests, my friends, are here."

Grogan started to remonstrate. Vicente Ortiz, who had joined Lopez in company with his friends, Zapater and Ramos, pleaded that the police be called, the guests searched. He burst into voluble Spanish.

"Silence, my friend!" Lopez ordered. "Please not to have so many suggestions," he added crisply. "Should I blast the reputations of all here on the scant possibility that one may be guilty? Come, let us repair to my study. We must confer on this. I shall get into communication with the Butts Agency directly we have anything to go on."

He motioned Zapater, Ramos and Ortiz to follow him.

At this moment, Weems, the butler, his ruddy face beaded with perspiration which indicated that, after all, he might be a human being, approached his master.

"Begging your pardon, sir," he said. "Some one turned off the switch in the storeroom. I got a flash light, sir, and put on the lights again. I am 'orribly sorry, sir, and assure you that it will not 'appen again."

"It is all right," Lopez assured him. "Come into my study, Weems."

He turned to Grogan, and indicated that he, also, should join the conference. And then to Ortiz: "Please be so good as to summon Juanita."

Five minutes later he sat at his desk, and addressed the assemblage he had gathered about him.

"The principal thing we want here is lack of publicity," he began. "I think that all of us men have observed what has happened. Juanita," he added, addressing his daughter, "I will now inform you: the court crucifix has been stolen."

"Poor Rosalie!" gasped Juanita. "Oh, father, it will upset her terribly!"

"It will not upset her," replied her father, "if she does not learn of it. I ask your aid in keeping this matter secret. It may be that the thief will be apprehended and the cross recovered. At any rate, we must proceed quietly, in order that no guest of ours shall be embarrassed.

"We have chosen our friends because they are persons of honor," he added, and it may have been by accident that he turned in the direction of Zapater, Ramos and Ortiz. "Now, Weems, I think you had something to tell us. You may proceed."

Weems proceeded. He told his story convincingly, with the ingratiating inflection of the well-trained servant.

He had been in the butler's pantry, he explained, when the lights went out. It occurred to him at that very moment, he averred, that this might mean some irregularity, for he was aware of the gifts displayed in the alcove.

He had reached for his flash light in a pigeonhole of the little table desk where he kept his butler's accounts, and had gone through the butler's pantry into the hall, then into the storeroom, where the light switch was located.

Entering the storeroom, he explained, he had brushed against the figure of a man who was making a hasty exit in the darkness. The man had grappled with him, had swept the flash light to the floor before he could operate it and learn the man's identity, and then had slammed the door into the hallway.

"Lockin' you in, you mean?" Grogan interrogated.

"Quite," replied Weems. "It occurred to me then, more than ever, that the lights may have been turned off with design."

He had recovered the flash light from the floor, had turned its rays on the switchbox, the door of which had been left open, and had thrown on the switch, once more giving light to the apartment. Then he had

rushed through an infrequently used door which led directly into the pantry—he had some trouble opening it, he claimed, and apologized for his dusty appearance, but he wished to get to Mr. Lopez at once—and had gone out into the hall again, but he was too late to intercept the prowler who had turned off the lights.

Might he make bold to ask if he had deported himself through the whole happening as Mr. Lopez would have wished?

The *señor* nodded. Grogan stared at the butler fishily. It was second nature for him to mistrust any one so glib. His natural aggressiveness, however, had been modified by his humiliation of a few moments previous.

"I'd suggest, Mr. Lopez," he said, "that you have this man check up the help an' see if any one's missin'."

Weems arched a disdainful eyebrow, and awaited his employer's pleasure.

"That might be a good thing," Lopez admitted. "I am not one to claim that the poor are more dishonest than the rich. Often exactly the reverse is true. And yet my guests here to-night are gentle folk. They are above want. They could not stoop to theft. It would be sadness for me to think so. The servants—possibly yes. You may check up the servants, Weems. Report to me if any one of them is missing, or behaving in any irregular manner."

Weems bowed in acknowledgment of this gesture of confidence on the part of his employer. He retired just as Pablo appeared at the study door with an abashed colored boy in tow.

The story of the elevator operator was halting, but apparently sincere. A few moments before a man had come into the lobby of the apartment building. He had waited there a few moments, and had consulted his watch a great deal.

"Checkin' up the time," was Grogan's opinion. "That get-away was planned for a certain hour to have the elevator ready for the inside guy upstairs. It was him rang that signal bell when you got him up here, wasn't it?"

"Yas, sah. He took the elevatah, an' handed me a five-dollah note. Said he was a friend o' Mistah Lopez's. Ah git him up heah on this flo'. He says I'm all right, to wait up heah a minute an' he'd bring me out a drink o' gin. It all looked mighty queer to me, sah, but befo' Ah knew an'-thing he'd buzzed the bell he had. Then he poked a gat in mah ribs.

"Next thing Ah knew a fellah was runnin' down the hall an' jumps in with us. Man pokes me with a gat agin, tells me to git started down, an' no delays about it. 'Nother man runs aftah him, but he didn't get in the car. Grabbed the cable, an' came down with us an' ran after the first two."

The case seemed pretty definite in Grogan's mind. The big detective stood up.

"All plain as day, Mr. Lopez," he said. "That bell could be heard in the switch room. One guy was there to turn out the lights. That guy is still here in this house, if I ain't an awful lot mistaken. Another guy was planted right near the alcove, to grab them jewels when the glim was doused. Mighta been one o' them waiters that grabbed the swag. An' the other guy—I got him mugged right. He was that tall, smooth-lookin' fellah that was talkin' alone with you near the alcove, Mr. Lopez. I spotted him the first thing."

"Find out, Pablo," Lopez directed. "And see if Weems has checked up all the servants."

When his secretary had left the room, the *señor* turned to his daughter.

"That young man you were dancing with so much, Juanita," he said. "How did he impress you?"

"He impressed me as a gentleman," was Juanita's reply, made with some spirit. "I trust, father, that you are not holding him under any suspicion?"

"He's the guy all right," Grogan declared firmly. "Twenty to one he's in the game. An' I'm almost sure that's the guy that swatted me down. I gotta hand it to him for havin' a sock for such a fancy lookin' bird."

The conference continued until interrupted by the return of the butler.

"There is one man missing, sir," Weems announced. "None of the regular staff. It was that extra waiter we engaged from Mancini, the caterer, sir."

" That's the one I doped," cut in Grogan. " Well, maybe we can git a line on him through Mancini. These two birds was workin' together, that's sure, this waiter an' this slick lookin' bozo. The chief showed me this fancy crook's picture today, and he told me he knew where to lay hands on him in an emergency. Must have had a tip-off. Maybe givin' this guy enough rope to make a get-away, then ketch him redhanded an' give him the works.

" The chief often works that way—don't cast the net while the small fry is runnin' —waits to ketch the big fish. The chief is smooth like that. When he gits a line on 'em, they're as good as in the Big House, so don't worry, Mr. Lopez. We gotta good chance yet o' takin' these guys."

" But this young man you refer to is the son of Abner Butts," said Señor Lopez. " So his credentials stated, at least."

" Then he framed the credentials," replied Grogan, confidently. " Boss, I feel pretty tough about this. No one ever got away with anything that Dan Grogan guarded before, an' I been in this business twenty years. Wouldn't fell down this time, but them lights went out, and there wasn't no chance to use the gat. Mighta hit somebody else. Then that sock on the button put me out—I'm only human. But I tell you I'll get that crook for you, or my name ain't Dan Grogan."

Juanita Lopez sat with an expression of deep concern on her beautiful face.

" I don't believe it!" she insisted. " Why, he may even be here yet, father."

" I regret to say that he is not," replied her father sadly. " I have had Pablo circulate about among the guests. This young man is missing."

" Course he's missin'," crowed Grogan. " That smooth-lookin' fellah's the man behind the gun all right. There can't be no doubt about it. I don't like this business o' delayin' action in a thing as big as this, Mr. Lopez, but you're the boss an' I'm takin' your orders. But that crucifix is as good as recovered."

Señor Lopez sat there thoughtfully. The jet eyes of Vicente Ortiz glowed. The face of Juanita was clouded.

" I still don't believe that tall young man a thief," she insisted. " He had an honest face."

" He had rather a handsome face," was Ortiz's meaningful correction. " Danced well, too, I thought," he added, acidly.

" He'll be dancin' up in Sing Sing before long!" Grogan predicted. " That guy had the look of a real Big Time crook—smooth-lookin', an' a fellah that knows how to wear clothes. Ten times as dangerous as a low-brow, that kind. Now I know why the chief wanted him to make a get-away at first, why he suggested ' no rough stuff ' to me.

" Knows where to locate him, the chief says he does, an' when he pulls the net on this bird it won't take long to haul in the little fellahs. Funny I never ran into this bozo before—one o' them big continental crooks 'ud be my guess. That's prob'ly why I never bumped into him. Noticed he spoke Spanish. Well, if what the chief says is true, an' it usually is, I'll see him again, an' mighty soon, too!"

Grogan's remark was prophetic, for at that moment there was a tap on the office door. Grogan arose, turned the knob and opened it.

The " Big Time crook " stood there calmly.

There was just a hint of surprise in his face as he stared at Grogan, then he looked beyond the big operative to the master of the household.

" The elevator boy told me you were in here, sir," he said to Lopez. " Sorry to report that those thieves got away, but I'd like to confer with you privately for a few minutes, if that is convenient."

" Oh! Is that right!" cut in Grogan, whipping out his automatic and leveling its muzzle at the breast of the newcomer. " Pretty smooth, you are—gotta hand it to you. Slip away with the swag, hand it over to the pals, an' then come back here with some cock-an'-bull story. A long chancer—but you took too long a chance this time. Phone for the cops, some one!" he called over his shoulder to the men seated around Lopez's desk.

Ortiz leaped to the telephone, but Lopez stayed him with an imperious gesture. John

Butts looked at the operative with an expression of scorn.

"I think I see it all now," he said, the look of wonderment clearing from his brow. "I had been imagining you a crook, possibly rather a clever crook, and now I find that you're a detective—and just a bungling one."

He turned and beckoned toward the elevator. "Oh, Bob!" he called. "Come here a minute, old man."

And when Bob Derwent had reached the study door and had been greeted by Lopez: "I appear to be a little under suspicion with our friend here, Bob. I told Señor Lopez who I was, but probably our ungrammatical friend here has been running me down."

"That stuff won't go!" said Grogan, determinedly. "I'm an operative from the Butts Agency, an' I happen to know this guy's a crook. I see Mr. Lopez knows you, but don't get mixed up in this, is my advice."

"And mine to you," Bob Derwent drawled, "would be to stop pointing that ugly-looking weapon at your employer's son. This is John Butts, son of Abner T."

"Yeh, that's what he told the boss here," Grogan retorted with a sarcastic grin. He kept the weapon trained on Butts. "An' I guess he pulled the same yarn on you. He's foolin' you, I tell you."

"Fooling me!" Bob repeated. "Well, my friend, then he fooled me four years at Harvard, and ever since then. If he isn't the son of Abner T. Butts, then I'm a Mongolian prince!"

The son of Abner T. Butts! Grogan's heavy jaw dropped. He lowered his automatic and placed it in his hip pocket with an air of great disappointment, equaled only by that of Vicente Ortiz. Señor Lopez stood up, and grasped John's hand.

"Glad to see you again, Mr. Butts," he said. "That was very courageous of you, my friend, chasing those thieves. The elevator boy was telling me how you got down to the ground floor by using the cable. I can see that you did your best, that only ill luck defeated you. I'll confer with you later. We'd better return to the ballroom. Don't want the guests to suspect any great irregularity. I detest publicity. The loss of the crucifix is bad enough, but publicity is worse."

Vicente Ortiz looked sullen. Grogan cursed under his breath. His theories had gone for naught. He would have to start all over again now, and the chief could be biting in his remarks on occasions of failure on the part of his subordinates.

Juanita's red mouth was parted in a smile that showed her white teeth. The strains of a fox trot swept in from the ballroom.

"Dance this?" asked John, with a gallant bow.

He led the smiling girl out toward the ballroom.

VII.

LATE that night, John Butts, clad in a suit of his friend's silk pyjamas, sat before a wood fire in Derwent's apartment, and listened to the eternal banter of his friend.

"Seems to me that 'the Eye' finished up rather black and blue," was Bob's smiling charge. "What was the result of the final conference with Lopez? I suppose he phoned your pater, and I suppose you're fired, and all that, and all this deduction stuff of yours is finished forever, what?"

"You have a positive genius," returned John, "for supposing wrong. I pleaded with Lopez not to call on the governor. Asked him for a chance to make good on the case after falling down on it at the start. Regular chap, Lopez. Much easier to convince than I thought he'd be in a matter of this caliber. Grogan still insisted on calling in the cops. Rather hard to handle, but Lopez brought him around somehow."

"Yes, regular chap," Derwent grinned. "That young daughter of his is rather regular too, yes? But what chance in the world have you to run these crooks to earth? I believe," he added, with a smile that would have irritated one who knew him less intimately, "that 'run to earth' is the accepted term, isn't it? And all these fictional detectives have theories and clews of some sort which ultimately bring the culprit 'to bay.' Have you any theories, *Sherlock?*"

John Butts lit a cigarette. For once he was deadly serious. "I have," he replied.

"Plenty of them. You wouldn't be interested in hearing them, of course?"

"Not greatly," returned the flippant Derwent, still grinning.

"In that case," was John's decision, "I will tell you about them."

"I knew you would," said Bob, resignedly.

"In the first place," young Butts explained, "I am not going back to the governor until I've run down these theories. I suspect four people—Ortiz, Ramos and Zapater and, I am sorry to say, Lopez's secretary. Sorry, for Pablo seems such a decent chap at heart. May be badly in need of money, and saw a chance to capitalize his position on the inside of the Lopez household. I'm almost certain there's something queer in the attitude of those four—I could feel it, somehow. I think I know people, Bob. Even the governor admits that."

"How unoriginal! Every dub thinks he knows people."

"True, Old Wet Blanket. But you know my hunches of old. Didn't I have a hunch on the Yale-Harvard game last year, picking the crimson to win when every gridiron expert thought we'd be wiped off the field? And didn't I tell you to lay off betting the year before—and save you two or three thousand?"

"Pure luck," said Bob, with seeming lack of appreciation.

"Maybe. But here's another fact—the Lopezes are sailing for Porto Rico tomorrow to get the house near Barranquitas ready for the honeymooners. Pablo is accompanying them. He would, naturally. But I find that Ortiz and Zapater are also going on that boat. Seems odd they should be taking passage just at this time. Crooks often leave the country after a coup of this sort, you know, when they can. No passports are required from the States to Porto Rico. Furthermore, there is no customs examination at San Juan for a passenger from the States."

"Marvelous, my dear *Sherlock!* And you're basing your suspicions on the skimpy fact that a couple of Porto Ricans are going home for a visit! Weird! Uncanny, in fact!"

"But Ortiz is not a Porto Rican. He's a Cuban."

"Yes, a Cuban infatuated with Juanita Lopez, who's taking the same boat. Or he might be going to Cuba that way. You're positively childish, old fellow."

"But a Cuban wouldn't go home that way. It's a good thousand miles from San Juan to Havana—almost as far as from New York to Havana, in fact. And the sailings, I'm told, are infrequent. And I have something else up my sleeve. I think, in fact I am quite sure, that the prospective purchaser for that court crucifix is now in Porto Rico. And, furthermore, I shouldn't be surprised if the fine Italian hand of our old pal, Lefty Bloom, was in this business, somehow.

"I know now where I saw Ortiz. Kept thinking and thinking last night, and finally it came to me. I saw Ortiz and Lefty Bloom together in the El Toro Night Club not more than ten days ago. They were splitting a bottle of champagne, and seemed very much engrossed in each other. And anybody that's friendly with Lefty Bloom—well, he's either a crook or well on the way to being one."

"But what's all this got to do with your purchaser's being in Porto Rico?"

"Well, I'll admit my theories in that quarter are based wholly on a sort of accident. No real brain work on my part."

"Naturally."

"You see, Bob, some time ago, when my mother was living, we took a little jaunt to Porto Rico, and dad had me drive him over from San Juan toward Barranquitas to call on his old friend, Lopez. Lopez had sailed for Cuba a day or so before, so since we were over that way dad suggested calling on another acquaintance of his—a General Compton, an American who was a regular army captain during the occupation of San Juan in '98. Queer old duck, seemed to have plenty of private means. Never could have kept up his elaborate menage on a general's retirement pay.

"Goofy over jewels, this General Compton, particularly jewels with a history. Vain about it, like most collectors. Bored me to death showing me his treasures, and I don't think dad was tremendously in-

terested, but it was hard to get away from the old codger.

"He took me into his holy of holies, showed me jewels that had come to him from East Indian potentates, and gems from the collection of the late lamented Russian royalty. He lives about two miles from the Lopez estate in Porto Rico, near enough, I should say, to know Lopez and to learn about the court crucifix. Think my reasoning is sound in suspecting he might be in this somewhere?"

"Do you mean that he's an old crook?" asked Bob, evidently determined to give no encouragement to his friend.

"Of course not! A man can't be in the United States army, and rise to the rank of general, and be a crook. But honesty is all comparative. Get a man with a weakness, and he'll cheat for that weakness, although he mightn't call it cheating. Take a law-abiding American. How often will he violate the law in order to get a drink of forbidden beverages?"

"I take the hint," said Bob, reaching for his bottle of special stock and pouring two more drinks.

"No, thanks, Bob. What I mean exactly is that the old boy wouldn't steal a peso from his worst enemy. But he has a passion for jewels, rare jewels, almost insane on the subject. I think if he got a chance to buy a rare thing like that court crucifix he'd jump at it and never ask where the crucifix came from, or how it was obtained, and he'd plant it away in that safe of his in his sanctum sanctorum, and gloat over it, and no one would be the wiser except the crooks who sold it to him, and they'd never tell.

"So far, so good. Now, the Coamo sails to-morrow noon. To follow up this hunch I have to get to Porto Rico. I'm not going to report back to dad until I've run down this case, and have either failed or succeeded. Things like that make a hit with dad. But I can't go to him for the passage money. And right now I'm all but broke, and you, Bob, having much more money than brains—"

"Ah! Hah! I knew there was a catch in it! You have the nerve to want me to finance a trip to Porto Rico.

"You're showing unusual perspicuity, Bob—for you. That's it, exactly. If I make good on this thing, you share in the reward, and get your money back several times over. And, furthermore, you could come with me."

"That's it! Spare no expense, old man. It's only the money of your old pal, Bob Derwent. Not a bad idea, though, at that. Cold here in New York at this season. I planned to go South next month anyhow. But I was thinking of Havana. Sportier time there. Porto Rico's dry, I understand."

"New York is dry," Butts countered, "and I notice you haven't died from thirst. If an old dipsomaniac like yourself has a craving for liquor, he needn't suffer in a place like San Juan—they run it in from Jamaica, good British whisky that will soften that brain of yours still more. Well?"

"You paint an alluring picture, old man. I'm rather for it. Think we could get reservations at this late hour?"

"Leave that to me. We'll sail on the Coamo to-morrow if we have to stow away."

"Don't make it plural, old man. I have no desire to hide out in discomfort, and maybe get caught and get put to work scrubbing decks. But if you can get a nice double stateroom, bath and all that, I'm your angel. I think you're perfectly loony, but the trip ought to be pleasant."

And that was why, shortly after nine o'clock next morning, John Butts might have been seen dashing frantically from one tourist agency to another. He finally took a taxi to lower Broadway, where the offices of the New York and Porto Rico Line were located.

He came out of the latter close to ten o'clock without a reservation, but still unwilling to admit failure. He looked up at the towering pile of the Corwith Building. Up there on the forty-fourth floor was a gray-eyed man who never gave up.

John's jaw squared. Then that gray-eyed man's son would do no less. He was determined to sail that day for Porto Rico, somehow.

Right at the moment he looked more than ever like "Bulldog Butts." He con-

sulted his wrist watch, then located a telephone booth and called up his friend Derwent."

"Hello, Bob," he spoke into the mouthpiece. "All packed?"

"You have the reservations, then?"

"We sail at twelve noon to-day, sharp. Slam the stuff into a taxi this very second, and make for Pier 7, at the foot of President Street, Brooklyn. Have the driver go over the Manhattan Bridge, down Clinton to President, and then keep right on to the wharves. I'll be waiting for you on board, at the purser's office. Hurry, old top."

He hung up the receiver before his friend could question him.

Bob Derwent, he knew, was so lazy that he would never make the trip to the docks if he knew that the reservations were still in doubt.

Some forty minutes later, in the wake of two porters who carried his elaborate hand luggage, Bob came upon Butts in front of the purser's office on board the Coamo.

"What stateroom?" he asked. "I told the officer at the gangplank that you had the tickets."

"I'll let you know in a minute," John replied, and he turned back to the purser.

But that official, with just a hint of growing impatience in his voice, said, with an air of finality: "What I have said is actually so, and I'll have to ask you to close this discussion, sir. There isn't a single reservation on this ship. The San Lorenzo, next week, is the best you can get."

"But I tell you we've *got* to sail to-day," John insisted. "We'll go second cabin, if necessary."

"We will like hell," put in Bob, pleasantly. "Do you mean to say, you old bluffer, that you had me spend the energy to get up early and rush down to this Godforsaken wharf to find out that we actually have no reservations? The nerve of the working classes?"

The purser, normally a pleasant-faced young man, if a bit perturbed at the aggressive methods of John Butts, smiled apologetically.

"I'm really awfully sorry," he said, in answer to John's suggestion, "but I couldn't book you second even, as a matter of fact. This is the very peak of the tourist season, you see. I couldn't accommodate the President if he dropped on board from an airplane after we got to sea. Couldn't even put him in the glory hole. We have eight new stewards to help at meals, for extra tables in the dining salon, and at that we'll have first and grand sittings every meal."

"You mean to say we couldn't double up with some one? All the double berth cabins full?" asked John, while Bob Derwent looked on in futile disapproval at the idea of doubling up with some stranger.

"All full," repeated the purser. "All the men's staterooms, that is. Biggest passenger list this winter. Of course, there's a big suite on the deck above, G suite, two good-sized beds and a private bath, that isn't full, but it was booked by a young lady two or three weeks ago. Obviously, that's out. Then B 106, on the same deck, has only one person in it, although there are two berths. Occupied by a New York woman. You see how helpless I am. Mighty sorry. You certainly seem bent on taking this trip right now. I know how you feel, but if you were my own brother I couldn't do a thing."

"B 106," repeated John Butts, and there was a designing look in his eyes. "Has the lady come aboard yet?"

"I think so. The gong for visitors ashore will sound in a few minutes." He consulted the chart before him. "Yes, she's board," he informed Butts. "Miss Muriel Andrews, B 106. Why?"

For answer, John Butts had darted up the broad companionway, and was knocking at the door of B 106, which was opened by a fashionably dressed lady of indefinite age and definite angularity.

"Miss Andrews?" he inquired, and he brought his flashing smile into evidence.

VIII.

SOME fifteen minutes later, just as the "All Ashore That's Going" announcement was being made, John ran across Bob Derwent in the smokeroom of the Coamo.

"Lord! I was afraid you might have be-

come impatient and gone home," he told his friend. "That shore gong made me finish up my negotiations pronto, and jump around looking for you."

"Much too comfortable for any such move as that," drawled the luxury-loving Bob. "I suppose we'll have to leave now, though?"

"Not at all. You can have our luggage taken to B 106. Everything O. K."

"You mean we are really going to Porto Rico?"

"That's what I told you last night, wasn't it?"

"But how did you work it, old man? That purser seemed to mean what he said, and—"

"And I meant what I said. Anything," John added, the least bit profoundly, "can be done if a fellow wants to do it—has to do it."

"Oh, Lord! Young Bulldog Butts, Junior, lecturing! Do you mean to say you got the dame to give up her room?"

"I simply put it up to Miss Andrews. Didn't have much time; had to work fast. First I made about ten thousand apologies. Told her there was a fortune involved. Thought she might be some girl of moderate means on a couple of weeks' vacation—some girl who might be glad to take a bonus of two or three hundred dollars, say, and shift to the San Lorenzo next week."

"And where," asked Bob, with mock severity, "would this handsome bonus come from, may I make bold to ask? You told me yourself you were about broke."

"Oh, I knew you always carried a few centuries in your pocket. And then there's your check book, you know."

"Thanks, awfully," Bob acknowledged, "for the abandon with which you hand out my hard-earned money. And I suppose all I do now is shell out a few centuries which you mention so lightly."

"Not so. Hear me out. I found that money wouldn't work with Miss Andrews. Her old man's worth too many millions—Andrews's Leakless Asbestos Roofs, by the way. She booked late for herself and maid. Couldn't get a bathroom, but the bath is right across from her stateroom. Then the maid turned up ill this morning, when it was too late to get another. But she's a determined person, Miss Andrews. Made up her mind to go anyhow."

"Then those mere few centuries of mine stay in my pocket?"

"For the present, yes."

"Thanks, so much. You are too good, *m'sieu'*."

"Let me tell my story. I'm rather proud of it. Accordingly, I had to get talking on other subjects than money with Miss Andrews. She happened to see my frat pin. Asked me where from. I told her Harvard. She mentioned that her kid brother was a Harvard man. I remember him, and possibly you do—old Bunny Andrews, who made his letter senior year more as a reward for his hard work than his gridiron ability. I assured her that dear old Bunny had football genius."

"Hypocrisy!"

"Diplomacy! We had to get that room. Then I found she was a nut on dancing, and told her that Chalif himself had nothing on me. She's going to Porto Rico, she told me, to perfect the Spanish that she's been studying under a tutor. They speak with a real Castilian accent there, you know, more than in the other islands. I told her I spoke it perfectly, and I'd instruct her an hour a day on the voyage down.

"Well, it took nerve. It took resourcefulness, old boy. But the result was that she consented to my humble suggestion to double up with the lone girl in G suite, if the G suite girl was willing. She and the stewardess got together with the G suite girl, and after some discussion the girl consented. Then for the last five minutes I've been fixing up this irregular last-minute passage with the purser, pleading and threatening, and all that. Not a bad fellow, really, that purser."

Bob Derwent blew out a smoke ring.

"You beat me," he said. "You're a born salesman, not a sleuth. I suppose you feel pretty cocky after this snappy start, but don't forget, old man, that you were handling a woman. That's where the *Don Juan* in you came out. Yes, you could always handle women. But wait until you get up against some hard-boiled

he-man crook in this detective game. Then *Don Juan* will find himself helpless."

"Lay off the criticisms and get down to the purser's office with the passage money" John suggested. "And I'll get a steward to pack these grips to the cabin."

"I'll carry this one myself," said Bob, picking up a sizable pigskin bag. "I'll let you guess what's inside. A fellow might get the chills, you know, and they tell me this ship is bone dry."

"Say, don't let the officers see that."

"Tush!" returned Bob. "This is just a few drops for medicinal purposes." He lugged the heavy pigskin bag toward B 106.

IX

ROLLING and pitching on her way, the Coamo plowed through the night.

Ambrose Lightship had been left far behind. The vessel was steaming a good eighteen knots, despite the mad December snowstorm.

A young man leaned against the taffrail watching the smoke bannering out of the Coamo's funnels. The air was decidedly cold, but John Butts, the collar of his big ulster turned up, continued to remain on the after deck and pull the clean sea air into his lungs.

He had remained in his stateroom during the afternoon, and had ordered his room steward to serve dinner in B 106, for he did not wish to be too prominent this first day aboard the Coamo. He knew that Ortiz and Zapater and Pablo, and possibly even Lefty Bloom himself, were aboard, and while it would be necessary to run into them sooner or later in the four-day voyage to San Juan, he desired to delay the meeting with them as long as possible, even at the expense of not seeing Juanita Lopez, whom he also knew to be on board.

The orchestra in the social hall was just beginning to tune up. He had a duty to perform, something he meant to go through with. He knew that the kittenish Muriel Andrews would be in the ballroom, expecting him to come and ask her to dance, and, although he felt little like dancing at present, he realized that he would have to go through with it.

He walked forward, descended to B deck and headed for his own stateroom to change into his dinner clothes for dancing. Turning into the passageway that led to 106 he all but collided with Muriel Andrews.

"I heard them tuning up," said the dance-mad Muriel. She smiled coyly.

"Yes, I am going in to dress. Had dinner in my cabin. I'll be up there presently."

"Goody! Ooh! I can hardly keep my feet still!" The orchestra had swung into a lilting fox trot, and John knew that he was in for a busy evening. He made his devoirs to Miss Andrews, and continued on to his room, where he found Bob Derwent had become somewhat the worse for a period in proximity to the pigskin bag which he carried for "medicinal purposes."

"Lay off that rot!" John commanded. "Come on! Get on your dinner clothes and we'll go up and dance. It'll do you good. Better take a turn around the deck first."

"What? In this blizzard?"

"It won't kill you. Then we can dance. You'll have to dance with Miss Andrews part of the time, for I know she's the kind that'll want to dance every number. And there are some mighty pretty girls up there. They're lining up ready to be swooped upon by all the dancing men."

"Count me out," Bob grunted, lying down in his berth and falling into sonorous slumber.

So John Butts got quickly into his dress clothes and, more as a duty than a pleasure, started back toward the ballroom. Entering he ran into Juanita Lopez, her eyes bright and cheeks flushed from her first dance—with Vicente Ortiz, John assumed, and the thought made him just the least bit jealous.

He paused for a moment, as the four-piece orchestra struck up a lively jazz.

"Mmh!" breathed Juanita. "That would be wonderful for a Charleston!"

"Yes," John agreed, and tried to stifle a feeling of disappointment as he saw the angular Muriel Andrews sitting demurely on the opposite side of the room. "I had an engagement for this dance," he added, feeling decidedly self-conscious as he bowed to Juanita and, making his way across the

teetering floor, led Miss Andrews into the dance. They swung past Juanita's corner, and John thought he saw a slight resentment in the eyes of the Spanish girl, who, with forced eagerness, accepted the invitation of Vicente Ortiz to dance the number. John also saw the look of amazement in Ortiz's jet eyes as the Cuban recognized him. The cards were being placed on the table. If Ortiz, as he believed, was a crook, he would know now that the game had really started.

It was not until he had gone through four dances with the clinging Muriel Andrews that he found an opportunity to cross to Juanita's side and plead for a turn. Somehow he felt she was going to refuse him. She did.

"I feel a little fatigued," said the pretty brunette. "After all, this is about the sixth dance," she added, acidly, reminding Butts of the number he had allowed to go by before his invitation.

To settle all doubt in his mind as to her resentment of the attitude which had been forced upon him by Miss Andrews, he saw her a couple of minutes later gliding about the floor in the arms of the tall young cruise director.

Despite the dipping of the floor, Miss Andrews clung to him until his legs were weary. Several of the couples had retired aft to the little tearoom, and it was thither John felt called upon to lead Miss Andrews.

"I'm so glad you approached me about giving up that stateroom so that you and your friend could move in!" gushed the angular Muriel, as they seated themselves at one of the little side tables.

"I may say the same," replied John, smiling outwardly, but inwardly cursing the fate that had made him seem to snub Juanita Lopez.

"What about your roommate. Doesn't he dance?"

"Oh, yes, indeed. Bob's a great dancer. You'll hear from him to-morrow night. He wants to meet you and claim about five for to-morrow." The lazy Bob would like living up to *that* rôle, he thought, as his smile widened. "Bob didn't seem quite up to it to-night. Lying down. It's been rather rough, you know."

"Yes, isn't it roly-poly? Plenty of the passengers ill. My own roommate loves to dance, she told me, but the rough weather has been too much for her. She's lying down, also. Had the ship's doctor. He told her to try to get some sleep, then, when she woke up, to take a swift walk twice around the deck and breathe plenty of fresh air."

"I hope I wasn't the means of getting you in with uncongenial company. Girl is pleasant, I suppose? She must have been, to take you in when I so nervily asked you to vacate for my selfish purposes."

"Oh, she's pleasant enough. I can stand her for four days, anyhow. But somehow not our—well, you know, not our kind, exactly, Mr.— Oh, I think I'll call you Jack. I notice it's John on the passenger list."

"Yes, please do," suggested John, without great enthusiasm. "The passenger lists are out, then?"

"Why, of course. Didn't you get one at dinner? Oh, that's right. You weren't down. I think I have one here in my bag."

"Mind letting me see it a minute? Some one I know might have booked this trip."

He took the folder and ran hurriedly down through the "B's." Lefty Bloom was not there. Of course it would be almost too much to expect. That would be having things run too sweetly. Of course, Bloom might be aboard under another name. John ran through the other names on the card as a matter of course. He knew none of the passengers, with the exception of the Lopez party and Muriel Andrews.

"The real tragedy," said John as he returned to his stateroom and recounted the dance incident to Bob, "is that Miss Andrews isn't the ill one instead of her roommate."

"Ungallant boor!" accused Bob.

"I suppose so. But seasickness does a person good, you know. And I'm sure a good dose of it would help her for life. But there! I ought not to be saying this. We owe our cabin to Miss Andrews."

"I suppose you call her Muriel by this time? Ah! These shipboard romances! You will use your fatal charms, *Don Juan.*

I'm feeling a little blooey. What d'you say to a good deck drill before we turn in —then a nightcap?"

"That's the first sensible thing I've heard you suggest in ages."

John drew on his ulster over his dinner jacket, and reached up for his cap. Bob, following with little enthusiasm.

From the side passageway toward the smokeroom companionway, a dim figure glided out, paused before G suite, and tapped on the door. John slunk back into his own stateroom doorway, for the mysterious figure was Jaime Zapater.

What was Zapater doing tapping on the door of G suite at this time of night? He wondered about this, as he motioned the puzzled Bob to keep back.

Peeking cautiously along the corridor, he saw the door of G suite opened slightly; there seemed to be a hurried conference. Then the door closed, and Zapater disappeared into the side passageway again.

A couple of minutes later, the door of G suite opened once more, and a fur-coated young woman came out. There was something vaguely familiar about the figure to the watching John Butts, who stared down the dimly-lighted passageway—then, leaving the passive Bob somewhat mystified, walked swiftly toward G suite.

The woman, meanwhile, had gone up the side passageway which led to the A deck companionway. Her face was still somewhat in shadow, but the motion, the mincing stride, the sway from the narrow hips, seemed to make the figure all the more familiar.

John Butts walked quickly toward and past G suite, and overtook the young woman just as she was passing to the deck through the exit between the smokeroom and the social hall. The woman heard the patter of feet at the head of the companionway, and looked back, somewhat nervously. Bob stared.

The woman was Maxine Lee.

X.

"JACK BUTTS!" A vestige of fear was discernible in the young woman's astoundment.

"Right, Max."

John Butts tried his utmost to keep his mien natural, but his heart was pounding. Then his hunch probably had meant something, after all.

Lefty Bloom was not aboard, but here was Maxine Lee, the woman who had tried to sue him for breach of promise, with Lefty Bloom backstage pulling the strings. And Maxine, with her bright eyes and her fresh complexion, did not seem at all like a person who had recently been suffering from seasickness.

And Jaime Zapater, one of the suspects, at the door of her stateroom? Yes, things were dovetailing nicely.

"You were going to take a walk?" asked John, feeling the question to be quite obvious. "May I accompany you? I was just going to take a turn myself."

"Why, yes. Fancy meeting you aboard, of all people! Topping, I call it!" John vaguely recalled that Maxine had played half a season with an American revue in London, and could not "stick the bally States" for some time after.

"Yes, I decided to sail at the last minute. A little mission for my father." Butts made the admission deliberately, to gage its effect.

"Your father?" Did he imagine that Maxine's tones were a trifle scarey?

"Yes. A little personal matter. He's interested in picking up a plantation down there, and as I speak Spanish quite well, he decided to give me a little vacation."

"How nice! Sort of business mixed with pleasure. My case, exactly. I'm on my way to join up with an American show troupe which the Porto Ricans seem to like rather well."

"An American troupe. Good."

John Butts knew this to be a lie. Things were turning out fine. Not one person in thousands in all of Porto Rico can speak or understand English, excluding the children, who are taught both English and Spanish in the lower school grades and are gradually becoming a bi-lingual race.

They had traversed the starboard deck from the smokeroom to the waist of the ship, and were strolling toward the port deck. It was glass-inclosed here, warmer

and sheltered. John Butts tightened his grip on the girl's arm and brought her to a halt as he thought he made out a tall figure lurking in the shadows amidships. This might or might not be Jaime Zapater, awaiting the evidently planned rendezvous with Maxine.

"We're bucking the wind this way," said John, as he guided Maxine in the other direction.

The girl turned and gazed back at the dimly outlined figure. John affected not to have seen her look back.

"So you are going to Porto Rico," he said, "to join a show. And you don't speak Spanish. And Porto Ricans don't speak English, most of them. And the Americans on the island could never support an engagement there. I'm afraid, Maxine, you'll have to think of a better one than that. I ran into Lefty Bloom not long ago," he added. "How do you think *he'll* like Porto Rico?"

"How should I know?" Maxine's tones were sullen. "It's rather cold out here. I think I shall go in now."

"Just as you like. But, Maxine, why don't you chuck it all? I happen to know that Lefty Bloom is planning to go to Porto Rico."

It sounded unconvincing to himself, but Maxine, pretty as a pastel picture, was not burdened with brains. Her next remark proved it.

"I don't think you know anything about Lefty Bloom," she said. "Lefty is in Porto Rico right now. Landed in San Juan last Monday, on the San Lorenzo."

The remark, John realized, might mean that he had won—or that he had lost. Lefty might have gone there in connection with the court crucifix coup, or, on the other hand, might be in the Island of Enchantment for a mere assignation with the pretty Maxine.

And yet, why should he, when New York was so big? Might he not, more likely, have had some deeper reason? And why was Maxine keeping to her stateroom, feigning illness when she was obviously in the pink of health?

"Yes, I am pretty well aware of Lefty Bloom's movements," he said, taking another blind dive. "I may as well tell you, Max, that I lied about my mission in Porto Rico. I'm going there for my father, it's true—but you know the business my father is in! And that show troupe story's a fib. You know it is. Come on, Max—come clean. Somehow, Max, I don't want you mixed up in this mess. You're all right at heart. Why don't you chuck Bloom and that crowd?"

"A lot you'd care. You're not thinking about me. You wouldn't care what happened to me."

"But I would care, Max," said John, with the voice of a lover—and the guilty inward feeling, somehow, of a murderer.

"Care how?"

"As a friend, as a person who knew you very well once, as one who admired you."

"Just admired me. Jack!"

After all, Butts reflected, why should he not go through with it? Why should he not give Maxine a taste of her own medicine—use love-making for material gain?

"More than that—perhaps. But I hardly think this is the place to talk about it. I can reach no real basis for truths when I know that you are lying to me. Do you wish to tell me just why you are on this trip, and why you are making believe you are ill when you are not, in order that you may remain in your stateroom?"

"So you know that I had the doctor? I suspected it, all along. That skinny old Miss Andrews told you. I didn't want to let her share my stateroom. Oh, well, damn it, I'll tell you, Jack. I suspected that Lefty Bloom might have put that dame aboard—to watch me. When she and the stewardess came to me with that story about wanting to shift in with me to accommodate some young man—that I never dreamed was *you*—I felt sure that Lefty was behind it somehow. I wanted to act innocent about it all. I consented to let her share the room, so that Lefty wouldn't have any doubts about me."

"Doubts? What do you mean?"

"Lefty," said Maxine, "has promised to marry me when I arrive in San Juan."

"And then you're going abroad on your honeymoon? Going to Paris?" He made another leap in the dark, believing that

Maxine, hard-boiled in many respects, was as easily pumped as a child.

"No, to Spain. Oh, Jack, do you think he's just fooling me again?"

"I can't conceive of Lefty Bloom doing anything else—with anybody."

"Oh, I wonder! If I thought he was fooling me again, I'd—"

"You'd what?"

The girl looked furtively over her shoulder. "I'd chuck the whole business. I do wish I was free of this crowd that I've got tangled up with. Can I really trust you, Jack?"

"You have my word that you can. You be frank with me, Maxine, and I'll see that my father's influence is stretched to get you out of anything that isn't a gross violation of the law. Here's your chance to come clean, and get out of this. Why can't you get free of Lefty Bloom? What has he got on you?"

"We pulled a little deal in Boston just before he sailed. He pulled it, that is. Bait—that's all I was, I suppose. I didn't know what was what until it was all over. I'm innocent of any wrongdoing—any real lawbreaking, that is. But I've been hauled in on it.

"I've worried myself goofy over it. It's true I wasn't really seasick, but I'm almost sick with worry. Bloom put over a phony certified check for eight thousand dollars, with me as the bait. Oh, Jack, can you get me out of this, somehow? I'm sick of it all. I'm nervous I'm c-cold."

They had reached the after-deck, and were standing in the lee of one of the lifeboats, but the cold wind scurried maliciously over the deck, and, despite her expensive fur coat, the girl was shivering, half with the cold, half in fear.

The Coamo's deep-throated fog horn was booming its warning through the night. The snow continued to drape the vessel like a great white veil.

John Butts felt an inward exultation.

"I promise you that you'll be safe if you help me get the goods on Lefty," he assured her. "If you tell the truth you have nothing to worry about. If you don't—well, we know enough now to jug the bunch of you. Let's see—you're about twenty-seven now, aren't you, Max? Well, ten years added on that, ten years in prison," he went on, mercilessly. "That would make you close to forty when you come out—almost the end of your beauty, the end of the career of a woman like you."

"Oh, Jack, you seem so hard! Don't, please! Do let us go inside. That fog horn shakes me all up inside." She put her hands over her ears as the gloomy sound of the whistle once more reached them.

John Butts clasped the girl's arm, and held her where she was.

"It'll take you about one minute to tell me where that court crucifix is, to tell me which one of this rotten crowd has it, and where and when it's going to be sold. There's nothing to fear. You're on an American boat. Even when you land in Porto Rico you'll be on United States soil, and the laws of the United States will be back of you. Come on, now! Who has the crucifix?"

"Well, my life wouldn't be worth a penny if they know, but right now it's in the possession of—"

Eight bells, midnight, were chimed, and simultaneously the raucous fog horn sent out its deafening warning again. The name that Maxine had almost whispered was lost in the racket.

"Oh, please! Let's go inside, Jack," pleaded the girl. "I can tell you to-morrow. This cold, and snow, and all this noise makes me feel positively creepy. I promise you that to-morrow night I'll meet you here and—"

That was all that John Butts heard. He did not hear the shriek of alarm sent up by the girl, who raced along the snow-slippery deck without daring to look back at the tall figure which had slipped from behind the lifeboat and blackjacked John Butts into unconsciousness.

XI.

JOHN BUTTS opened his eyes, and looked about him with a puzzled expression. His head was aching. He put up his hand and felt the bandages. Then his mind harked back to the midnight conversation on the Coamo's deck in the lee of the lifeboat.

He looked about him again. This was not B 106 that he was in. The walls were of white shiny tile, like the walls of a surgery. With some difficulty he slid out of the white bed and over to the opened port. Lights were gleaming dead ahead.

"How do you like the view?" came a soft voice from the shadows in the corner of the little room.

The voice was the voice of Juanita Lopez. Somehow, John's headache all but departed.

"Miss Lopez!" he greeted. "Why are you here?"

"Oh, I'm a sort of nurse, I guess. A volunteer nurse. Why? Any complaints?"

John felt sure that his head was better now.

"None," he replied, with his old flashing smile. "But what are those lights?"

"Morro Castle. We're off San Juan. We land early to-morrow morning."

"But we're not due until Monday. Do you mean to say that this is—"

"Sunday night. That was rather a bad crack on the head. You seem to look all right now, though."

"Do you mean to say I've been unconscious since Thursday night?"

"Not entirely. Don't you remember? You came to a couple of times, and the doctor gave you broth. But you were in pain, and he administered morphine. And you were repeating a lady's name. Do you remember what it was?"

Before he could answer, there was the sound of visitors at the doorway. The door opened, and Maxine Lee entered, followed by the white-uniformed doctor, Bob Derwent, Señor Lopez and—John could hardly believe his eyes—his own father.

"Bulldog Butts" crossed to the bed, extended his big hand,- which the boy clutched, and looked down at his son affectionately.

"Feelin' all right now?" he asked.

"Pretty well. But how is it you're here, dad? I thought I stole a complete march on you."

"Well, son, you did very well. But I haven't been in this business for over thirty years for nothing. Lots o' folks have thought they stole marches on me, and I've followed their movements as if they'd been a goldfish in a globe. The main thing is, are you feeling anything like your old self? The doctor says you'll be all right in a day or so, but meanwhile it was your head that was hit, and not his. Headache?"

Jack looked over at Juanita.

"Not now," he said. And then, with chagrin in his tone: "But I'm beginning to ache a little inside, dad. I'm afraid you'll think I've fallen down on the job. And I was so eager to make good and surprise you."

"Wait a minute!" commanded the elder Butts. "I haven't any complaints to make. You did surprise me. Read that!"

He handed his son a typewritten document, the statement of Maxine Lee. John read through the statement, and his eyes brightened perceptibly.

"This seems to be pretty complete," he said, "but do you think Bloom will get wind of anything, and beat it away from San Juan?"

"I don't think so," replied the senior Butts, grimly. "I've sent a radio to my friend and former colleague, an ex-army colonel at the head of the Insular Police. Bloom had a rendezvous with Maxine here for noon to-day, in a little office in the Calle de Tetuan. Maxine was due to deliver the crucifix. It was typical of Lefty not to take a chance himself, but to shift all the risk to a woman. At noon to-day Lefty'll be waiting at the office all right, but instead of meeting Maxine he'll meet two husky members of the Insular police. And now, since you were the one responsible for all this, I think it only fitting that Maxine should surrender the crucifix to you, so you may hand it to the *señor*, and claim the reward. All right, Maxine."

"Do I understand that with the surrender of this I am not liable in any way?" asked Maxine.

"You do," replied Abner T. Butts. "You were tricked into this. You are doing your best now to help the law, and as soon as you hand over this valuable you are free."

"Thank God!" breathed Maxine, fervently. "Gee! I feel as if I'd come out

of a stifling room into fresh air and sunshine. I'm going straight from now on. I'm not even going to land in San Juan. I'll stay on the boat, and go back on her Thursday. I'll go back to my mother in Boston. I hope Lefty let's me alone."

"You won't be bothered with Lefty for some time," Abner Butts assured her. "With your statement, and the statements of Ortiz and Zapater, I think Lefty will be taken care of for some time. We have enough on Lefty to put him away for a term of years."

Maxine arose, approached the bed, and handed John Butts a little red morocco case. Abner Butts reached down, opened the case, took out the crucifix and handed it to Señor Lopez.

"That's that," he said. "And now do you think you'd like to be alone, John, and take a little sleep?"

"Well, you're all welcome here," John replied, "but if you want to go up on deck it's all right with me. But I'd like Miss Lopez to remain a minute. I want to explain to her why I didn't take her hint to dance the Charleston with her Thursday night."

XII.

It was on the following evening that Señor Ramon Lopez and Abner T. Butts sat together in the cool lounging room of the great Lopez house near Barranquitas, in the interior of Porto Rico.

Butts accepted the large Porto Rican cigar which the *señor* handed him. He lighted it, blew out a ribbon of smoke, and sat back in his comfortable chair.

"Well, Ramon?" he said, and his old-fashioned mustache curled in a meaning smile.

"Yes, everything quite well, my friend," returned Lopez, also smiling. "At last I got you down here for a visit. It'll do you good. To-morrow we'll run over in the car to the Jardine de la Convalescencia, and dine over there at Rio Piedras. You have a little vacation coming, you know. You Americans take work entirely too seriously."

"Perhaps," Abner Butts admitted. "Well, I think that son of mine has shown that he has the right stuff in him. When I retire he can run the office. About time he should be back here, don't you think? Juanita and he and Bob seem to be having a riotous time driving around the island. Great pal of his, Bob is, but somehow I imagine John and Juanita would rather be alone."

There was a guffaw outside of the wrought iron grating that served as a wall for one complete side of the house—a wall barring the residence to unwelcome visitors, but letting in the cool breeze of the tropic night.

"That's what I thought," drawled Bob Derwent, as he pressed his face against the grating. "I made use of the car, and left them down in San Juan. And, by the way, I have a little question to put to you two wise old gentlemen."

He folded back the unlocked iron grating, and walked smilingly across the elaborately-tiled, rugless floor and flung himself lazily into a chair.

"Now," he said, with his wide grin, "you two wise old birds have got to let me in on this. There's something phony going on here."

The face of Abner T. Butts was a mask. "Just what do you mean, Bob?" he asked, apparently puzzled.

"Just this," replied Bob, still grinning. "Last night, when we left Jack's room and went up on deck, I was strolling aft for a smoke. I had my sneakers on, and I guess Señor Lopez here didn't hear me. I was about to speak to him when I saw Señor Lopez take that red morocco case out of his pocket, and—yes, I actually saw him do it—throw it overboard! Now, gentlemen, I ask you, what's the idea? I may look like a dumb-bell, but I've got eyes."

The ghost of a smile flitted across the rugged features of Abner T. Butts.

"You—you didn't mention anything about this to Jack, did you, Bob?" he asked.

"Nary a word. I don't tell all I know. And I don't know everything yet. But I think I'm going to. You gentlemen have got to come clean with me. Now, I ask you, just what's the idea?"

Butts looked across meaningly at Señor

Lopez. Señor Lopez looked back meaningly at Abner T. Butts.

"Bob, you young rascal," said Abner T. "Can you keep a secret?"

"It looks like it, doesn't it?" returned Bob. "I kept mum on what I saw to Jack, didn't I?"

"Well, then," said Abner T. Butts, once more looking across at his old friend, Señor Lopez. "I suppose we'll have to 'come clean,' as you say. But if you ever breathe a word of it, Bob, I'll skin you and hang your hide to dry on the outer wall of Morro Castle. I've been a little worried over Jack lately. He didn't seem to have a care in the world, nor an ambition. Seemed to be going to the bad, like so many rich men's sons.

"Lord! I didn't mind the money he spent. I have plenty of it. But I was afraid the life he was leading was eating into him—gadding about with the wrong set, as I thought, making himself a target for the darts of women like Maxine Lee, and hanging around with such purposeless young men as I believed you yourself to be."

"You'll never get into the diplomatic corps, Mr. Butts," grinned Bob good-naturedly.

"No. But I said as I believed you to be. You seem all right to me now, Bob, a good influence rather than a bad one. And not such a fool as I thought."

"Thanks again," said the imperturbable Derwent.

"Well," Abner T. Butts continued, "I thought it was about time to call a halt, to see if John had the stuff in him. I summoned John to my office last Wednesday. Told him he'd have to get to work. It did my old heart good to find that he didn't squeal or show any yellow streak. Yes, I almost threw my arms around him then. I was proud to think that he was a real son of old Bulldog Butts, as they call me, and a worthy son of his wonderful mother, too.

"During the talk I had with him I hauled in a memory of our last trip to Porto Rico, about going over to the home of the *señor* here and finding that he had sailed for Cuba. I knew that if the boy had the spark of a sleuth in him, he'd recall about the passion for jewels of old General Compton, and that all this would dovetail in his mind later, when the court crucifix turned up missing."

"Yes, he told me about the old general. First thing ran through his mind. But you talk as if you knew the crucifix was going to turn up missing."

Abner T. Butts puffed his cigar and smiled.

"I did," he admitted. "And so did the *señor* here. It was a frame-up between us, to test the stuff in my son."

"By golly!" Derwent exclaimed. "I thought you seemed awfully determined to keep anything out of the newspapers, Señor Lopez. But do you mean to say that that robbery was framed, too?"

"It was not exactly what you call framed," replied the *señor,* taking up the story where Butts left off. "Abner here and I have been close friends for years, even though once we were rivals in love. A few weeks ago my trusted secretary and protégé, Pablo, came to me and told me a most exciting story. Vicente Ortiz had been getting pretty friendly with Pablo, and had approached him on an easy way to make a big haul. Ortiz had been chumming around with Lefty Bloom."

"Yes, I remember that Jack said he saw them drinking together in a night club one evening, apparently engaged in a confidential conversation.

"That's it. Bloom had a market for the crucifix, which was known to be in my possession. He knew that Ortiz spoke Spanish and was close, or so he believed, to Pablo, and he knew that I trusted Pablo as I would a son of mine, if I had one. He suggested, through Ortiz, that Pablo, in his confidential position in my household, should have a duplicate of the crucifix made up and spirit away the real valuable.

"Pablo comes of an eminently respectable Porto Rican family. At first, he told me, he felt like killing Vicente Ortiz for daring to make such a suggestion. However, he asked for time to consider the thing, and, as soon as the opportunity presented itself, came to me with the news of Ortiz's perfidy.

"I consulted my old friend, Abner Butts, and we decided to give the Bloom

crowd a taste of their own medicine, and it was Abner's idea also to test the ability and braininess of his son. I told Pablo to deport himself as if he fell in eagerly with Ortiz's suggestion, but to represent that he could not do so bold a thing as was suggested. But that he would pave the way for a perfectly planned robbery which would clear himself and Ortiz and Zapater of any possible suspicion."

"Then you knew just what was happening when those lights went out that night?"

"I did. And so did Pablo. The real crucifix was displayed on the gift table in the first part of the evening, while the guests were examining the gifts. After my first talk with Pablo, I had had time to have a most convincing duplicate made up—an excellent piece of workmanship; it cost me plenty, but I regarded the money as well spent. Pablo made the switch just a few minutes before the lights went out, for he knew, by his arrangement with Ortiz, just when they were going out."

"And it was the duplicate they stole. And that's why you threw it overboard, to get it out of evidence?"

"That's why," Abner T. Butts put in. "For John must never know of this. He showed that he was a chip off the old block. It would have been the same if the crucifix had been the real one. But this way the *señor* and I were not risking so much capital. When Grogan came to me after the wedding reception that night, I took Grogan into my confidence. The old gorilla was delighted, for he expected a heavy call down.

"It was Grogan who shadowed John and gave me the dope about his planned trip to Porto Rico. Then, with some inside ways that are known to me, I took passage, pairing up with the *señor* here in his own private suite. I was pretty worried when John was unconscious, but I guess it takes more than a tap on the head to put out a Butts for keeps. So everything has turned out all right. Bloom is in jail, and Ortiz and Zapater have been taught a good lesson, and Pablo will be rewarded by the *señor* for his honesty."

Señor Lopez looked nervously at his watch.

"I do not quite like this idea of a young lady and a young man running about the island at night," he said. "Of course we are getting Americanized down here. Such a thing would have been a public scandal in Porto Rico in my earlier manhood. And you say you took the car, Bob. Then how will my daughter and her escort get back to the plantation to-night?"

Bob Derwent lit another cigarette. "Well, the dance at the Vanderbilt Hotel won't be over until close to midnight," he said, calmly. "I'm sure, *señor*, that I haven't the remotest idea how they'll get back, or whether or not they intend to get back."

The *señor's* black eyes showed astoundment. "What do you say?" he asked, rising.

"I say," said Bob, "that they're probably sitting out on the veranda of the Vanderbilt billing and cooing to each other. You see, my wise friends, I have a little announcement to make myself. We stopped this evening at that little Barranquitas church, the one with the careening cross. And right there an old Spanish padre gave Jack Butts the right to keep your daughter out as late as he cares to on any night he chooses. Oh, well, I suppose I'll have to look up a new fellow-rounder now, with old Jack married."

Señor Ramon Lopez arose and crossed to an old-fashioned sideboard. He returned with a cobwebbed bottle.

"Once, long ago," he said feelingly, "an American named Abner T. Butts was a rival of mine. To-night I drink with him a toast to the union of our families and the happiness of our children."

"It seems as good a reason to have a drink as any other," was the comment of Bob Derwent.

THE END

The Sun Test

By RICHARD BARRY

Author of "The Big Gun," "Don Rando'," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART 1

TO save his life, Tench McTier travels south from the frontier of Arizona, where he had been in a sanatorium, to live in the sun. He manages to avoid other people for over three months, keeping always in the sun, traveling south, near the center of Mexico. Then one day he is held up by Black Pete, an escaped jailbird, who is a prospector. He robs Tench of all he has. In this extremity, he is saved by Za, the high priestess of a small tribe of ancient Mayans who have lived for centuries in a remote mountain fastness. The Mayans nurse Tench back to health; but he has a hard time trying to see the high priestess again, as she lives aloof from her tribe. One day, when he does manage to see Za as she teaches some of the maidens to dance, he is arrested and held for trial for eluding his guard.

CHAPTER VII.

TENCH ON TRIAL.

THE next day occurred the spring festival, the dance of the virgins, the day the young men chose their brides. It was not a day for a trial, as the judges were obliged to be present at the dance.

Tench heard about it from the guards Xlaco left to watch him. He was yet to see the amphitheater in which these events were staged, and so could hardly visualize the actual spectacle, as he would have been able to do later, after he had been a participant there, though in quite a different kind of event than a matrimonial sweepstakes.

As it was, he could well imagine the maidens advancing, leaping, gyrating, retreating, under the skillful leadership of Za—much as they had done the night before in the glen, only this time visually feasted upon by the eyes of all the tribe, in the front rank of whom squatted the youths.

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The girls would be alluring in adolescent femininity, the youths constrained by long established tribal law and custom. If a young man stepped from his place in the line at the side, he was subject to severe discipline, for a first offense a reprimand, for the second a week in the penal bowl, for the third a removal from his chance to secure a mate in this year's dance.

The penalty for a third offense was considered so severe and was so much dreaded that no young man had been obliged to endure it for a good many years. They all wanted their mates, and they wanted them at once, in the spring; so they obediently squatted on their haunches, watched the spectacle, and submitted quietly to its established rules.

Rule one required that at the conclusion of the last dance each young man should express his choice among the maidens, not to the girl herself, but to the council of elders. This was gravely taken under advisement; he would get his answer in three days.

Then the young men engaged in a series of games intended to show off their charms and prowess, wrestling, tree-climbing, running. Most important of all was the running. From Indians such as these come the greatest distance runners of the world.

They deified running. To them it was the supremacy of human achievement, a feeling persisting in them for thousands of years, probably back to a time contemporaneous with the same national feeling in Greece.

At these games the maidens sat on the sidelines, watched and observed their future mates and, on the conclusion, expressed their preference by ballot to their elders.

When the decisions were handed down it seldom meant that a youth or maiden got the boy or girl he—or she—had picked. Not by any such haphazard nonsense had the Mayans existed secure in the mountain fastnesses for so many generations.

The choice was automatic. The girl with the most votes was paired off with the boy having the most votes, even though neither had asked for each other. Second choice among the males went to second choice among the females, regardless of personal preference. And so on down the list. When it came to the leftovers who had received no votes at all, the elders exercised their discretion and chose mates for all remaining.

From the decision of the elders there was no appeal. The mating occurred forthwith and was final—no divorce, no dilly-dallying.

Tench quizzed the guards all through that day of the Spring Festival. There he lay, or sat, on the stone ledge in the cool shade, while his guards squatted on their haunches in the sunlit doorway, answering his persistent questions.

As they talked, from far off they could hear the shouts and the laughter rising from the amphitheater. The guards seemed to be willing to impart to him any information they had; so that at length he was led to ask: "Is the husband of Za chosen by this same method?"

A look almost of terror came instantly to the faces of the Mayans. They regarded him with dumb astonishment in which he felt there was an instinctive repulsion, as though he were some kind of a poisonous insect. They opened their mouths to answer, but neither was able to speak a word.

Tench himself was quick to realize his error, but in his embarrassment he made another: "I suppose Za selects her own husband; is that it?"

The answer to this was a dumb show of indignation. The Mayans slowly shook their heads while they glanced at him.

"Don't be offended," Tench apologized. "I believe I have just as high an opinion of Za as you have, even if I don't express it as you do. What is the idea?"

At last one of the Mayans found his tongue. "Za never marry," he said.

"Impossible!" Tench exclaimed.

"Za goddess," said one of the guards.

"Daughter of the sun," added the other Mayan.

"No man good enough for her," added the first.

"Za not human, but divine."

Seeing that Tench was duly impressed with their vehemence, the two launched into a voluble laudation of their high priestess. Tench learned through their revelation of

ignorant superstition that it was their belief that Za had not been born of human kind, but that she was a divine gift to the Mayans from their great god, the Sun, Himself.

The sun was their chief god, but they also worshiped the moon and it was their belief that Za was the daughter of the sun and the moon—which they referred to imaginatively as " the mountain top," taking the name from the place where they first glimpsed it when it rose.

It was less intelligent mythology than that of the Greeks, which it paralleled in some respects; yet Tench was more impressed by it than by any fable he had ever read from Greek mythology. It was alive, part of his very life, and while there were moments in which he thought he was living a fantastic dream, he always came back promptly to a definite knowledge of the stone bench, the inclosed hut, the overhanging cliffs, and the stolid, squatting, ugly and ignorant Mayan guards who looked at him with little, beady eyes.

He felt the menace in their presence, but he also felt that they had been kind to him, and that if he scrupulously conformed to their queer customs and did not transgress their arbitrary laws, he would come out of his situation safe and sound.

Late in the afternoon the wildest shout of all rang through the streets of the village, plainly an echo from the exciting dance in the distant amphitheater.

" Huh," grunted one of the guards, " it is the farewell of the maidens."

" Now they will withdraw," said the other, " while the voting occurs and the judges decide."

Silence ensued and a long period elapsed, carrying on into the soft Mexican twilight. Finally Tench asked if it was customary for Za to remain at all times secluded in her own pueblo.

" She never comes out alone except once a month," replied one of the Mayans, " and then in the full of the moon, when she goes alone to a rocky, high place in the hills to commune with her mother, the moon."

Tench's pulse quickened at this information. He thought he was crafty in changing the subject and talking about other things until some time later, when he inquired, as if casually, for the location of this rocky glen. Quick, suspicious glances went from one to the other of the guards; both affected to misunderstand his question. He ceased pursuing that information.

The next morning he was led along the street past the steam baths to the far end of the village, and conducted into a large stone room, roofed only partially. There were stone benches along the sides, no other furniture.

He was motioned to take a place in the center, where he stood uncomfortably. The guards left him there and withdrew to the doorway, where they squatted on their haunches as they had been doing for days before his own doorway.

They remained there like immovable pieces of stone, but he knew it was stupidity to think that he could pass them, even if he desired to do so.

Gradually his eyes became accustomed to the shadows along the benches under the roof, and he saw that he was not alone. A number of old men occupied the benches. They sat apart from each other in such a way as to convey the idea that each was independent and alone.

They looked upon him forbiddingly, and with the staring curiosity of the aged. The more his eyes became accustomed to the shadows, the more he realized their very great age, centenarians perhaps, every one of them. He counted them; there were seven.

There was a very long silence, in which they seemed to try his composure by subjecting him to their studious and not too friendly glances.

Finally the one in the center, evidently the oldest of all, spoke with a thin, high voice: " Stranger," he said, " listen and be silent. It is your elders and your rulers who speak. Know that no man comes before the council more than thrice.

" You come to this first hearing, ignorant. You are a man of the white skin, a savage whom the great sun god has not yet blessed. Because of this misfortune of your birth you will be granted the opportunity to absorb wisdom.

" If you do not acquire wisdom readily you will be submitted to the final judgment

of the great god himself, the sun. Hear and learn. Listen and become wise.

" You are guilty of the sin of profanation. You have been detected in the act of gazing upon the secret ceremonies of the Mayan maidens. The punishment for such profanation is most severe. This council would have no choice.

" Being a white savage, uncultured and ignorant, a stranger without people to guide you, or custom, or law, we will give you an opportunity to be heard in your own defense. Speak up! What have you to say?"

Tench shifted uneasily from one foot to the other. He looked apprehensively from one to the other of the seven old faces. Then in his best Mayan, he answered, while he slightly bowed his head respectfully: " I am humble with apology. I did not know."

A sterner voice than the first, that from the last of the old men, quickly replied: " You escaped from the guard. That you knew was wrong."

Tench bowed his head until his chin touched his breast. " I am contrite," he asserted. " Permit me to atone."

As yet he had no idea of what he was up against, but instinct told him that this was the only way to treat with the sinister suggestion of menace that lay in the situation.

A third old man spoke up in the commanding tones of a magistrate: " You are also guilty of the sin of ingratitude. Was not your life saved? Were you not rescued from the desert when you were perishing, and brought back to health by our holy Mayan people?"

With deep feeling and complete sincerity now Tench murmured: " Indeed! And from the bottom of my heart I am grateful. Do with me as you will. You have only to command; I will obey."

His attitude and his speech seemed to have a favorable effect upon his judges. A less tense atmosphere pervaded the council room. The old men glanced from one to another with slight but unmistakable signs of approval.

They seemed to convey their conclusions from one to the other by means of glances. Words were unnecessary, and the decision seemed to be left by silent consent to the eldest among them, the one who had first spoken. After a few moments he concluded with slow and particular emphasis:

" Young man," he said, " look upon us, and look well. The Sun has assumed charge of your destiny and has placed you within the keeping of the Mayans, his favorite children. We are all but atoms of dust in His domain. Look you well, therefore, that you know His law and obey it carefully.

" For this first offense you have pleaded ignorance and youthful impulse. It is our judgment under the supreme and all-wise guidance of the Sun that you are to be sentenced to confinement in the penal chamber for a year and a day."

Tench gasped. He did not know exactly what the penal chamber was, nor what confinement there might mean, but the term " a year and a day " sounded extremely ominous. A dreaded shadow of apprehension settled upon his heart. With intense anxiety he listened to the next words from the chief of the old men.

" However," went on the head of the council, " as the Sun is the beneficent and all-wise father, He will not at once exact of you this extreme penalty. He will take into consideration your ignorance and your youthful impulses."

Again Tench gasped, but this time with relief. He felt the blood racing once more through his veins. There was a sign from one of the old men, seen by the guards, who arose to their feet and advanced toward Tench. He turned to meet them. As he reached the door and stood between them, a word came from the stone bench in the rear, and he turned to face the seven.

The chief added softly: " Beware! The suspension of that sentence may at any moment be lifted. Your continued freedom depends entirely on your own conduct in the future."

The guards hastened Tench along the street back to his hut, but he breathed freely again. The sunlight seemed stronger, more a friend than ever.

Like a flood-tide his heart went out to the Mayans. He felt a relationship with

them, an intimacy beyond words. The sun was theirs—but was it not also his?

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SPRINTER'S CROUCH.

BACK in his stone hut life went on for Tench as it had before—the customary food, the daily bath, the ever-present guards. That was the worst feature of his life, those two Mayans squatting at his doorway night and day. Occasionally Xlaco came to relieve his underlings, and then he talked with Tench with more intelligence and freedom.

One day Xlaco said: "Soon comes the summer race."

"Race? What race?" asked Tench.

"Foot race."

"Who enters this race?"

"All young men up to twenty-five years."

"Where?"

"On the mesa." Xlaco pointed upward beyond the cliffs that rose behind them.

"How far, for what distance?"

Tench was becoming subconsciously alert. Foot racing had been his favorite athletic specialty.

"Two races," Xlaco replied sententiously. "One very long, from sun to sun. One short, across the small neck of the mesa."

Already Tench's mind was racing in the contest. His athletic instinct was alive with the prospect of competition; for the moment he forgot that he had been severely denied all strenuous endeavor by the doctors who had understood his malady.

When the memory of his malady did come to him for a moment, he dismissed it instantly with the reflection that he was entirely well. One of the long silences that was habitual in the hut fell upon them. During it Tench was vividly recalling those stirring episodes at the university track, where he had once ruled supreme among the sprinters.

To his mind's eye there sprang vistas of exciting scenes more than two thousand miles away, far across the continent—the grand-stand groups flushed with excitement, the noisy cries, the cheers, the college yells, songs, with the leaders beating their cohorts into massed frenzy.

Down on the running track the athletes crouched in short pants and spiked shoes, waiting poised for the crack of the starter's pistol. The snap of the gun.

He thought of that day in the stadium in Chicago when, against the picked college sprinters of the Middle West, he had started on the hundred-yard dash, intoxicated by the cheers of forty thousand spectators, flying along the ropes, barely conscious that the ground existed, in a fever of intense joy, elate, ecstatic, breaking the tape first, the champion sprinter of his region.

He found himself breathing very deeply. He was clenching and unclenching his hands. Before he realized what it meant, he asked Xlaco timidly: "Do you think they would let me enter the race?"

The old Mayan turned upon him with startled suddenness. He saw the intensity in the eyes and the clenching of the hands. Perhaps he misinterpreted their meaning, for he answered the gleam of anxiety with a spark of suspicion.

"A prisoner under suspended sentence is not eligible," said Xlaco.

Tench dropped back to his bench with a partly suppressed sigh of disappointment. Then as he lay there looking at Xlaco, something in the Mayan's manner revealed to him the thought behind that wrinkled old brow. He smiled blandly, with the boyish charm which always endeared to him those upon whom it was expended.

"I get you, Xlaco, old sport," he replied cheerily. "You think I might run away if given a chance to compete."

The Mayan's sole reply was to look like a graven image.

Tench went on eagerly: "I don't think I could compete in an all-day race, certainly not against your young men. I am not geared for that. Anyway, I have not been competing for a long time. But I sure would like a try at that short race. It might be just my style."

The graven image said nothing.

After a little Tench asked casually, and as if the matter had been entirely settled: "How far is it across the little neck of the mesa?"

Xlaco pointed down the street. "As far as halfway to the steam baths," he said.

Tench knew that distance well. He had traversed it every day. In his mind he began to estimate it carefully. He concluded that it was not more than one thousand feet. If neither Xlaco's estimate nor his were amiss, the short race on the mesa then would be over a distance of between one hundred and two hundred yards, his distance, the ideal distance for Tench McTier, not long since champion sprinter of the Mid-West.

Nothing more was said at that particular moment. They conversed about the weather. Xlaco revealed that the rains were undoubtedly over. It would be another six months before anything would prevent the serene daily supremacy of the sun. When he rose to go, late in the afternoon, Xlaco said abruptly: "If white man wish to enter short race, Xlaco ask the council tomorrow."

"With delight," Tench assented.

After Xlaco departed, McTier began to reflect that there was no good reason why the Mayans should not permit him to enter the short race. After all, they had found him, not so long before, a dying man, wasted with disease, and while apparently he had recovered, still it was not likely that he could escape from them while they kept their eyes on him, and this they could easily do in a short race.

Of course, the long race, an affair of all day, might give him an opportunity to get beyond their immediate vision. It was understandable that they might not permit this. However, he permitted himself strong hopes of entering the short race.

The next day these proved to be justified. Xlaco came back in the afternoon with the news that the council had favorably considered Tench's desire to enter the sprint across the little neck of the mesa. They had ruled that his suspended sentence did not render him a prisoner, and they extended him the opportunity to compete with the young men of the tribe of his own age in their favorite form of athletic expression.

Then Xlaco added a gratuity. "The council has decreed," he said, "that if you win, your sentence is removed. You will have a full pardon, and will be accepted as a Mayan youth in good standing with every right and privilege of a Mayan."

It was very clear from Xlaco's attitude and his very few comments that he did not regard it as in the least likely that Tench would be able to secure his freedom from surveillance in this manner. Tench asked at once, however, for an opportunity to train. This was granted.

He was taken the next morning up a winding path to the top of the cliff, and then through precipitous crags, back several miles, until they reached the mesa.

There, at his request, they took him to the little neck, and he paced it off—forty paces, about one hundred and twenty yards, the distance which all of his muscular instinct had been trained to command since early boyhood, the perfect distance for the high-geared sprinter.

Two youths of eighteen or twenty accompanied him and his guards. Together the three ran the distance. Tench did not exert himself. On the first day the others easily outran him. Each day thereafter he was out with the two boys under guard for an hour or two of training.

Narrowly they watched him, and while his eagerness to know them was equal to their desire to measure him, he was more expert in concealing his curiosity.

He affected to do only what they did. He started as they started. He ran as they ran, and invariably he fetched up at the finish a little behind them.

He was delighted to find that this effort did not unduly tire him; that his strength had returned, and that he was capable of an hour's exercise in the hot sun without complete exhaustion. For a day or two he was apprehensive that a dreaded hemorrhage might be the penalty for the exertion. But no, his lungs had healed.

The day of the race came, as near as Tench could figure it, along about the middle of June. It was one of the longest days of the year. The sun would be in the sky from about four in the morning until after eight in the evening. Thus, the long race would last for sixteen hours.

He knew something of the running records of the Indians of southern and central Mexico. He knew that the Tarahumaras had broken all records ever held by man for foot running. The Greek who carried the message from Marathon to Athens was a bush leaguer in comparison with the fleet champions of these surpassing athletes.

And the Tarahumaras were probably near neighbors of the Mayans, of the same ethnic family, living under similar conditions, of the same physical fiber, and accustomed to similar diet and hygiene. It was known that a Tarahumara Indian had run one hundred miles in sixteen hours, a record that could be equaled by comparatively few horses.

Tench was eager to know if a Mayan could do as well. He realized perfectly that it would be foolish for him to compete in such a contest; his diet, his hygiene, his physical past would not warrant it.

But a short race, a sprint, that he hoped might be different. While the Mexican Indians are the greatest distance runners the world has ever known, they are not sprinters of the first class, probably because they have never specialized in sprinting; and the greatest sprinters of all time have come from among present-day American collegians.

Among these, Tench McTier was a top-notcher. He had been a competitor of, and in the class with Charlie Paddock, "the fastest human," whose record of nine and three-fifth seconds for the hundred yard dash, he had nearly, if not quite, equaled on several occasions. He was thoroughly familiar with the finer points of the sprinting game. He had the knowledge, the physique, and the psychic impulse to excel at it.

Consciousness of these facts filled him with confidence for the coming contest, especially because he had observed while training with the Mayan youths that they were lacking in knowledge of the finer points of the highly developed technique of the hundred yard dash as it is mastered on college cinder paths, especially of the start.

He had not seen a Mayan who knew how to start a sprint. Not once in his training had he been indiscreet enough to reveal his method of starting, which he had mastered from old Hi Ruggles himself, one of the greatest coaches of runners ever known.

Just before dawn of the great day he was wakened by one of the guards, handed a ration of maize cake, and bid to follow. In a few moments they were climbing the trail up the cliff in the midst of a throng of Mayans of all ages and both sexes.

They were all light on their feet, men, women, and children. They went up the cliff like goats, seeming to regard it as no hardship. The whole tribe was gathered on the edge of the mesa, while the dawn was still dim and gray. When the first faint fingers of rosy pencilings began to usher in the coming of the color of the sunrise, the Mayans were assembled in a semicircle surrounding the starting point of the race, in the little neck of the mesa.

The athletes chosen to compete in the long race numbered between several dozen. They gathered at the starting line and stood there easily, as if without purpose or interest.

There was no flexing of muscles, no preparation, no sponging, no drinking, no seconding, none of the accustomed preparations that one would observe in any athletic contest anywhere else in the rest of the world. They seemed to be merely a group of healthy young animals coming together by chance, without any premonition of contest or strain.

Tench stood with Xlaco and his guards at one side of the semicircle. Across it, and at the head of the tribal group on a slight elevation, stood the seven members of the council. The chief alone was fully clothed. He wore his mantle, the lower part of wool, the upper part composed of the breasts of humming birds taken at the period of mating, the semihuitzin.

The huitzin itself, the tribe's most precious material possession, was worn by the high priestess. Tench saw her now in the growing light standing in front of and a little apart from the aged members of the council, the huitzin folded about her and shielding her from the chilly dew of the morning.

Her yellow hair, her fresh complexion,

and her clear eyes could be seen above the enveloping softness of the brilliant mantle. The sight of her filled him with inspiration to run that day as he had never run before.

Za! The high priestess! He didn't wonder that they deified her. He, too, could worship at her shrine. It was not difficult.

Presently the rosy dawn melted into pale lemon, and then came a thin, golden light which filled the whole sky. In another few minutes the disk of the sun itself would rise above the horizon.

At that moment Za parted her mantle, and stretched forth her right hand imperiously. Tench saw sparkling on her breast great yellow points of brilliant light, jewels, from her head to her girdle, revealed as the huitzin fell gracefully away.

At her first gesture the competing athletes came slowly to attention and stood with their right feet advanced, toeing a mark on the earth, which was now clearly discernible. Their hands fell limply at their sides. Their eyes regarded her calmly and obediently.

Her left arm rose, and with it her right also came up in an attitude of supplication toward the sun. The heads of the competing athletes for a moment bowed, as if in respect and prayerful obeisance to their deity.

Clearly and respectfully the voice of Za spoke out over the tribe. "Oh, Sun," she said, "bless these, our young men, the chief hope of your Mayan children. In their fleetness of foot lies our security and peace.

"Watch over them and guard them, and reward the winners with long life, happiness and a chieftainship among their devoted people."

With that her hand fell swiftly, while the huitzin again was folded about her. The falling of her hands was the signal, silent, perceived easily by all in the clear morning light. With it the forty odd youths started on their long race, easily, surely, like antelopes.

Once the distance runners were gone, the members of the tribe fell into little chattering groups to while away the time. The course was fairly clear and visible. It extended along the periphery of the mesa a distance which Tench thought to be perhaps twenty-five miles. They were to go around this again and again until the sun sank in the west, at which time the winner would be declared.

Meanwhile the rest of the tribe spent the day in various games and at high noon sat down to a meal of maize cake, plaintain fiber, and a drink made of cactus marrow. Tench tasted this drink curiously, thinking it might be pulque or mescal, but it was not fermented. It was cool, and thick, and slightly sweet. A little of it was quite satisfying. Perhaps the sugar in it was stimulating.

About the time of the noon-day meal the distance runners began passing the starting point for the second time. They had finished the first fifty miles. It appeared that the winners and probably all of them, would run approximately one hundred miles in the course of the day.

It seemed incredible. If Herodotus had reported it in his history as happening in Greece thirty-five hundred years ago, commentators would have said that he was confusing mythological legend with historic fact.

About the middle of the afternoon a call went forth for the contestants in the short dash. Tench had not been told when this would occur, and all day he had been waiting for it. All day, too, he had been waiting and hoping that he might have an opportunity to speak to Za. This had not occurred.

None of the tribe spoke to her. She remained apart, near the old men of the council. Even the old men did not speak with her. Xlaco told Tench she was waiting to crown the winners of the races, and that except for these contacts, none of the tribe could, or would, approach her.

The contestants for the short race assembled as had those for the long, casually, silent, and as if the event were of no particular moment.

The guards pushed Tench among them, and he found that they were not as numerous as their brethren of greater endurance. They numbered sixteen. He was the seventeenth. Younger than the distance runners, they were of slight build, evidently

the junior athletes, aged perhaps eighteen or twenty, or at the most, twenty-two.

Fortunately for Tench, he had undergone his apprenticeship in bare feet. His soles were thoroughly calloused, and the hide thick. He felt as confident as any Indian to run barefoot over stubbly ground from which there had been no attempt made to remove pebbles and the broken ends of old grass and clumps of last year's stubble.

As he stood waiting for the signal to start, he began with his toes to dig two little holes just at the edge of the line, pits from which to spring. He had not dared to ask in advance for the proper preparation of the pits, for fear that his request might be refused, and also because he did not want to apprise any of his competitors of the method which he proposed to utilize.

In a few minutes he had a nice little comfortable hole for his right foot, and another similar one for his left, in the proper position and angle, just behind the line.

He could not help bending down and back to flex his muscles. The Indian youths looked at him with an amused indifference, as any professional might look at an amateur.

No words were spoken, but it soon was apparent that all was ready. Swiftly Tench took his position, the balls of his feet digging into his pits, crouched down almost to the earth, the tips of his fingers on the line. If he had been suspended on an axis passed through his hips, it would have been found that his body was in perfect balance and would not have tipped a fraction of an inch in one direction or the other.

To the Indians this must have seemed extremely awkward and absurd, for they stood erect with flexed muscles, hips back. Their curiosity at the absurdity of their white competitor quickly dissipated, however, for their glances were now directed toward the High Priestess.

Za stood forth before the old men, clear and distinct in the full light of the afternoon sun. A circlet of hemp bound her yellow hair and passed across her forehead, where in its center hung one of the huge yellow jewels.

A silence descended on all. Not a word was spoken, even the breaths were expelled very cautiously. It was a hushed moment of concentration.

As it reached its climax, the chief of the council stepped a pace forward. At the same moment Za raised her hands.

Her hands fell as a barrier rises for the beginning of a horse race. It acted on the field of starters like the crack of a pistol on a field of intercollegiate starters. Having seen the start of the long race, early in the morning, Tench knew what to expect. As her hands fell, his feet dug into the pits, and he dashed off, a very long pace ahead of the nearest Mayan.

The battle of a short dash is in the start. In a field of runners of equal ability, the man who gets away first will finish first, nine times out of ten, and it is in the science of the start of the hundred yard dash that the thought of the modern American sprinters has centered.

Therefore the surprise of Tench's swift taking of the lead at the beginning added to the actual fact in giving him his initial mastery over the Mayans.

Xlaco let forth a shout which revealed plainly his personal feelings.

"The white man wins!" he cried. "Child of the Sun! He is worthy of the god!"

At the same time friends of the other contestants broke forth in excited cries of encouragement to their favorites. For the first time that day the whole tribe was consumed in a froth of intense excitement.

Halfway across the little neck of the mesa Tench still led, but the nearest Mayan was at his shoulder. He could feel the hot breath on the flesh of his arm. He heard a cry: "On! Huasco!" He recognized the name as that of a youth he had seen once or twice, one with extremely dark skin, with a strong jaw, and with rather a sinister countenance.

Instinctively he had disliked Huasco and he remembered this in the brief second of the mid-dash, though he could not take time to look back even the fraction of an inch to observe his oncoming rival. His glance traveling ahead took in Za at the finish line.

The sight he saw lifted him out of him-

self as though he had been suddenly suspended in a balloon. Her eyes were radiant and they were looking at him, him alone. Unconsciously her lips were forming words, silently, and yet he knew what they were saying. "Win! Win, for my sake!" Now the patter of Huasco's feet sounded level with his. They were elbow to elbow, shoulder to shoulder.

Yet the eyes of Za led him on, took him out of himself. They were imperious, hypnotic. In the last ten yards he made his spurt; for he had been trained to hold always something in reserve for the last leap. With his hands far in front and his breast outstretched, he crossed the line twelve inches ahead of Huasco, made a half circle, and came back on a slow trot to halt in front of Za.

She regarded the winner aloofly, as she regarded all the others; yet he was sure he read in her eyes gladness and delight.

At that moment, before the winner could be crowned, before any word could be spoken, a piercing shriek came from one of the women at the edge of the cliff, several hundred yards away. Quickly it was taken up and resounded through the tribe.

"Lion!"

CHAPTER IX.

WHEN A LION STALKS.

McTIER turned about to look in the direction of the first cry. Already those who had been standing at the farther side of the little neck were closing rapidly in across the short race course.

Where only a minute before the flying feet of the seventeen contestants had sped over the sod, now came the hurried patter of hundreds of frightened feet, fleeing from some object of danger which their figures obscured. He felt as if in the midst of a herd of stampeded wild animals.

Ever since living with his new-found friends, Tench had marveled at their apparent lack of defense. They had no weapons except blunt stone instruments used in pounding maize. They were not meat eaters and did not hunt game, although there were plenty of rabbits, deer, foxes, and smaller animals like squirrels, woodchucks, and gophers, to say nothing of the scarcer and more dangerous puma, or mountain lion.

They had partially domesticated wild goats and wild sheep, utilizing the milk from one and the wool from the other, but in a very primitive fashion, and without great skill or industry.

Their village of stone huts was located cunningly under a cliff which protected them from marauders above, and at the edge of a jungle of sycamore, live oak and Joshua trees.

They relied for defense solely upon their nimbleness of foot. They were as expert in climbing trees as monkeys, and could leap from tree to tree and from branch to branch with simian ease.

Snakes they regarded with veneration. The only venomous snake of the vicinity was the rattler, and with him they lived on terms of intimacy. They knew that he struck only in self-defense, and that he shunned the habitations of man. Therefore they did not fear him at home, and when abroad they stepped cautiously.

With an instinctive knowledge of the probable location of hidden rattlers, when on rare occasions a Mayan was stung by a rattler, it was regarded as a just punishment for human stupidity, and they were expert in applying quick tourniquets and in drawing the venom from a wound. It had been more than a decade since the tribe had lost a life from a rattlesnake bite.

Thus, their chief menace from wild life lay in the puma, the great feline who stalks silently and swiftly through the jungle, carnivorous, unintelligent, a killer at heart, but craven, of no actual value, except as a thing of noxious beauty, really vermin, dangerous only when aroused by fierce hunger, or when trapped, and in danger of its life.

Though highly intelligent about most wild life with which they had existed on good terms for so very many centuries, the Mayans had concentrated on the puma all of their ignorance, and had surrounded it with their superstition and idolatry. To them the puma was the visible expression of evil, his Satanic Majesty in living force.

Mothers scared their children when young by threatening them to be thrown to the lions if they did not behave. When a young man or a young woman in adolescence gave vent to some of the impulsive passions of the spring of life, it was declared by their elders that the spirit of the puma, or the evil one, had entered them.

While the rattlesnake was actually a much more dangerous and sinister wild neighbor, they lived with him on intimate terms of comprehension. With the puma they were as stupid, ignorant, and fearsome as would be the ordinary dweller of an American city in the presence of a rattlesnake.

It was because of this background of tribal animal lore, and of false idealogy, that the Mayans were thrown into a senseless fever of wild fright at the mere cry of, "Lion!" from the seven old men of the council and the high priestess, right down to the youngest babe.

Without a single exception they turned and rushed pell mell in the opposite direction, scurrying in radiating lines, fanwise, far across the mesa, away from the cliff, away from their homes, anywhere to escape the dread evil.

Tench had no such reason to be alarmed. He did have a deadly fear of rattlesnakes, but he had very little fear of mountain lions. He knew that in the open a man was practically safe from their attack, unless he might happen to be sick and dying, and they happened to be hungry, for they are almost as much scavengers as coyotes, and are inclined to run from man, rather than to seek contest with him, unless from a very sure ambush. So he turned to look with greater confidence and curiosity than any of the Mayans.

In a moment he perceived the cause of the scare. Just coming up over the edge of the cliff was a little half-starved goat, partly grown, and half dead with fright. A hundred yards behind loped a rangy mountain lion, a male, as shown by the size of his head, and the thickness of the fur across his shoulders.

He did not seem in much of a hurry for his meal of goat, so certain and sure, just ahead of him, and he went on toward it with a sort of feline serene indifference which seemed to animate all living things in that country, human and brute, vegetable, mineral, and water.

If he had possessed a sense of humor, he might have been laughing at the unholy spasm of fear which his advent had caused to seize the tribe of Mayans.

A subconscious instinct must have actuated Za in this crisis. Certainly all of the other Mayans acted on preconceived impulses, rather than on intelligent observation and reasoning. Strangely enough this subconscious instinct in her, whatever it was, led her to stay close to Tench McTier, and to act as he did, rather than to look for protection to her own people.

The old men of the council tried to surround her and hustle her away, but the shrieks of the women grew so wild and so furious, and they were so feeble with age, and so irresolute with tribal superstition, that one by one they permitted themselves to be jostled and crowded along the paths of the mesa, farther and farther away from their high priestess, who stood alone, a few paces from the white athlete who had just surpassed all his Mayan rivals in the short sprint.

Perhaps this subconscious instinct was reliance in the fleetest of foot, or was it something else?

At any rate, in few moments there they stood together, alone, the tribe of Mayans fleeing crazily across the mesa, and in front of them at the edge of the cliff, a few hundred yards away, stalked the puma. In another moment the animal sprang, and the last pitiful little bleat of the dying goat was cut short.

Tench smiled grimly. With calmness and assurance he reached his hand toward the high priestess. "Come," he said, "The way to your pueblo will be safe by now."

For an instant her arm, covered by the mantle, moved as if she would reach forth and obey his request. Then the arm subsided; yet her eyes answered fearlessly and trustingly. With her lips she said: "Lead on, I will follow."

Cautiously proceeding toward an arroyo which led down from the near end of the

little neck, Tench led the way, giving the puma a wide berth where he had thrown himself on the ground to consume his fresh kill at leisure. Za followed him swiftly and silently.

In a few minutes they were down in the arroyo out of sight of the puma and with not a Mayan to be seen. Every member of the tribe was still running in the opposite direction, scattering the dread news to the contestants in the long-distance race who, as soon as they heard it abandoned the contest and proceeded with the others to flee toward the far hills.

They came to a precipitous descent where even a goat would have found difficulty in getting down. Tench picked his way from rock to rock, looking back from time to time and calling to Za.

"This way it is safe."

"Very well, I am following."

"Take care of that shale that your foot does not slip."

"Do not fear for me. Look out for yourself."

"This is no path for a girl." Even as he said "girl," he realized his presumption, and looked back apologetically. She was behind and above him a few feet. The huitzin had slipped down over her shoulders and was pulled up around her knees, and she stood a little awkwardly though sure-footed; the word and the thought behind it startled her.

Perhaps the disrespect in it affected her adversely. She let the mantle fall to her ankles, and drew it up sharply about her neck, and a distant look came into her eyes. She said nothing, but her manner was enough to convey her reproof.

He felt like apologizing, but concluded that it was better to let the incident pass. So he proceeded on down, climbing from ledge to ledge, looking back with each step to see if she was following.

She did follow cautiously, but it seemed with more reserve than she had shown in the beginning. She did not again permit the huitzin to leave her ankles or her neck exposed.

This fact pervaded Tench with a strange sense of civilization, one of which he had been unconscious ever since he had deserted the sanatorium, months and months before. To his apparel, or lack of it, he had become well inured, and his association with the Mayans had taught him that they were entirely superior to the false modesty of clothing.

Yet here he had come in contact with it again, provokingly, dramatically. What did it mean? Was this Mayan priestess superior to her environment, or inferior to it, or was it only after all that a woman was a woman still, whether primitive or modern, whether prehistoric or supercivilized, the slave and the dupe of clothes, using them as a mask, an allurement, or anything except as an essential covering.

His æsthetic sense was vastly pleased however; the huitzin folded about her subtly, softly, and was ravishingly becoming. It clung to her lissome figure like a tropic twilight, dreamily soft and evanescent. She seemed to be a queen of humming birds, secure in their beauty.

He was enchanted with her nearness. The fact that she held her mantle more closely about her and yet looked to him for protection, and that she had instinctively preferred him before all the tribe, filled him with a sense of conquest that was intoxicating. He felt powerful, fit to cope with anything, satisfied that life was perfect, and that he had nothing to fear or desire.

While he was in this mood of dreamy abstraction, he was obliged to watch his step most cautiously. He turned a sharp angle of the rock above, and found a very long step down. He called back to Za, "Take care; you had better give me your hand," and reached up to assist her.

She coldly ignored the hand, and reached forth one foot tentatively exploring for the way to get down without assistance. It was a long, long step, and her foot came out from under the mantle and felt its way down until her leg was bare to the knee and still her toes were searching in the space for a foot-hold.

At length they found it, and she intrusted her weight to the hold, but without looking. Nor was Tench looking at her foot-hold, else he might have warned her, for it was on a piece of weathered shale,

and as she intrusted her weight to it, the shale splintered and crumbled away.

She seized a ledge above her, but it also gave, and she was precipitated full into Tench's arms.

She lay there securely, while he steadied himself with his back against the rocky wall on the lower ledge, her eyes looking down into his calmly.

There was no fright in her eyes, nor fear, only just a little bit of reproof, as though he had caused this thing to happen, something that she did not care to admit she disapproved, something she equally desired not to approve.

For a moment he stood there clasping her firmly, halfway down the cliff, bolstered against the wall of rock, and oblivious to their precarious condition, as if they stood safely on the floor of the arroyo, hundreds of feet below.

His eyes glowed, his lips parted to speak, but he lacked the words to utter the idea that whirled through his brain. For a moment she too seemed to forget where they were, and their predicament.

Then the coldness, the calm, and the aloofness which had marked her descent even up to her accidental precipitation into his arms began to recede, just as a wave automatically recedes from a shore after it has climbed its farthest height to an unyielding sand. Swiftly over her face there spread a rosy flush.

Neither spoke a word. Slowly, cautiously, and with great reverence he began to edge his way along the rocky path. Fortunately they had passed the longest step. From there down, the way was broader and easier.

He felt impelled to proceed, and yet he did so lingeringly as though he desired to make each step last an age. She made no move, lying in his arms quietly. He wondered if she felt faint, but did not care to ask.

At length he gained the level floor below, and moved out on to a tiny clearing in the shadow of a live oak tree whose bole extended along for many feet, only eighteen inches above the ground, a natural seat, broad, inviting and shady. There he sat with his precious burden.

Only then did she open her eyes and look at him again, and regain the consciousness of their situation. At first, for a moment, she seemed unaware that she was in his arms and unknowing of what had happened from the moment she had slipped. In that brief moment she seemed to him just a girl of his own people, the loveliest, the dearest he had ever known.

Then the rapid metamorphosis occurred: and she was conscious of the huitzin and its symbol, of the regalia of yellow jewels, and of the high duty they prescribed for her. She was again Za, the High Priestess of the Mayans. She rose from his arms and stood before him, and looked at him again calmly and aloofly.

"You have done well," she said simply. "We have escaped the lion." Her self-composure was far greater than his.

"Yes," he said. "We are safe—safe from the lion."

CHAPTER X.

BACK TOWARD THE VILLAGE.

"COME," said she. "We must get back to the village before nightfall." The sun was still an hour from its setting.

"Rest awhile," said he.

"It is a long way. It is late." She started to move away.

"I am tired," he pleaded. "Can't you rest just a few minutes, and give me a chance to get my breath?"

She gave him one quickly compassionate glance, and with a murmured apology seated herself beside him, more than an arm's length away.

"Of course," she admitted. "You carried me down that long path, and after your race, too. Excuse me; I had forgotten."

She strove to regain the relations of priestess and tribesman. She spoke of the race with a species of patronage.

"You ran well," she said. "The council will now revoke your sentence. You will be free."

"I am grateful," said he.

"You will be accepted in the tribe. You

are now the same as a Mayan," she went on, and then added with finality "you are a Mayan."

He looked at her with adoring eyes.

"I am happy," he exclaimed, "for then I am your subject."

A severe line came into her mouth, but evidently with an effort; for it was a most lovely mouth, with delightful upcurves at the corners.

"Not a subject," she corrected. "I am not of the tribe."

He leaned forward eagerly at this, with avid curiosity.

"Really," he queried excitedly. "Tell me where are you from?" If he expected a revelation of some forbidden secret, he received an instant disappointment. There was no answering confidence from her, no joining with him in a conspiracy of secret knowledge. Instead she replied quite solemnly, "I am from the Sun, my father, who has loaned me for the period of my life to the Mayans."

This was said so simply and sincerely that he was quite halted for a moment in his effort to proceed on an intimate basis of understanding. He was at least convinced that she firmly believed in her own mythological origin.

Incredible, of course, it was, absurd, from his own sophisticated twentieth century point of view, yet a fact, understandable if he took into consideration what was obviously true, that whatever her origin, she had known nothing since probably earliest babyhood, except these Mayans and their strange customs and beliefs, ignorant, almost prehistoric, baffling, and yet how naïve! How utterly fascinating!

As a sociological study, it was well worth a trip across the world, but he was fast realizing that his own youthful impulses were going to take a hand in the solution of this enigma, and that the sociological study could come later, if at all.

Yet he must learn more about her if he was to progress. The impulse was there, stirring in him, to talk to her casually, as he would have talked to any girl of his own age and circumstances in the life he had left behind so adventurously.

He wanted to ask her about the mantle she wore. He wanted to gossip about the Mayans. He wanted to make love to her. And yet something restrained him from doing any of these things.

What was that something? It could be only the barrier of her own regal consciousness, of what she firmly believed to be her actual divinity. In her own mind she was set apart from men. What had happened between them—the subtle, the unexpressed, the emotional contact of their two flaming, adolescent souls—she denied now with utter conviction, calmly but convincingly.

What she said by her manner was that they were *not* a young man and a young woman, very much attracted to one another and by all the requirements of youthful circumstances natural mates, apparently of the same white skin, united by ties of race and blood, outcast among a hidden, primitive race in a forgotten wild niche of a continental fastness.

Without saying a word, she denied all of this absolutely. It was the fact; but she was a woman, and she was steadfastly loyal to the game she had been taught to play, to the rôle she had been pledged to adopt. She knew nothing else.

For a moment the dominance of her will was greater than his; the intensity of her religious belief exceeded the impulse of his youthful desire.

"Are you not rested now?" she inquired impersonally.

"Somewhat," said he; "but not enough. Please don't go back just yet. This is the first chance we have had to talk."

"We must not talk," said she.

At this he exploded. "Why don't you want to talk to me?"

She was taken slightly aback for a mere instant with his impetuosity, which penetrated her impersonal reserve.

"Why—why—" she hesitated—"what I want has nothing to do with it. It is the Mayan law that the High Priestess shall not talk with any man except the members of the council. It is for your sake that I must not talk with you. Your punishment would be most severe."

"Wouldn't they punish *you*," Tench asked slowly.

"The High Priestess is above punish-

ment, except for a capital offense," she answered severely.

" But when they know that I have saved you from the lion, and also from falling down the cliff, don't you suppose that they will consider that I have the right to just a few minutes' conversation?"

She shut her mouth tightly, and slowly shook her head.

He added decisively: " Well, how will they ever find it out, if neither of us tell them?" The suggestion that she might connive with him at this deception shook her. She opened her eyes widely, and looked at him as from a great distance. He was chastened.

" Pardon me," he hastened to add. " I don't think that I am asking you to avoid any of your duties." After a moment he added half-heartedly: " But I don't see any great necessity for hastening back right now.

" Every member of the council and every member of the tribe is hoofing it across the mesa away from that poor old lion, whose sides are stuck out by this time with that goat. They won't get home to-night. Why should we hurry?"

" The High Priestess is forbidden to remain away from her pueblo after nightfall, except on her visits to the moon."

Tench looked over his right shoulder. The sun was now setting, and the tropic twilight was swiftly falling. In the east was appearing the thin scimitar of a new moon. He smiled broadly. " There!" he exclaimed, " is your moon. That makes it all right, alibi enough, if one were needed."

It was clear she did not know what " alibi " meant. In fact, he did not know the Mayan word for the idea, and expressed it in his own language. But she seemed to sense his meaning, and to resent it.

" I cannot remain away after nightfall. Come," she insisted, and rose, striding swiftly along the path. Reluctantly he followed her.

For an hour they went on down the arroyo, bearing ever toward the left in the direction of the village. He had no knowledge of how far it might be to the stone huts. Judging from the location of the mesa above and the projecting shoulder of the cliff, whose wrong side they had come down, it must be several miles around to them.

Za seemed to know the way, and he followed her, without question; for the path was now fairly clear along the dried bed of a stream, evidently existent only in the rainy season. Before long it was quite dark, and the light of the thin, new moon was hardly sufficient to show them the way clearly. Still she pressed on eagerly and somewhat excitedly.

After a bit he suspected that she did not know the way; a slight hesitation in her manner indicated this. He said nothing for another half mile, until at length she stopped, distressed, spent, and confessed that she did not know how to reach the village.

He, too, felt as much lost as she appeared to be, but this did not depress him. Despite the fact that they had had no supper, and had endured a very great exertion and intense excitement, and that there seemed little prospect that they could find their way home that night, still he regarded the situation with equanimity, even with secret elation.

In the indistinct moonlight he managed to find a bed of dried oak leaves. He picked up a stick and rustled among them carefully until he was satisfied that no rattler was concealed there. The sward underneath had been of tufted desert grass, and he knew that this was not a likely place for snakes, which preferred crevices and holes. He urged Za to sit down and rest.

She did not oppose him. She was evidently very tired, but before sitting down she removed the huitzin and folded it carefully with the outside in, creasing it over and over until it was in a package about two feet square, which she held in her arms protectingly.

Evidently she did not mind cold, and like any thrifty woman in possession of an incomparable garment, was carefully protecting it from any possible incident of vicious wear.

" What are these?" he asked, indicating the jewels that hung on her breast and forehead.

" Sun's windows," she replied. " Through them the sun speaks by night as by day. See?" She held them up from her breast so that the rays of the moon were reflected in them. Tench saw the soft glow strike through them with a phosphorescent gleam.

" Where do they come from?" he queried.

" The Maya mine."

" Where is that?"

" You will see, now that you are a Mayan, for you will join the others when they dig for more of the Sun's windows."

" They look like yellow diamonds," he said, taking one in his hand and bending closely over it. " I wonder if they are zircons or tourmalines?"

Slowly she shook her head. She did not understand what he was talking about. She tried to explain to him what the jewels meant. They were intrusted to her as insignia of her exalted rank, an indissoluble mineral proof of her divinity.

No ordinary Mayan below the rank of a member of the council could lawfully be in possession of one of the Sun's windows. Through them, she explained, could always be seen the power, the beauty, and the everlasting life of the Sun's rays.

As she talked about the jewels, she made herself comfortable on the sward on the oak leaves.

He sat down opposite her, not far off. Evidently she had accepted the hazard of their situation, and did not again refer to the professed illegality of her absence from her pueblo after nightfall.

" You are a philosopher, Za," he commented indulgently, as he threw himself on the ground, face down, and leaned on his elbows, a pace away from her, looking up into her face.

" What is that?" she asked.

" One who has sense enough to see things as they are," he answered.

" You mean I am a Priestess," she corrected.

" You are adorable."

" You mean you worship."

" Yes, I worship as a Mayan, and I worship as a white man. Do you know what it means to worship among the people I came from?"

" I would learn," said Za timidly. " Tell me."

" When a young man worships a Priestess in my country," said Tench, " it means that he thinks she is the one woman in the world for him. She is better than being a goddess, because she is a human being, too, and while he worships her, he can love her. The two are one. Do you understand?"

" It is not logical," replied Za. " You would make your Priestess a human being, while she is a divinity."

" Her great humanity enshrines her divinity."

" No," responded Za, judicially, " if a Priestess becomes a human she ends her divinity."

Tench drew himself a few inches closer, yearning toward her in the soft moonlight.

" Perhaps you are mistaken, Za," he pleaded. " Perhaps there is more divinity in being human than you could possibly imagine."

She sighed deeply. He took this for assent, or at least an inclination to favorably consider the plea which he was making. The night was entrancing. He lay there, looking at her languorously, absorbed in a dreamy contemplation of her ethereal beauty, now rendered more poetic and mystic in the softness of the dark.

Her hand was stretched out on the ground close to his. He placed his palm across its back.

" Za," said he, " don't you feel the whole force of the universe calling out to you, saying that I am here by your side; that I am yours and you are mine; that the Moon God herself, shadow of the great Sun, is watching reverently above us there, blessing us in peace and joy? Za! Oh, listen! My dear, my beloved!"

As his hand pressed hers more tightly, she moved gently, but firmly away another pace. Straining his gaze into her eyes, he could not be sure what he read there. Her pupils, so clear in the daylight, now seemed obscured, withdrawn. Were they pleading to him from a great distance to come to her, or were they commanding him from a vast height, to remain far below?

He felt transfixed, powerless to move, obedient to her will, every impulse in him

eager only to know what that will was and to observe it.

He withdrew until he was a few paces from her. There for a long time he sat watching her. Her eyes were closed; she slept.

As the moon came higher and higher in the heavens, and a ghostly radiance streamed down in the arroyo, in the far distance a screech owl hooted. A faint growl sounded from the top of the cliff far above, a growl, perhaps, of the puma's mate, coming in to the leavings of the feast. The leaves of a near-by tree rustled as some finches readjusted their postures for the night. A rabbit scuttled in the underbrush. A soft breeze stirred in the tree tops.

Tench thought his heart had stopped beating.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SUN GOD'S LOYAL DAUGHTER.

SAVAGES prefer blondes; they please the eye more. Yellow tresses gleaming in the sunlight suggest happiness. In the moonlight they suggest love. In any light they lend themselves to a more brilliant coiffure than do the dark tresses of Mother Eve. It was the golden hair of Helen that led the Greeks and Trojans into the ten years' war, golden hair more alluring than the golden fleece.

Tench thought of all this as he lay there in the mellow moonlight watching over the sleeping Za. Exhausted, she had passed into slumber, without any fear of her safety or without any thought of her personal appearance.

The carefully folded huitzin she clasped in her left arm to her side, but she had avoided lying on it, or using it for a pillow. It was too precious for either, more precious even than the wondrous jewels which had slipped to one side and were reposing partly on the ground.

Tench was propped on his elbows, as he lay full length a few yards from her. The repose of sleep accentuated the perfection of her facial contour. Her nose was short and straight, a perfect human nose, whereas the Mayan noses were usually long. Her nostrils were delicate and highly arched, whereas the Mayans' were usually thick and straight.

Her hair covered her ears, but he had noted them before. They were tiny and placed high on the head. The Mayans' ears were large and low. Her chin was narrow, while that of most of the Mayan women was round and wide.

He looked down at her feet. They were thin, short, and highly arched. She would have worn a No. 1 or possibly a No. 2 shoe. The Mayan women, he had noticed, were flat-footed and seemingly without arches.

It was only among the male runners of the tribe that he had seen highly arched and thin feet. Her waist was slender, and her hips thin, while the Mayan women, even in girlhood, bore in their bodies unmistakable evidence of incipient stoutness.

There was every evidence that Za was not a Mayan. In addition to all else, her eyes could have been no straighter along the brows, if they had been set with a level, while most of the Mayans bore a slight trace of slanting brows, an ethnic proof there was somewhere a connection between them and the Oriental.

Something in his heart whispered that this woman was to be the light of his life, the mate of his future.

He watched. He brooded. He adored. He became the sentinel of her repose. Naturally it was unthinkable that he could continue on for any particular length of time as an inarticulate Mayan, living their vegetable existence, and stay forever apart from this exquisite creature, so evidently created for love and happiness; yet how could he bridge the chasm between them?

It would be easier to escape from the Mayans than it would be to break down the wall of her superstitious belief, which she shared with them. Her words and her actions told him that, and yet whenever he recalled what she had said and done, there came to him subtly a memory of the unforgetable moments when she had looked at him trustingly with her adorable eyes, when she had leaned toward him instinctively for protection in the midst of danger.

However, he was young, and nature demanded of him also that he rest. He had been expending his strength exhaustively. After awhile he grew tired of propping his head on his hands. He laid it on one arm, though determined to keep his eyes open, watching Za.

Shortly her hair seemed to fill his view completely. It magnified strangely and floated across the face of the new moon. It occupied all the horizon as if with a luminous molten glow, lulling him in a sense of blissful content. Shortly he slept.

When he awoke the birds were chattering and the light of dawn was in the sky, a gray light, harbinger of a clear day. With a start he looked about expectantly, conscious only of the ecstatic state of bliss which had ruled his slumber.

He was alone. He sprang to his feet in fierce alarm. What had happened to Za? He could see now clearly where they had been lost. It was in a grove of oaks near the entrance to the arroyo, perhaps two miles from the path down the cliff and only a little farther from the stone huts of the Mayan village.

"Za!" he called excitedly, as he looked eagerly in various directions.

From behind a rock a hundred yards away came a soft call: "Hoo-o."

He rushed in that direction and found her there, where she had discovered a small spring. Already she had rearranged her hair, the fillet was in place with its golden jewel in the middle of her forehead, and the huitzin was folded about her with regal magnificence.

There was no playfulness in her greeting. As he came up she said only one word, "Water," and pointed to the spring. He was a bit taken aback by the coolness of her reception, but plunged his face and hands into the water and bathed and drank copiously.

Meanwhile she stood a few paces away, watching him indifferently and impersonally. He felt suddenly as if she were further removed from him than ever. His thoughts of the night before and her nearness to him had been as a dream.

"Look," said she, and pointed to a nearby copse where low bushes clung close to the earth. He did not at once gather her meaning, until she advanced toward the bushes, leaned down and gathered a few berries, a species of wild blueberry. She ate one, and offered the others to him.

"A great breakfast!" he cried. "And how we do need it!" He plunged into the bushes excitedly, and began picking the berries with both hands. She stood aside, folded in her mantle, watching him, the goddess on her throne. Again his ardor of friendliness was cooled. Somehow she had managed to change their situation from that of two castaways dependent on each other in the wilderness to that of queen and subject on a temporary journey.

He offered her a handful of berries. She took them and ate without even thanking him. Then she said coldly: "Now we must return. The pueblo is near by."

For a few minutes they walked along silently. He felt resentful at her self-sufficiency. He was miffed at her unspoken reproof. Then his confidence departed. He told himself that he had been mistaken about her personal interest in him.

For the moment he became only a dull Mayan, in respectful servitude to a worshiped Priestess of his cult. Half an hour passed in this way, and they had traversed more than half the way to the village when he began to reflect that such an opportunity as this might not occur again very readily. He became desperate as he contemplated the very probable resumption of their previous relations with the impassable tribal barrier between them.

"You go to the glen once a month, in the moonlight, do you not?" he asked.

"Yes," she admitted.

"When that time comes I will be there."

For one second a look of startled fear was apparent in her face. Then her lips closed tightly and she said decisively: "That cannot be. It is against the law. I go only to commune with my mother, the Moon."

This broke the spell for him. It seemed too childish, too absurd that this full-grown, evidently highly intelligent young woman, so near his own age, should persist so sincerely in this sort of antedeluvian ritual, that he found the tongue to protest against it.

"Look here, Za!" he exclaimed. "You are going back to your dwelling, and I am going back to mine, but I can't let you go without having an understanding with you.

"I am not disrespectful of any religion. I am not disrespectful of yours, but I am telling you straight that to me you are just a girl. That priestess stuff is out. You are the only girl in the world for me. I adore you; I am mad about you.

"You belong to me, and I intend to have you. I don't know how we are going to work it out, but it will be worked out some way, because I feel we are intended for one another, and I don't believe that this Priestess business sits any better on you than it does on me. You have got to help me find a way to get round it."

She was shocked at his first words. Then her eyes opened wide with alarm. Her mouth fell partly open. Nothing like this had ever happened in her life before. No Mayan had ever had the imagination, much less the courage, to address her in such a way, even remotely.

Then, to her own consternation, she began to blush, and blushed furiously. At length, instead of facing him defiantly, as she evidently wanted to do, and thought that she ought to do, her glance fell before his, and, her only safety evidently lying in flight, she started to run.

This was too much for him. He rushed after her and seized her with both hands and held her firmly. "Za," he pleaded, "forgive me. Really I would not offend you for the world. But I must tell you how I feel. If I am wrong, all you have to do is to tell me I am mistaken; that you have no feeling for me; that I mean nothing at all to you. Tell me that, and I will let you go."

She got away out of his hold gently but firmly, and made no further effort to run, for the moment.

"I am sorry for you," she said. "I said yesterday that you were a Mayan. That is not true. The council has not yet accepted you, and I see now that it would not be right if they did accept you as a Mayan. You do not understand."

His pulses leaped with delight. She had not denied a personal interest in him, or a response to his feeling. She had evaded that question.

"If to be a Mayan means that I must believe you are the daughter of the Sun and can never love a human being, me especially, Tench McTier, if that is what you mean, then you never were more right in all your life. I am not a Mayan."

"You are guilty of a great crime in daring to aspire to love the daughter of the Sun," she added softly. While her words were severe, her eyes were luminous with compassion. "If I report what you have said to the council, you will be locked immediately in the penal chamber."

He defied her. "Report it, then!" he cried. "If you care nothing for me, I would just as soon go to the penal chamber as anywhere else, whatever it is, or wherever it is."

"I would not see any one punished. Yet it is the law," she temporized.

"Law, the devil!" he exclaimed. "Love is really the highest law, always has been, always will be, in the jungle and the city. With my people, with your people."

"No," she corrected calmly, "not with my people. There is no love, no marriage, except as the council decrees."

"Trash and nonsense!" he hotly countered. "Let me tell you something about my people."

"Please." She was polite, but apparently she would have it mean nothing more.

"My people have a god whose influence dominates all people."

"He is the Sun?" she asked blandly.

"No. His name is Cupid. He is the love god, and boys and girls, men and women, everybody, obey him. He rules in the hearts of young and old."

"What a wicked people," said she.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Well, that's me; that's my number. If I have to go to the penal chamber for that, very well."

She made no direct reply, but walked on soberly in the direction of the village, her head bowed in thought, her finger lying across her lips as though she were denying herself any spoken utterance. The huitzin was drawn about her.

He walked at her side, and again suddenly he felt his courage depart. He was afraid of nothing except that she might not care for him. The bashfulness of a balked lover overwhelmed him. Again he was rendered desperate by the nearness of the village and the imminent fact that they would again be separated.

"Oh, Za," he pleaded, "I can understand how it must be with you, that you have never known anything else but these Mayan laws; but before we go back, give me one hint, one sign, one word that I may hold until we meet again, until something happens to bring us together."

She stopped in the path. She held her head up regally and looked straight ahead. The thin first disk of the new sun was just climbing into the horizon. Broad daylight was upon them. Everywhere the birds were resounding with glad outcries. The underbrush seemed alive with the cheery chatter of insects. The vegetation was lush and fertile. The rocky hillsides and the gnarled trees formed a setting of perpetuity. Over all lay the tropic beauty of a semiarid jungle.

Za lifted her hands toward the uprising orb of day, while the huitzin fell back along her shoulders. In her eyes could be seen the fire of a very deep feeling. Her bosom rose and fell as if with a profound emotion.

"Oh, Father," she implored in a tone and attitude of prayer to the Sun, "speak unto your daughter with all wisdom. Counsel her with strength and knowledge, and show her the way to do thy will."

Her hands fell, and the huitzin encompassed her again. She bowed her head reverently. Tench's eyes fell, and his spirits drooped in depression.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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THE VACATION BUNK

BACK from vacation,
All sunburned and bitten
By giant "muskeeters,"
Most vicious man-eaters,
And ten times more tired
Than if I had hired
Myself to a farmer,
To get in his hay;
Gosh, I'm glad that it's over!
Let those live "in clover"
Who like it. I'm thankful
To hang up my hat
In the office once more,
And at home, in my flat,
For I've found that vacation's
The bunk—and that's that!

Will Thomas Withrow.

Medals

By DON H. THOMPSON

IN a stuffy little room at one end of a stable off the Clermont Road, Top Sergeant Billson examined the company records by the light of a candle stuck on top of a tin hat.

He ran a dirty but practiced forefinger over the day's reports on the number and condition of the men, ambulances, trucks, medical supplies and food, grunting his approval as he scanned the neatly typewritten pages.

" Good," said Top Sergeant Billson when he had finished. " Best damn company records in the outfit."

Clerk Willie Hodge tossed the papers back into a water-proof case with a gesture of contempt. Then he turned his washed-out blue eyes upon the fat non-com and said:

" You been promisin' me relief so I could go up front, but you ain't come across yet."

" Rats!" growled Billson. " You don't want to go up there."

" Yes, I do," complained Willie. " I'm tired of settin' back here tappin' a typewriter while all the other fellers has the fun."

" Fun?" snarled the sergeant. " Haven't you got sense enough to know when you're well fixed, huh? Don't you know it's better to be back here with plenty of bully beef and canned tomatoes than to be out in the rain so hungry your belly thinks your throat is cut, hey?"

He spat disgustedly, lit a cigarette and inhaled deeply. " And besides, what good would you be to the army? You're knock-kneed and bow-legged and near-sighted. You'd die up there, you poor fish. You're doin' your duty ain't you? Why can't you be satisfied?"

" I wanta go up front," said Willie stubbornly. " What do I get to see ten miles back? Nothing! Reports, reports, reports. So many men, so many horses, so many trucks, so much bread. Bah! What am I gonna tell my girl when I get home? Answer me that? She'll say ' And how did it feel when you went into battle?' and I'll have to tell her that I fought the war on a typewriter."

" So that's it." Billson's heavy featured face broke into a grin. " A skirt, hey? An' you wanta dash through shot and shell

and come staggerin' back, shot in the pants with a medal on your chest. Ha! Well, Willie, you can tell her anything you like, but you're too good a company clerk to ever be a hero. Believe me, brother, I'm keepin' you safe and sound. I never did like paper work anyway."

Sergeant Billson got up from the overturned wine keg that served as a chair, strode to the door and bellowed into the darkness:

"Hey, you iron herders! Inside for orders!"

A dozen men responded to the call, men in steel helmets, mackinaws, gauntlets and boots. Ambulance drivers.

"The infantry is goin' through them woods in the morning," said Billson importantly. "We'll have a station as far up as we can get it, Avocour probably. It'll go forward as fast as the foot soldiers can travel. This'll be your base. Unload here any place; let the pill rollers take care of 'em for the hospital train.

"All you guys get plenty of gas and oil in the boilers and then try for some sleep. There'll be so much hell around here in a few hours that the dead won't be able to get any. That's all."

The men trooped out. Billson put on his helmet and shook himself into his mackinaw.

"Gotta go see the Old Man," he said. "Remember what I said, Willie. Stick close to your records. It's better for the health."

He stamped out and left the skinny little clerk sitting on the keg with tears of disappointment in his eyes.

By midnight the road that wound around the hill to Vincennes was packed with a procession that moved slowly, like some great worm, through the darkness. There were men and guns; trucks filled with shells; rolling kitchens fragrant with cooking slumgullion; balky mules, artistically cursed by evil-tempered skinners; ambulances jammed with rattling stretchers; signal corps men under burdens of tangled wire.

Willie doused the candle in his stable-office and watched the parade go by.

"Damn Billson," he said bitterly. "If it wasn't for him I'd be up there in the morning."

Now came the infantry, marching at route step, tin hats tipped over their eyes. Crunch, crunch, crunch!

"No lights, men," barked a sergeant. "No smokin' now."

A motorcycle put-putted through the gloom. Crunch, crunch, crunch! Thousands of hob-nailed shoes pounded the road. Willie's eyes were heavy.

Cursing Billson with his last waking breath he sank back in the doorway and fell into a troubled sleep and dreamed that he was leading an attack on the Hindenburg line.

Willie awoke at the opening roar of the greatest artillery attack the world has ever seen. To him it sounded like a million hammers beating steadily upon as many bass drums as the guns, jammed wheel on wheel for miles through the Argonne Woods, spat out their messages of death at twenty-second intervals.

The dun colored fields, the scraggly trees and the lumpy road stood out in sharp relief under the flashes of red flame and were swallowed as quickly into the blackness of the night only to reappear again, grotesque, horrible, twisted. Off to the left an ammunition dump exploded with an earth shaking thump and burned brightly against a sky dark with the threat of rain.

Willie looked at his wrist-watch. It was three o'clock. Shuddering against the damp wind he got up and went into the stable, fumbled about until he found the keg and sat down.

The roar of the pounding guns swelled with each passing minute until it became a mighty chorus that seemed to make the whole world quiver. From down behind the town came the clump, clump, clump of the naval ten-points going into action from their railroad flat cars.

It was raining outside, a persistent drizzle that rattled like distant rifle fire on the tin roof of the stable.

Billson stamped into the room, lit a candle and bellowed for his raincoat.

"It's pouring," he growled, "and I've gotta get up to the infantry. You bonehead, you make me sick, moonin' around

here because you can't be a target for the Heinies."

He got into the coat and buttoned it under his square chin.

"The first ambulances ought to be back here in thirty minutes," he went on. "Help 'em unload and see that the drivers carry plenty of dressings and serum back up with 'em. Hand me a can of that beef. I'm liable to need it before this little skirmish is over."

He tucked the can into his pocket, turned to go and almost walked on an excited young medical captain who dashed into the hut.

"The infantry's gone over," said the captain breathlessly. "A runner just came back. They're almost to Epinonville. Dressing station's this side of the town. Hundreds of wounded men lying in the fields. No antitetanus serum. Up to us to get some up there quick."

"Well," said Billson calmly, "I'm goin' up. I'll take an ambulance load and the other boys can fill up on their return trips."

"Won't do," snapped the captain impatiently. "Can't get an ambulance up there. Motorcycle's the only thing. Got the motorcycle but nobody to ride it."

Willie Hodge, the company clerk, stepped forward, shouldering the husky sergeant to one side.

"I'll ride it," said Willie.

"You!" There was murder in Billson's shoe-button eyes. "You couldn't ride a hobby horse."

"Yes, sir, I can," declared Willie stoutly. "I went to auto school at Camp Lewis and they taught me how. I can ride it, captain. Don't listen to the sergeant—he's afraid I'll get hurt so I can't keep his records for him."

"That's not it at all." Billson turned to the officer and spoke in a soothing voice: "This boy's a little nutty, captain. He couldn't get to Epinonville in a red plush taxicab with a chauffeur. Come on outside and I'll find you a motorcycle rider. A real motorcycle rider, captain."

"I haven't got time to go prowlin' around in the dark looking for a man," complained the captain testily. "If this fellow can ride let him go to it."

"But, sir—"

"Shut up! Load that side-car and start this bird off for Epinonville."

"Yes, sir."

Billson helped Willie load the side-car with the boxes of carefully wrapped tubes. The clerk mounted to the seat. The gears signaled the start.

Billson suddenly seized Willie by a skinny arm.

"Pray, you cootie," said Billson. "Pray that you get shot because that'll be gravy compared to what I'll do to you."

II.

WILLIE seemed alone in a terrible world that rocked and wheeled about him like a crazy, futuristic picture he had once seen in an art galley. Through the yellow smoke the drab ribbon of the broken road leaped up at him, a road filled with the wreckage of war, twisted hunks of steel and wood and bloody things that had once been men.

"God," said Willie and trembled. Fear held his heart in a relentless grip and the knowledge that he was afraid brought a stream of bitter oaths to his lips.

He swerved to the left of the road and skirted an ammunition train that was moving cautiously forward, picking its way like a blind man. Twenty trucks filled with high explosive shells. What if they were struck by one of the whizzing, singing things that filled the air?

Willie passed them with a shudder, shot down a hill and came out of the woods and into the remains of a town. There the highway was filled with a snarl of guns, trucks, ambulances, and men.

A burly captain of military police stood in the center of the heap of broken and blackened sticks, and chewed tobacco while he patiently sorted out the mess—sent guns and ammunition forward, waved ambulances, food and medical supplies into the ditch.

"Ambulances off to the right!"

A little major hopped from one of the machines and ran toward the captain, waving his arms. He reminded Willie of a ballplayer belligerently protesting the decision of an umpire.

"These ambulances—"

"Off to the right!" The captain eyed the little major coldly. "Guns and something to go in 'em are all that get by here for three hours. Pill rollers take the ditch."

He turned to one of his waiting lieutenants. "Get that ammunition train up here. Snap into it!"

The ambulances moved grudgingly into the water of the ditch. Willie churned forward. He caught himself hoping that he would be banished, then cursed himself for a yellow dog.

"What yuh got there?"

Willie was facing the burly captain.

"Antitetanus serum, sir. And, captain, I won't gum up the works. I can scoot in and out and nobody 'll ever know I'm there. Lemme through, will you?"

The officer looked into Willie's eager eyes and smiled wearily.

"Go on through," he said. "I guess those poor devils up there need that stuff."

Willie shot past the officer, bumped through the town, strove up a steep hill and came out upon a plain, brutally mutilated as though it had been crushed by a giant hand. The German gunners had found the range of the unprotected road now and they pounded it fiercely with high explosive shells that ripped and tore great jagged holes in the earth.

Off to the right the growing light disclosed a battery of seventy-fives coiling and spitting beneath strips of camouflage canvas, a jeering captain driving its toiling crews. Ahead members of a labor battalion struggled to fill a hole in the road with a dead horse. They scattered as Willie bore down upon them.

A company of infantry popped up from nowhere, crossed the road in open formation and disappeared like gophers into the holes on the other side.

With his heart beating like a trip hammer, Willie rode through a clattering of shrapnel and gained temporary safety where the road ran beneath the brow of a stubby hill. He stopped the machine and dismounted.

His knees were strangely weak. He put his hand to his forehead and wiped away the drops of cold perspiration.

"No chance," he muttered to himself. "A guy ain't got no chance. You just ride along the road and, blooey, you get blown to hell."

Willie was afraid, deathly afraid of the screeching things that dropped from nowhere to kill and maim. It would have been a whole lot different, he told himself, if there had been an enemy to grasp and fight—but these shells that whistled overhead, how could a fellow fight them?

"No use. No use."

He sat down in the mud and held his head in his hands. He dared not go forward, he could not go back. Where could he find shelter until the shells ceased to fall?

Panic-stricken, he finally crawled under the side car.

The intensity of the barrage increased. Shrapnel slapped the stumps, the ground quivered, acrid smoke clung to the low places.

Willie peered dazedly from between the wheels of his shelter. From toward the front came a tall, gray-haired man, clad in heavy boots and a dirty, wrinkled slicker. He wore a battered helmet and had a long white mustache that drooped over a chin covered with a week's growth of beard.

"Gee," said Willie, "he looks like the walrus in the zoo at home."

Realizing that the man was an officer, probably of high rank, the clerk reached into the side car and fumbled around until he found a monkey wrench. By the time the plodding figure had reached him, Willie was industriously engaged in tightening one of the front wheels.

"What are you doing?"

Willie thought he said it suspiciously and so he stammered as he replied:

"Wheel came out. Had to put it back in. Just finished when you got here."

"Humph!" The officer stared at him unpleasantly from beneath bushy eyebrows. "Where are you going?"

"Epinonville."

Once again the old man peered at him closely. Willie felt very uncomfortable.

He told himself that this old fellow was wise to him, knew him for a craven who had been hiding beneath a motor cycle side

car while other men went about their business heedless of the withering fire.

"Your name and company?"

The officer got out a little notebook and a pencil stub.

"Aw, say," pleaded Willie, "you don't hafta take my name, do ya? I ain't done nothin', have I?"

"Your name?" snapped the old man impatiently.

"Willie—Willie Hodge, Three Hundred and Sixty-Third Ambulance Company, Three Hundred and Sixteenth Sanitary Train."

The officer scrawled in the book, closed it, tucked it away and stood there watching.

"Well," said the clerk, "guess I better be hot-footin' it for Epinonville."

He kicked the starting pedal. The engine purred into life. He slammed the gear lever into low, stepped on the clutch and moved away down the hill.

As the machine gathered speed, Willie looked back. The officer had turned and was sloshing through the mud toward the battery of barking seventy-fives.

"I'm sunk." Willie made a groaning noise in his chest. "Meat for Billson. That old goat 'll report me and Billson 'll have me tried sure for layin' down in the road."

The engine sputtered and roared and with each revolution it sang to Willie:

"Court-martial. Court-martial. Court-martial."

Desperately he fed the machine more gas and tore over the ground at a reckless pace. Abruptly he came to what had once been a plank road.

It was badly broken now. A gang of sweating laborers worked like beavers to repair the damage, using anything that came to hand. Willie rocked over the débris, his machine sliding at crazy angles.

Suddenly the engine died. He kicked the starting pedal frantically. A big shell whizzed through the air.

Willie stood on his machine, paralyzed in every muscle, awaiting the explosion, but when it came it was just a dull plop. A dud, thought Willie with relief.

A heavy, yellowish substance crept out of the shell and writhed over the ground.

"Geewhillikins!" said Willie. "What's that?"

A labor battalion sergeant ran down the road, yelling full-throated curses between cries of:

"Gas! Gas, you idiots! Get your masks!"

Willie saw the sweating workers dive for their masks and managed to get his own on, kicking the starting pedal all the time. Suddenly the engine roared again and he lurched forward through the smoke.

He could hardly breathe. The mask hurt his face frightfully. Curses and broken phrases of anger drifted to him from the ditch where the laborers had taken refuge.

"Hey, you bonehead!" somebody bellowed. "You can't ride that road. It's all shot to hell!"

Willie waved a skinny hand and kept on going. He would ride that road. He'd show 'em. He'd show Billson. He'd show the old walrus with the white mustache. He'd show 'em all, damn 'em!

"Give her the gun," said Willie, and he did.

The machine careened wildly, struck a hole, the rear wheel threshing wildly. Willie dismounted and pulled off his mask, sniffing the air to see if it was safe.

"Looks like I'd hafta push," he grunted and put his shoulder to the side car, but paused to watch an ambulance which was swaying toward him, its driver hunched over the wheel, striving valiantly to steer clear of the treacherous holes.

On came the machine, rolling and dipping as it navigated the wrecked highway with its load of broken men from the red horizon where the gallant Ninety-First had smashed the enemy lines.

"Good boy," breathed Willie, fascinated. "He's gonna make it."

In silent admiration he stared as the ambulance churned into a shell crater, came up on the other side, gears growling, and hung there. Then there came a blinding flash, followed by a roar that cracked into Willie's eardrums like a hot poker.

Willie picked himself out of the ditch. He was bruised and torn and weary; the armies of pain stamped through his confused brain. From his bloodshot eyes he

saw, through the smoke, the ambulance folded upon its side, its rear wheels spinning helplessly.

Willie staggered toward the machine. He passed the driver, lying on his face in the slime, his body riddled with shrapnel, made his way to the car and stood staring at it, sickened by the tragedy.

From the tangle of twisted steel and cracked wood, he saw a pair of muddy boots protruding. He managed to get to the wreck, grasped the boots and hauled forth a youthful second lieutenant with a dirty and bloody rag wrapped around his head.

Blood and mud caked the youth's face, a horrible mask over a great gash that had been cut from the top of his skull to the point of his jaw.

Willie's body quivered and his voice shook as he tried to speak to the wounded man.

"Hey," said Willie, "are you dead?"

The lieutenant opened his eyes and muttered curses.

"Some scrap! Come on you roughnecks! They can't stop us. At 'em, up and at 'em. They—"

His voice trailed away and died. He flopped his hands feebly. Blood ran in a thin stream from his mouth.

"Nutty," said Willie softly. "The poor devil."

He grasped the officer under the shoulders and began to drag him across the road. It seemed cruel even to touch this pitiful wreck but Willie knew that he had to get off the highway for the German artillery had come to life again and was dropping tons of explosive into the area just behind the front lines.

Willie half dragged, half carried the wounded man into the shelter of a shell hole, propped him up in a sitting position and made him as comfortable as he could.

Then he ripped the tail from his shirt, soaked it in water from his canteen and did his best to wipe the dirt from the cut.

The lieutenant stirred fretfully beneath his hand and began to rave again.

"I tell you we beat 'em! Hell's bells, you should have seen us go! We—"

"Sure," said Willie soothingly. "I know. I'll bet you gave 'em plenty." He bent low over his charge and added: "That's not hot air either. I'll bet you did."

Willie forced a drink of water between the officer's teeth, lit a damp cigarette butt and sat down to consider.

The road was a wreck. There would be no more traffic over it that day. No hope for rescue from that quarter.

It was now broad daylight and they were in the middle of a bare field, exposed, for all he knew, to fire from the enemy trenches.

He gazed critically at the wounded man.

"There's only one thing to do," he concluded, "and that's to carry this guy outa here. He'll die if he lays here much longer."

After much struggling Willie managed to get the lieutenant across his shoulders like a sack of meal and staggered heavily over the field, his heels digging into the ground. From time to time he paused and took refuge in shell craters as his weary body demanded relief from the burden.

In this way he covered two miles of the soft, rolling ground and finally came into the shadows of a small clump of damp trees. Here all was quiet except for the distant roar of the guns.

It seemed to Willie that desolation had laid its hand upon the place and all men had fled before the terror of the great battle in progress ahead.

"Cheest," said Willie, "it's spooky."

He dumped the lieutenant against a water-soaked log and sat beside him, puffing and weak with fatigue.

Zing!

A bullet ripped through the leaves and hit the log with a plop.

The lieutenant opened his eyes.

"Snipers," he said and swore cheerfully. He was fully conscious now.

"Snipers?"

"Sure." The officer regarded Willie through lids half closed. "The infantry went through here too fast. No clean up men behind 'em. Mr. Heinie climbed a tree and he's been there all day taking pot shots at anybody that came along."

"Hell," said Willie because he could not think of anything else to say.

Of a sudden he felt terribly weary and hungry and useless. He did not know what to do.

The officer put a wavering hand to his head and it came away covered with blood. He sat there looking at it, then said:

"Where did you get me?"

"Outa the ambulance. It was wrecked. I guess you were the only guy in it left alive."

"Too damned mean to die." The lieutenant laughed feebly.

"Say," demanded the clerk, "what'll we do about this squarehead that's shootin' at us."

"Keep still. He probably just heard a noise and took a shot into these bushes for luck."

Ping!

Another bullet struck the log.

"Take my revolver," said the lieutenant. "This fellow's about seventy-five yards right through there." He pointed at the dripping underbrush. "I'll stick your hat up over the log on a stick. You watch. When you get him spotted you can knock him off. All right, now! Look sharp!"

Willie took the weapon and peered over the log. The lieutenant raised the helmet slowly.

Zing! Zing!

The hidden sniper fired twice.

"I see the devil," said Willie. "Damn him, I'll fix his clock!"

The veneer of civilization, plastered upon the little clerk during all the years of his drab, uneventful life, was stripped from him in the one second that he sat watching for his quarry. The leaves of a distant tree parted and a thick-jowled German infantryman, wearing a helmet like an inverted soup bowl, looked out.

Willie raised the revolver, aimed its barrel between the man's eyes and pulled the trigger.

The sniper fell forward with a gurgle of surprise, slithered down a limb and hung there, blood dripping from his head to the ground below.

"Got him!" exulted Willie.

"Good," said the young officer soberly. "That's the second time to-day you've saved my life. I've got a drag at headquarters like a ten ton truck and by Heaven, I'll have a couple of medals for you or know the reason why. What the hell are you doing in the medical corps? The army needs fellows like you to win this measly war."

Willie, mouth agape, sat down.

"Me?" he echoed. "Fellows like me? Say, lieutenant, my top kicker says all I'm good for is to keep the records."

"He's an awful fool," grinned the officer. "Look over yonder there. It's the stretcher-bearers. We'll be out of here soon, thank God. Remember, old fellow, what I said about that medal business. You're a hero for sure."

"What'll Billson say?" asked Willie.

III.

BILLSON said plenty. Willie rejoined his company late that night as it was preparing to move up through Exermont and found Billson and a squad of his drivers working on the ambulances to get them into shape to follow through on the big advance.

When the sergeant caught sight of the approaching clerk he slammed down a monkey wrench and advanced to meet him.

"Here's our hero," he jeered. "Look at him, boys. The luckiest white man that ever boobed his way into a medal. Can you imagine a guy carryin' so many horseshoes that he meets a general the first time he ever gets within ten miles of the front, hey?"

"It wasn't a general," Willie defended. "It was a looey—a damned nice fellow."

"Bah," snorted Billson. "A looey goin' around givin' out medals. Yeh, the woods is full of them. It was a general, you fat head. I guess you called him lieutenant and he liked it so well he gave you a cross."

"It was a looey," Willie repeated doggedly.

Billson threw up his arms in despair. The grinning drivers had stopped their work and were listening.

"And besides," the clerk went on, "I ain't got no medal. I'm just promised one."

"You infernal idiot!" roared Billson.

"Didn't I just come from headquarters and see the citation they got out on you down there, written by the Old Man himself? Didn't I read with my own eyes all about you repairin' a motorcycle under shell fire and continuin' gallantly on to the front despite everything. Didn't I read about your manly modesty and how you didn't want to give your name to the general?

"Yes I did. It made me sick, but I read it. And now you have the blasted gall to stand up here and argue with me that this medal distributor was a looey. Get busy on the comp'ny records before I bust you one on the chin."

"Yes, sir," said Willie. "I'll fix your records, sergeant. But I'm tellin' you for the last time, that fellow who fixed me up for a medal was just a common, little old second looey. He said he had a hell of a pull at headquarters and I guess he ain't no liar."

THE END

The steamship, railroad, telegraph, telephone, airplane, radio, short skirts, prohibition have been achieved since Washington lived. What would he think of this dazzling age? Read "The Return of George Washington," by George F. Worts, starting October 15th.

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THE FLYING LEGION

OH, the bug of aviation's stung our grand an' glorious nation,
An' our bird-men everywhere are on the hop.
High above the clouds they're swirlin' on to Paris, Rome, an' Berlin,
An' they're never bothered by a traffic cop.

While the present day is dyin', men are plannin' to be flyin'
In the span o' just a hurried day or two,
Out from Oakland, through the sky-lands to the far Hawaiian Islands,
Down the lanes which only hardy seagulls knew.

Borne on toughened wings they fashion to withstand the sunlight's passion,
Sped by motors made in hum-drum factories—
Hoppin' onward with their eyes on that old miragelike horizon,
To the lands across the ever-changin' seas.

An' Icarus, lodged for years up in Heaven, gives three cheers,
As he views 'em speedin' on their airy track—
He's the guy who took a notion long ago to cross the ocean
With a pair o' home-made wings waxed on his back.

But the wax got soft an' runny when the sky got hot an' sunny,
An' Icarus fell an' smothered in the foam,
An' since then there's many others he has welcomed home as brothers,
Up above the highest lane the bird-men roam.

Honor to the flyin' legion hoppin' off from every region,
Blazin' everlastin' names upon the sky,
Takin' death-defyin' chances that the world will call romances
When their histories are written by an' by.

Pat Costello.

The Devil's Flower

By JOHN WILSTACH

Author of "Forged Faces," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PARTS I and II

I HAD only had the interneship which my medical college classmate, Harry Garrett, obtained for me at Mercy Hospital long enough to become engaged to Nurse Julia Senton, when the superintendent, Harry's uncle, dishonorably discharged me because of a morphine frame-up which Senior Surgeon Bellows cleverly worked. To begin with, he was jealous of my success with Julia; an encounter between he and my friend, Jack Martin, another interne, and myself, further incensed him; and the climax came when I was favored by a journalist, Drummond, who gave me one hundred dollars for my aid to him. With the hundred I opened an office in Clifton Falls, and my landlady, Mrs. Brown, immediately secured for me fashionable clients. While riding in Mrs. Brown's flivver with Julia, I discovered a wounded man in a car off the road, who, in a moment of consciousness, insisted I care for him and not take him to the hospital. This I did, and when he regained consciousness in a room at Mrs. Brown's, he confided that he had valuable papers. He told me he was Colonel Bruce Chalmers, of the Federal Narcotic Squad, and I told him I was Dr. Robert Warner.

CHAPTER XIII.

EXPLANATIONS.

IN half an hour I departed for the Clifton Falls post office, where I mailed, special delivery, the letter Colonel Chalmers dictated to me, and his papers which he inclosed. He had summarized the approaching smuggling plot, told with details in his notes, and added that his wounds would detain him under doctor's care for some time to come. The envelope I addressed to a high official I shall not name.

My patient was relieved when I told him I had pushed his important communication into the proper slot.

"One can't do much without leg work," he sighed. "Now for it, doc? In what shape am I under these mummylike bandages? Tell me the truth."

"People don't ask their lawyers to tell how particular cases will turn out, but

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for September 10.

doctors are always expected to give snap judgments," I parried. "From my examination, you are quite weak from loss of blood, but the real danger is infection. We shall try, however, to guard against that.

"You must have absolute rest to allow those wounds to heal and your system to recuperate. You're lucky that bullet was not an inch to the left, for your brains would have been scattered all over the place. Luckily, too, the bullet that struck your right shoulder missed the bone. Take things easy, and I'll have you around in no time at all."

"Indefinite as a doctor should be at the head of medical similes," he replied, with a smile. "I shouldn't complain; aside from being weak as water, I feel O. K."

I looked at my watch, and found it was eight o'clock.

"I'm going to give you a sleeping potion shortly, colonel, but I'm simply dying of curiosity," I admitted to him frankly. "How did you happen to land in that thicket?"

He smiled and, surprisingly, the stern lines of his face softened to a likable expression.

"I thought you'd ask—I would have told you in any case," he said. "I was doing some secret service work upstate and had nearly finished that particular job, to get an inside line on that shipment of which I told you. Posing as a big buyer of dope from the South, I was in touch with a gang of 'junk' importers and distributors who have headquarters at points this side of the Canadian border.

"I was just thinking of returning to New York, without suspicion that I was anything but what I claimed to be, when a peddler recently released from Sing Sing, one of the small fry my testimony had sent there, blew in on his old friends, and seemed to recognize me. He was puzzled, but was not sure, and I bluffed my way out to my car before he started to ask questions that might lead to discovery of my false claims.

"The fact was that I had made a mistake in not letting my superiors know what I had discovered to date. Professional pride had prompted me to wait until I had the case sewed up tight. I had the notes on my person, and not in code.

"Even if I destroyed them, before being caught, I was sure that I'd be held until that ship came in and the narcotics were distributed; indeed, I would have got a quick death sentence. An overdose of morphine, taken at the point of a gun, is fatal enough! Several of our men have been popped off that way, as if with ironic revenge on the stuff we're after.

"The only thing for me to do was to make a quick get-away, and I did so. The little spark of suspicion blazed at once when I ducked, and, twist and turn as I might, I couldn't throw my pursuers off the trail. A man who wishes to make a trick disappearance is in the position of a stage magician; to do the stunt quickly and effectively details must be arranged beforehand with adept confederates.

"My car was fast, but I never really got clear of the loop that was spread. This State is dotted with roadhouses and minor hotels where the heads of the ring can locate agents to work on the offensive as well as defensive. Money talks in a language more persuasive than the gruff voice of the law. I was worth a lot of money, dead or alive.

"Of course, it was advisable to take no chances and wipe me off the slate as you would a mistake. Several times I was miles in advance of my actual pursuers, but before I reached Brettontown, snaking along that highway like a streak, a telephone call must have gone ahead to some tough pals.

"I had to stop for gas at a filling station, and outside of town I barely escaped an ambush. Escape, did I say? Not exactly. Those bullets got me, but they didn't stop me. It's hard to place the black spot on an old bird like me. I kept right on breaking speed laws in the open country, until desperation caused me to dive my car into the hiding place where you found me. Growing weaker and weaker, I realized that it was only a matter of time before I drew a blank—entirely—with the pursuit hot on my heels; so I swerved off the road into that thicket.

"Several minutes afterward two high-

power cars whizzed by, burning up the roadway. Fortunately I hadn't overestimated my endurance. I slumped with the reaction just as their machines blew by, and lost myself like you'd blow out a match—never knew a thing until you forced that brandy down my throat.

"Since then, doctor, with your kind help, I have succeeded, I'm sure, in beating that particular case. The men on my trail realize I gave them the slip in some mysterious manner, but that is all they do know. That peddler out of stir only remembered me as a man who testified against him, not as a Federal officer, and maybe he wasn't quite sure at that.

"I believe they suspected me of being a government stool pigeon, or a tip-off man to some hi-jacker. You know there's as much of that game in the dope racket as the liquor, only you don't hear a lot about it. Everything is in a sing-low key. Anyway, not catching me, they're left in the air, a baffled bunch.

"I would have faced them instead of running away, if it had not been for those papers on my person. You see what the mistake of overconfidence can do to even a supposed slick Federal dick?"

I had listened to his snappy recital of events, as if he were dictating a wire, with the closest attention.

"Seems to me," I said, "you played in luck all around. What will happen now?"

"That remains to be seen; but that cargo of narcotics is a goner. The tough part of my mishandling of this case is that, if any, only dumb subordinates will be caught in the mesh of the law, and it is the men higher up we're after—the real backers. It isn't until we reach the financiers of the ring that we can destroy the evil root of this monstrous tree."

"Financiers?" I gasped. "Is the trade big enough to attract them?"

He smiled. "The general public, fed with twaddle about the bootleggers and running the Coast Guard, hardly hears a peep about a trade that makes it look infantile in comparison," said Colonel Chalmers.

"The illegitimate trade in opium and morphine, the common and more popular dope derived from the poppy, is so large that the mention of the figures stuns the mind.

"The opium that enters this country, figured on an old basis, not at all up to date, is over fifteen hundred tons, of which only one hundred and twenty-five is used for medicinal purposes.

"Think of it: thirteen hundred and seventy-five tons of opium to ravage our civilization! I'll bring it down for your consideration to the number of doses, which makes the imagination more easily realize the magnitude of the trade.

"Of course, I know the figures by heart. After seventy-five tons for illegal smoking is disposed of, thirteen hundred tons are left for morphine manufacture.

"Now, figuring two hundred pounds of morphine from one ton of opium, the thirteen hundred excess tons will yield us these figures:

"260,000 pounds;
4,160,000 ounces;
1,996,888,000 grains;
7,987,200,000 doses or 'shots.'

"Just let that sink in. Nearly eight billion doses of illegally distributed morphine! And these figures are old ones, issued some time ago, but they're large enough for you to see the tremendous spread of this Asiatic curse.

"Now for the profit—beyond dreams of avarice. The quantity of opium sold by the grower for twelve dollars retails to the user for over six thousand dollars. The morphine is sold in ounce packages by the big peddler for from fifty to ninety dollars an ounce. The street peddler puts the stuff up in 'decks,' of about one-quarter of a grain, and sells them for a dollar each, making about four hundred dollars an ounce. Just figure that out on two hundred and sixty thousand pounds, and you will see where the money comes in, and why the most vicious and cunning of criminals find this the most attractive line known, with profits of such proportions that they can obtain great financial backing.

"The battle between the law and the trade goes on unceasingly, and since the 1914 Federal Legislature passed the Har-

rison Narcotic Act, with teeth in it, placing the administration in the Department of Internal Revenue, we have fought with some success.

"The Narcotic Import and Export Act and section 591 of the Traffic Act have, too, given us more counts on which to indict when we obtain evidence. But the Dope Ring is all-powerful, reaching out in every direction, its slimy force even influencing the courts of justice."

I must have smiled at the phrase "Dope Ring," conjuring up, as it does, sinister Oriental figures of dime-novel thrillers.

"You smile in ignorance," said Colonel Chalmers, "vaguely, no doubt, remembering old melodramas where Chinamen plotted in opium dens and lured white girls to their lairs. That is an outdated picture, if it ever was true.

"After the San Francisco earthquake the famous burrows supposed to run like worms under Chinatown were proved to be a dream of yellow journalism. Indeed, our Asiatic population is so small we have scant dealings with them.

"The big smugglers and traffickers are white men, cultured and educated crooks, with an unlimited capital at their command, passing in the best society, and with international connections. You know this is a world trade."

"Hasn't there been some restriction in the growing of the poppy?" I asked, remembering an article I had read somewhere.

"Yes, I'll tell you all about that some day, but the attempts haven't got much of anywhere, for since 1923 the military leaders in China, where ninety per cent of the flower is grown, have compelled cultivation on the part of the peasants, for increased revenue, everywhere, save in the Shansi Province.

"The land of the dragon is a series of armed camps, ruled by warring factions, some backed by interested nations like Russia and Japan, with unscrupulous bandits, or tuchuns, in the saddle. In this huddle of greed what good are League of Nations agreements?"

"And what good a doctor who doesn't make his patient rest?" I retorted, with a laugh. "Colonel, you are too interesting a sick man."

I proceeded to mix the sleeping draft.

"Here's how!" Colonel Chalmers said, as I passed him the bitter brew. "To the good fight you helped me wage to-day. If I'd been shunted to a hospital I probably would have been given at once an injection of the very morphine I'm fighting, and if I wanted to get off an important communication I might have been listed as out of my head! Oh, I know hospitals and their unbending rules and regulations."

"I know one, too, colonel," I said bitterly, "and morphine enters also in my tale. It was the means of my being unjustly fired!"

He looked at me inquiringly, but with perfect trust. It is certainly great to be taken on faith by a man, without his sniffing around a lot of references.

"Good night, sleep tight," I said.

"Thanks to you, my lad."

I turned out the electric light and tiptoed my way from the room. There was a leader who knew the magic means of getting the very best out of a man and to receive willing, loyal service; he was big enough to show confidence in others.

CHAPTER XIV.

JOINING THE FORCE.

EVEN though a sick person's reserve power of strength is the motive power drawn upon for his progress toward perfect health, a physician has every reason to be pleased at a successful example of treatment. After all, he does tinker with and lubricate the physical machine, like an expert mechanic.

I patted myself on the back at the surprisingly fine reactions of Colonel Chalmers's physique to the demands made upon it. In ten days he was becoming a troublesome patient to keep in bed.

"I never had such a good rest for years," he announced cheerfully one morning, "and such food. I think instead of your presenting a bill for my recovery it should come from Mrs. Brown."

His eyes gloated on the crisp bacon and

eggs and biscuits, as he held a steaming cup of coffee to his lips, and regarded the contents of the silver tray balanced on his lap.

My office hours wouldn't start for a while yet. I loitered in his room smoking an after breakfast cigar, the first and sweetest of the day, for our relations had become of a very friendly nature.

I never tired of having him ramble on about different cases on which he had worked, with entertaining angles. It was remarkable how much variety there was to the chase of dope smugglers and traffickers.

This morning he became a bit personal with some diffidence.

"Doctor," he began, "curiosity is our natural legacy, the quality that makes fools walk in where angels fear to tread. If I remember rightly, you spoke of our local hospital—and morphine having a direct bearing on your expulsion from it. Do you mind telling me the details of the incident?"

His wise eyes were gazing at me quizzically.

"Not at all, colonel," I said, "why didn't you ask me before? I never thought to weary you with my own affairs."

"Now, no false modesty. Nothing in the nature of things can be more interesting to a fellow than the subject of himself. Unless he is in love," he added slyly.

Needless to say my patient had met the darling of my heart, Julia.

I told Colonel Chalmers of my appointment as interne to Mercy Hospital and almost immediate conflict of temperament with Dr. Bellows, one of the senior house staff, because of his persecution of Julia, and how I loathed the man.

"It must be disagreeable for that chap to wake up every morning and find himself on the pillow," my listener chuckled.

"I can't paint his portrait without using pork fat and snake oil," I continued. "Dr. Bellows was generally disliked, but had, and still has a pull with the head of the hospital, Dr. Garrett. My only man friend was another interne, named Martin.

"He it was who, disliking our petty tyrant profoundly, discovered that his superior was receiving by registered mail medicinal jars that seemed to excite him unduly. As the hospital had an adequate pharmacy there was no call to send afield for medicine.

"Martin confessed to me he snooped in Bellows's room, while the latter was out, and secreted a sample of the powder from one of the jars; after giving it the required tests he found, not to his surprise, however, that it was salts of morphine."

"Humph. That's interesting," drawled Chalmers. "I suppose you know that a doctor is just as culpable as an ordinary citizen under the Harrison Law if he uses dope 'except in the course of legitimate professional practice.' That's the explicit wording of the bill. Go on."

"I'll tell you, briefly, just what happened, instead of how facts were disclosed to me. It seems one night the medical stores were broken into and the hospital's entire supply of morphine stolen. The following day a quiet search was instigated, but only a few of the staff were let into the news of the theft.

"Wards and private rooms occupied by patients were ransacked, since one of them might be the culprit. The finale was my being called to my own room and shown the jars, found under the mattress of my bed, and asked for an explanation!"

I shrugged my shoulders.

"What could I do except assert my innocence? It wasn't enough. I was dishonorably discharged and shown the gate," I said bitterly.

"Unquestionably a plant, on the part of your enemy, but a clever one," commented Chalmers. "Well, we have a fine chance to put an end to his game and place him under the shadows of bars to think things over, my lad. When you have a spare half hour summon the local post master; just tell who I am confidentially, and that I desire to see him, and we will understand one another."

He finished a second cup of coffee.

"I see that I may repay you in more ways than one," he laughed. "No matter what the Bible says about turning the other cheek, revenge is as sweet as honey."

"I'm afraid I don't understand," I replied.

"Why should you, though it is simple enough? You are not aware that Federal authorities have the power to stop letters or packages on their way to suspects, opening, examining, and if need be seizing for evidence. Why, not ten out of twenty crooks wanted for Federal offenses would be caught if they didn't get careless, forget the never ending pursuit, and write home to a wife or mother. Certain names in every post office, are on a hold and search list."

"And in this case?" I asked.

"We shall instruct Mr. Post Master to stop all mail directed to Dr. Bellows, registered or not. If another consignment of morphine comes along we'll first have it traced back to the sender, and then nab the physician himself. He'll tie himself in knots explaining. We take the greatest delight," chuckled Chalmers, "in breaking doctors who wander outside the pale. They know the consequences."

"Do you think Bellows is a dope fiend?" I queried him.

"No, but that he supplies one or more addicts who have enough money to pay through the nose. Indiscriminate prescription writing has, you know, been done away with. Drug stores have to keep an exact record of where their supply goes, and are checked up by our agents. There are as many rascals in the medical profession," explained my friend, with a disarming smile, "as anywhere else—maybe more—the temptation is so great."

"Now, now, colonel, I won't allow you to say such things about my calling," I protested. "Of course there must be isolated cases like this but—"

"You don't know anything about the situation," he said dryly. "For example, that we must have a number of doctors as unofficial members of the Federal Narcotic Squad, paid from a special fund appropriated for that purpose?"

I flushed at the possibility that bobbed into my mind, and perhaps Colonel Chalmers noticed my confusion, for he had a habit of keen observation.

"I'll run over to the post office after taking that tray downstairs," I said, not disdaining the work of a trained nurse. "The very thought of your landing Bellows fills me with delight."

"We are sometimes a bit slow but that only gives suspects a sense of false security," he explained. "You don't read much about our work. Many newspaper stories are suppressed by order of the department, following a Continental secret service lead. By secrecy you render the underworld uneasy, playing its own game."

This was an enthralling field of endeavor, I vowed, as I went on my errand to the post office. How I longed to be one of a force working along such mysterious undercurrent lines of investigation. What about the possibility of joining up? True, Colonel Chalmers said doctors were employed, but though I knew he liked me personally, might I appear to him as promising material?

As the gods haven't followed Bobbie Burns's wish of letting us see ourselves as others see us, we cannot get another's viewpoint. It never occurred to me how pat my leaving Mercy Hospital in disgrace might come in to further my desire.

Since the advent of Colonel Chalmers as my patient my other practice had been inconsiderate. My two wealthy women friends of Mrs. Brown were high points and now and again I had a little drop in trade during office hours. Clifton Falls was a factory town and the fact that every big plant had a first aid station, in charge of a physician, because of claims, mainly under the Employers' Liability Act, made this free service of great appeal to a majority of works.

Writing home, only yesterday, I had told the folks I was taking in an amount of money above expenses, but I could see no future in Clifton Falls. Youth, of course, is always impatient, wishing quick results, and in any case I had the added incentive of desiring to be in a position to marry Julia. To think of that happy consummation being held up by financial considerations was maddening, but the fact is forced upon one, after gentle hints and forcible kicks, that this is a practical world with a lot of sharp corners.

Thus I ruminated as I walked toward the post office, whistling a popular tune.

Hung in a frame against the background of my mind flashed a pleasing picture. Behind a crisscross of steel bars slumped a familiar figure, with the same miscast features, but a shaved head. I had called to the prison, on visiting day.

"I just wanted to see you where you belong," I heard myself saying, "and let you know that I put you there. The pleasure is all mine."

A few whistled bars of music and the projected scene of revenge vanished. Short but sweet.

I found the post master of Clifton Falls, after following the usual intricate directions, in an office on the top floor of the government building. I gave the official, George Budd by name, Colonel Chalmers's message and he promised to drop over late that afternoon, evincing no surprise at the request.

Not until that evening did I hold further converse with my patient. After eating dinner with Mrs. Brown I was in the habit of taking his meal upstairs on a tray and smoking a cigar while he partook of the ambrosial repast. The delectable spread, in this instance, was baby spring lamb, mint sauce, golden browned potatoes, with garden peas, beet salad and lemon meringue pie, topped off with crackers and cheese and coffee. Enough to make a dieter throw his column of "Eat and Grow Thin" out of the window in disgust.

Knowing my interest Colonel Chalmers related his interview with the post master and the latter's promised coöperation.

"This morning, my lad, when I mentioned our using doctors in the narcotic service, I fancied you looked interested?" he said. "Don't think my question entirely unselfish—because it isn't. There is a job, for example, that I have in mind, where we have had no success to date, where your peculiar past might make you valuable and the means of ringing the bell."

As I hesitated he told me the monetary inducement which was very attractive, but I must not mention the exact remuneration.

"If I'm any judge Clifton Falls isn't a promising spot for a young man of spirit," he went on, "more of a place to retire than one in which to start. But if you're getting along in a promising way don't allow me to influence you. The work isn't all danger and excitement, sometimes it means a long drill, trying to the patience, and a lost trail. Think it over."

"I don't need to do so, colonel," I replied enthusiastically. "Indeed, I wanted to ask you if there was an opening, but I thought it not quite fair to do so. Nothing would please me better than to join up."

"All right, doc, and as you've told me I shall be in shape to travel to Washington in a few days I'll take the question up at once with Chief Merritt and wire you to hop on. That formality over, we'll give you the details of your first assignment. I'll be glad to have you as one of us."

He reached out his hand and clasped mine in fellowship.

Ten days later, not as quickly as he had figured, Colonel Chalmers left for the Capitol city, and the following morning a telegram came telling me to report.

I had no unfinished cases on my books, save those of the two widows, Mrs. Weatherspoon and Mrs. Dowertown, and they came under the heading from their point of view of a luxury not a necessity.

I was sorry that I couldn't see Julia before leaving, but I had acquainted her with the expected change, and all that it might mean to us, so I had to say farewell by telephone. I will skim, too, over my almost weeping leave-taking, on her part, with my good angel, Mrs. Brown, and the tiresome trip, changing at New York, to Washington.

Colonel Chalmers had paid me well, so that with my little local intakes I had over three hundred dollars on the profit side of the ledger; not much, maybe, but a lot to a fellow who never before had any money he had earned.

Reaching the new railroad station on the outskirts of Washington I engaged a taxicab and reached Colonel Chalmers's headquarters in a massive government building well before closing time. I found my counselor and guide the occupant of an official

looking office, crowded with files, and the walls covered with maps, on which were stuck colored pins.

He greeted me warmly.

"I shall conduct you at once to Chief Merritt," he began. "A mere formality, as everything has been arranged by me; you are one of us."

I followed him to a vast inner chamber, where a stern-faced little man was bending, engrossed, over a table littered with documents. Upward of sixty, his face was a network of fine lines, but the eyes were sharp and vigorous, and his manner one of dominance that had nothing to do with inches.

"This is Dr. Robert Warner, of whom I have told you, governor. Bob, meet Mr. Temper Merritt, head of the Federal Narcotic Squad."

The introduction was concluded with a firm handshake and a warm smile that radiated his face, making him look twenty years younger.

He regarded me closely, tapping on the table nervously with a pencil during the interview.

"This is the man, Chalmers you recommended for the Edgewater Sanatorium case?" he asked. "That has been a thorn in our side of which I am not at all proud."

"Yes," replied the colonel, turning to me, "you are to start on an important assignment, one that will call for subtly and acting. The Edgewater Sanatorium, near Baltimore, has a great reputation as a 'cure' for drug addicts as well as so-called nervous cases. The institution draws only those of social and financial standing, since the rates for treatment are exorbitant.

"So closely do the heads of this sanatorium look up prospective clients that we have been unable to slip a spy in under false pretenses. We have every evidence, except proof on which to take action, that Edgewater makes dope fiends worse by catering to their craving instead of treating them for it. Complaints have reached us, and higher official quarters than ours."

"Too near Washington for comfort, and even brazenly making wrecks of patients with senatorial relationships," put in Mr. Merritt.

"We finally managed to get a young doctor attached to the staff, but he aroused suspicion by an indiscreet curiosity, and to-morrow he will resign of his own accord," continued Colonel Chalmers. "You will go to Edgewater seeking a post. In some way, by simulated embarrassment, perhaps, you must arouse a desire to find out *why you left Mercy Hospital?*"

"Why?" I exclaimed densely.

"Yes, don't you see," he insisted, "if you can get them to query the superintendent of the hospital, and find you were expelled for stealing a supply of morphine, you will be a welcome addition to their staff? We know you are innocent, but they'll take your guilt for granted.

"Your disgraceful expulsion will be merely put down as a youthful indiscretion—one of those mistakes a clever rascal does not let happen twice. It is a difficult game you are asked to play. Do you think you are up to it?"

"Yes," I said, "and you may rest assured I shall do my best. I didn't come this far to fall down without trying!"

CHAPTER XV.

WATCHING MY STEP.

COLONEL CHALMERS eased me diplomatically out of the chief's chamber.

"I just wanted to have you meet the old man," he explained, once back in his own office. "That's part of the regular procedure. You will, of course, work under me."

He passed me a slip of paper.

"Here is an address where you will lodge to-night, and it will also do as a place you may refer to as having roomed the last couple of months. We try to make every detail bullet-proof, but even then, sometimes, a nut gets in the works. Did you ever hear the tale of the lad who tried to make his suicide a certainty?"

There was a twinkle in his eye as I shook my head.

"This young man hired a boat and went out on the river," the colonel began, with a smile. "Standing upright in the craft,

under an overhanging tree on the bank, he fastened a rope to the branch of the tree and dropped a noose about his neck. Then he saturated himself with kerosene and applied a lighted match, at the same time taking a shot at himself with a revolver.

" The bullet went high and cut the rope; the would-be suicide fell into the river, extinguishing the flames before he was harmed; and as the water only came up to his neck he could not drown. So he waded ashore, everything wrong with a beautiful plan, for every detail had miscarried."

He joined in my hearty laugh.

" So even when you take every precaution you can trip up. In a tight fix you must depend upon your wit and quickness; a sort of no-mother-to-guide-him state of affairs," continued my superior. " Reaching Edgewater ask for Dr. Blakely, the owner of the sanatorium.

" From Baltimore I would take a car, for it is three to four miles outside of town. We want particularly to find *how* they obtain their supply of morphine and from *where*. Even seemingly willing patients become unreliable witnesses when called upon to testify against any one who gives them dope. You have some ready cash, I assume?"

I nodded as a clerk entered with a sheaf of papers he deposited before Colonel Chalmers.

" Here is a private telephone number where you can always get in touch with me or a representative of the department," he said.

I copied down the number and sensed that the interview was over. After a hearty handshake and best wishes, I found myself out on Pennsylvania Avenue, an unofficial but none the less salaried and responsible member of the Federal Narcotic Squad. Colonel Chalmers and the big chief himself had trusted me with an important assignment and it was up to me to make good.

Feeling quite affluent, I took a taxi again to my lodging, and that evening took in a tinkling musical show at the National Theater.

The next morning I tried to pay for my room, but was informed by the proprietor that he couldn't take any money from me, as arrangements had been made with him for the occupancy of the room whenever I might want it, and I could pay some time in the future. In that case it would serve as a Washington hangout as well as another.

After breakfast I treated myself to a sight-seeing stroll, for this was my first visit to the capital, and as I viewed many places of interest I promised to further investigate.

But the assignment given me claimed my absolute concentration. I remembered, dimly, reading of a scandal connected with a sanatorium on the Pacific Coast, where poor Wally Reid had been sent, where patients suffering from the narcotic curse were sold more and more dope, instead of their being tapered off it.

The doctor in charge, if my memory did not err, was given a jail term after the exposé. Physicians taking advantage of the known weakness of creatures seeking to break off the leash of the dope habit appeared to me most despicable panderers. Robbing charity boxes or stealing from cripples, were brave and worthy acts in comparison.

Before noon I caught the interburban to Baltimore and after eating a bite of lunch at the Herman Hotel oyster bar, hailed a taxi and ordered the driver to take me to Edgewater Sanatorium. A half hour's drive and we entered trimly kept grounds, with a vast Colonial structure nestling back in the trees, once graced with gallants and the silken music of the minuet.

Now I shuddered to think of the evil under this smooth appearance, but I must keep my knowledge hidden.

Paying the driver, and telling him to wait, I walked directly by a group of well dressed men and women lounging on the porch into a room a brass strip told me was the office.

" I wish to see Dr. Blakely," I said to a young man behind a long, wooden counter, who was dressed for golf, whether he was going to play or not.

" Your card," he returned languidly.

" I have none with me," I said. " I am Dr. Robert Warner."

I am sure that the name meant nothing

to him, but he retreated through a rear door and returned with a manner that hinted I had become a person of importance.

"Come right this way, doctor," he murmured. "Dr. Blakely will be delighted to see you."

I followed into an elaborately furnished office with more of the library atmosphere of a literary man than that of a physician. A gentleman in blue coat and white flannels, and with a society manner, arose briskly from a leather armchair.

"Dr. Warner, I am at your service. Pray be seated."

The voice was soft and pleasing.

"Delightful late spring weather we are having," he continued. "Will you have a cigar? These are something very choice a friend brings me from Havana."

A weed was tendered me and my host lighted it, a tall, keen, finely groomed individual with a long, thin, keen looking face, and a noticeably well bred English accent.

"Ah, Dr. Warner, what may I do for you? I assume you have a patient you desire to consign to our care, eh? Well, we are a happy family here, and our results are wonderful, if I say so myself. We are a little full up, but we may be able to consider another guest. You can't imagine how delightful the atmosphere is for our patients, they feel so at home, all being of the same high social standing."

Seeing his error, I thought best not to let it go any further.

"No, Dr. Blakely," I said, "I am here on a different errand. Somewhat of a specialist in nervous cases, I thought you might have an opening on your staff for a young doctor desiring valuable experience."

"Ah, my mistake. I hardly think so, but one never can tell. Where did you last practice?"

"At the Mercy Hospital, Clifton Falls, New York, but if you don't mind we won't go into that," I faltered, with an intentional break in my voice.

He regarded me with a sly smile.

"Nothing disagreeable, I trust?"

"Well, no, not exactly; that is to say—" I stumbled in my speech.

"The fact is," I stammered, "I have the highest respect for Dr. Garrett, and the house staff of Mercy Hospital, the very highest respect, but—er—our opinions didn't quite agree and—"

"Indeed, some difference in diagnosis, perhaps?"

"I didn't exactly get a square deal," I blurted out, as if unable, or unwilling, to explain further, "but I assure you that I am a young physician who can be trusted. I have *other* references I would be quite pleased for you to investigate. In Clifton Falls I had the honor of having some very distinguished patients and—" I drawled off, lamely, trying, apparently to change the subject from that of the hospital, and had a feeling that I had made the impression that I desired.

"Indeed, doctor, it may be that an ambitious young man like you," said Dr. Blakely suavely, "blessed with a fine social sense, might be a happy addition to our staff. Where may I get in touch with you if I desire to do so?"

"I have been staying in Washington the last few weeks," I said, and wrote down my address on a little pad that he handed to me.

"Thank you, Dr. Warner. You may hear from me shortly. I have been thinking of making a few changes. A very good day to you," he said, terminating the interview.

I strolled out to my waiting taxi well satisfied with myself and ready to bet a hundred to one that Dr. Blakely, within an hour's time, would have the head of Mercy Hospital on the long-distance telephone, asking why I happened to leave that institution.

I flatter myself I had planted in a natural manner that there was something queer I wished to cover, in connection with my leave-taking—and I fancied he would be secretly delighted to hear of the morphine episode that had meant my expulsion. Here, he would say, is a type of creature I can use!

Life, it has been sagely observed, consists of things that come off and those that don't come off, and I had a feeling of certainty that my interview had registered in

just the manner that I intended. Here was an odd instance where a damaging record, instead of a recommendation, would turn a black mark into a strong influence in my favor.

It was easy to imagine the gusto with which Dr. Garrett would characterize me as a disgrace to the medical profession. The more he put me on the pan, the better, but I knew he would need no prompting.

Pat, too, would come the resignation that day at the Edgewater Sanatorium of the young doctor whom, to no avail, Colonel Chalmers had planted there. I doubted not my application for a post might seem to Dr. Blakely a lucky coincidence at the right time, and that I would make a malleable addition to his staff.

He had to be mighty careful, playing a game fraught with danger, where a false move would be one into the penitentiary.

It is a pleasure to score a bull's-eye at your first attempt.

The next morning I received at my rooming house a note on distinctive linen stationery.

> My dear Dr. Warner:
>
> Regarding our conversation, I have found an opening on our staff that I am sure will be satisfactory to you. Kindly report this afternoon ready to assume your duties.
>
> Very sincerely,
>
> Dr. Bennison Blakely,
> Director in Charge.

I repacked my toilet articles and pyjamas, thrilled with satisfaction that this first step had been accomplished without a mishap. An actor on the stage is nervous of the result of a first performance; how much worse in this secret service performance it would have been to fall down on the job!

Upon my second visit to Edgewater I felt much more confident. The first act was over, and I had acquitted myself before a discriminating critic.

As the taxi, taken at the station at Baltimore, turned into the grounds, I determined I wouldn't commit the mistake of the secret service aid who had preceded me, by appearing as an obvious snooper.

My cue, it seemed to me, was to play a young weakling without scruples or much brain—a willing tool.

Maybe my giving the impression of not possessing more than a low showing of gray matter wouldn't come hard!

Dr. Blakely sent out a servant to take my bag, an orderly in white duck with the flattened features of an ex-pug.

"I'll take your things upstairs, sir," he said in a servile, smirking manner. "The boss is waiting for you inside."

I entered, after dismissing the taxi driver, with all the confidence of an old hand.

"Welcome to Edgewater, doctor," said my new employer, his hand outstretched. "By an odd circumstance, one of my staff left suddenly, yesterday, after our interview, so I have a place for you. Your salary will not be large, two hundred a month, but you will be dealing with generous patients who will pay well for favors. Money is no object to them, you understand?"

I smiled, well pleased. "I appreciate, governor, your sanatorium is the gathering place of some of our very best people, and you maintain a high social tone," I thought best to say, "in surroundings that remind one of a fine country estate."

Blakely waved his hand, as if to signify that I had caught his meaning.

"We try to get away from the confining, cramping atmosphere of the usual prison-like reservation where mental cases are sent for treatment," he explained, as if reading from an advertising booklet. "We proceed on the principle that the patient is almost always right. An appearance of freedom, because of lack of regulations, is our plan, of course under expert supervision. Why, in numerous examples I might name, guests quite cured continue to stay on here under conditions so perfect for cerebral and physical balance."

I am sure this was part of his usual selling talk, yet I listened with the rapt expression that makes employers think they're good.

"We have our schedule so arranged that there shall always be a doctor in readiness for a given number of patients," he further explained. "To-night, at dinner, you will be introduced to the gentlemen at whose service you will be from one o'clock until midnight. From Dr. Shel-

ton, our pharmacy head, you may obtain what medicine you require by writing *your own prescriptions*. At times, I assume, your patients will need narcotics to quiet their nerves; breaking the drug habit is, you know, a gradual process—very gradual."

"I understand," I replied quickly, "one must not withdraw the drug at once; the shock is too great. A slight lessening of the amount each time will bring the most successful result."

"I see that you have the proper idea, Dr. Warner," said my chief, with a smile. "Come, I shall make you acquainted with Dr. Shelton."

As we strolled through the mansion the head of Edgewater told me how the sanatorium was laid out.

But my mind was active with a phrase of his remarks. Dr. Blakely made his staff physicians responsible for the morphine they doled out, by having them write their own prescriptions for it. In this way each man was responsible, and in the case of an investigation the owner was quite absolved from blame.

Of course it was perfectly proper in treating addicts not to deprive them of the dope at once; a favorite form of diagnosis called for doses of morphine to be administered in decreasing amounts. Finally nothing but a harmless substitute was given to the patient by hypodermic injection, and by this time he was not assumed to know the difference, so slowly had the drug been withdrawn from him.

Here, however, Colonel Chalmers knew, nothing like this was even attempted. The poor drug fiends were pampered by being allowed their full measure of nerve-soothing and destroying narcotic. And a habitual user of morphine, or tincture of opium, commonly called laudanum, can safely take a dose that would kill a normal individual. Thomas de Quincey, author of "The Confessions of an Opium Eater," said that he had taken as high as three hundred and fifty drops of laudanum a day, so accustomed had his system become to the poison.

So, if Colonel Chalmers's surmise was correct, a tremendous amount of narcotics must, in one way or another, find their way into Edgewater. The ordinary supply, obtained legally from some wholesale drug company, supervised and taxed by the government, might easily be accounted for.

But those secretly smuggled consignments? That was the mystery I must solve, and produce evidence that would stand in a court of law.

Somehow, somewhere, there must exist a method of intercourse between Edgewater and dope traffickers outside. It was my duty to discover the means of communication by which smuggling was accomplished, and I saw that I had a man-sized job on my hands.

CHAPTER XVI.

A HARD NUT TO CRACK.

WE entered a miniature drug store, without toy and department-store trimmings, a room given up exclusively to chemicals. From behind a glass counter appeared a distinguished-looking individual, wearing tortoise-shell glasses and a Vandyke beard, the combination being quite overwhelming.

"Dr. Shelton, I want you to meet Dr. Warner, a new member of our staff," introduced Dr. Blakely, with a characteristic wave of the hand.

We shook hands with a show of cordiality.

"Whenever you need anything, this is the place to get it," said Dr. Blakely. "I flatter myself that we have a very complete pharmacy department. Patients are not allowed to make purchases. Their needs are filled by our staff, who write out prescriptions that must be left for the record. This, of course, balances with the supply of ingredients on hand. You know, Dr. Warner, a sanatorium of this nature is open to possible suspicion, so we always wish to be on the safe side, in the position of *welcoming* investigation."

He was very cautious in his dealing with me, or just plain careful on principle.

In any case, I was being shown the works of an institution seemingly run with scru-

pulous care and aboveboard, abnormally so, it might appear. A stage trickster always shows that he had nothing up his sleeves before he produces a few live rabbits from the back of your neck. In other words, I was quite sure there was a Senegambian hidden somewhere in the woodpile.

However, I expressed my favorable opinion of this clean-cut method of conducting the drug department of Edgewater.

"It was my own idea to keep the pharmacy entirely separate for particular use," said Dr. Blakely, gratified at my remarks. "Downstairs at a counter patients may purchase toilet articles, cigars and cigarettes, candy or light drinks."

I was then shown other distinctive features of the sanatorium, a model gymnasium on the same floor, and swimming tank.

"We encourage submersion as quieting to the nerves," said my guide. "It is generally agreed to be the best of treatments. Patients like this pool."

Indeed, as he spoke, several men were splashing about with every evidence of enjoyment.

"Your room, doctor, is No. 12, in the west wing," said Dr. Blakely after our inspection tour was over. "Doubtless you would like to unpack. You will meet your patients at supper. We are very informal here, you will be pleased to learn."

After doing the honors, with the satisfied smile of one who has made a good impression, Dr. Blakely left me to find my room alone, which I did without difficulty, in a wing at the back of the mansion evidently added in modern times.

I found my suitcase had been unpacked and toilet articles laid on the bureau in a manner that suggested a valet. I gazed with approval about the comfortably fitted chamber, a little private bath leading off it, and couldn't help comparing the delightful surroundings and apparently congenial staff I found here and the drab association at Mercy Hospital.

After tidying up, I went downstairs and strolled out about the grounds, which were quite extensive. Some distance from Edgewater stretched a fine velvet lawn and decorative elms, and farther back were croquet courses and tennis courts, both being used by players, none of them young men, but in the prime of life.

You may be surprised to learn that they didn't in the slightest look like the preconceived picture you may have of dope addicts or sufferers from nervous complaints. Of course at Edgewater the former were vastly in the majority.

I am sorry if I must shatter the vision of thin, haggard creatures, wasted to skeletons, we have been accustomed by newspaper cartoons and articles to bring before our eyes whenever dope fiends are mentioned. For these men appeared quite normal.

It is a fact that morphine or opium can be indulged in for extended periods, even years, without even those nearest to the addicts being aware of their habit. Narcotics have made an insiduous appeal because of their secrecy, as compared to alcohol, for a heavy drinker cannot but expose himself.

Your nearest friend, relative, even husband or wife, might be a dope fiend without you being aware of it. The habit encourages reticence and for a long duration of addiction the only outward manifestation is an increased nervousness if, for any reason, the drug isn't available.

If it is entirely withdrawn? Ah, that is a different story, and not a pleasant one. But ordinarily you can't label users of narcotics. Alas, the slaves of the poppy wear no outward badges of servitude.

There in the bright, sunshiny day, a world of green and gold, with the white pillars of the Colonial structure in the background, I might have imagined myself a guest at some fashionable house party watching other visitors at play.

Intelligent appearing chaps, too. That lithe fellow swinging his racket for a smashing serve must have been an athlete in his youth, and his opponent had the bearing of a prosperous business man. Three chaps, somewhat older, were intent on a close game of croquet. Expressions I studied were contented ones. A sufficient nerve soothing supply of morphine must be steadily coming in.

Here was indeed a contrast to the mis-

erable wretches of the underworld we have pictured in court, shaking and trembling, before being sent away for treatment at the expense of the State. Yet statistics show that the silken, lulling breath of the poppy obtains the greatest sway among the cultivated, educated class.

That evening, at dinner, in the main dining room, Dr. Blakely introduced me to the group of men with whom I was to be associated, ten in all. Pleasant, well groomed types one might expect to meet anywhere. During the meal there was a sprightly interchange of conversation, on current topics, and I could not see any signs of artificial stimulation.

After dinner we scattered, some of the men straying to the billiard parlor, others to the combination library and smoking room.

I went to the magazine stand, near Dr. Blakely's office, presided over by a uniformed attendant, and purchased a handful of cigars. Only imported brands were on display, priced from thirty cents up, but I figured that I might afford the luxury just this once.

The only sanatorium rule I had thus far discovered was that lights were out at midnight. The only exception was Dr. Shelton's drug department, open until 2 A.M., for emergencies. But most of my patients retired to their rooms early in the evening.

My duty it was to make the rounds, from ten on, to find if there was any medical service needed. A list of names and rooms was given me by the young chap, in perennial golf outfit, I had first met in Dr. Blakely's outer office.

That first evening I received cheery assurances that everything was O.K., and careless good-night from all but the last of the ten men on my list, a patient named Marshall Carter, whom I had admired playing tennis that afternoon.

"Come back for a few minutes' chat when you're through your rounds, doctor," he said, "I feel a bit lonely and nervous, and you might perk me up a bit."

"You are the last man I bother," I said, taking a seat, "and even that seems a useless formality. I shall enjoy a smoke with you."

I took out one of my Havanas.

"I'd offer you one of mine, doc," he said, "but they are a brand specially ordered for me, and I never have too many of them on hand."

Taking one of his own weeds he clipped off the end in a cigar cutter, with a metal box beneath it, clamped on the wall.

"I noticed that little jim-crack in my room," I said, "but hadn't sensed what it was for."

"Oh, they've thought of every convenience here," he replied, dryly. "The mind that figured out the equipment for this place didn't forget anything."

He suddenly slumped in his seat.

"Doctor," he said slowly, "do you know that I have been here seven months?"

"Seven months," I repeated, "why no treatment should take as long as that."

"No, well several of the men at our table have been, you may call it, guests at Edgewater for over two years. I am violating no secrets. They'll tell you so yourself."

"I don't understand," I replied, trying to appear dumb. "Why don't they leave?"

"Well, doctor," he drawled, "if you don't know I shall not tell you. This isn't a bad place—for addicts. We have all the freedom we require, physical freedom I mean, and what does it matter if Dr. Blakely is making a fortune at our expense."

"I heard the rates were rather high," I admitted.

"The roof is the limit, but so long as we get what we want, and must have, no price is too steep. But the whole aspect is so very hopeless."

"Why, isn't any one ever cured of the habit?" I asked, in an attempt to draw him out.

As soon as I spoke I saw that I had taken the wrong tack. Too late I realized that I should have posed as more knowing, instead of ignorant how the place was run.

An expression of surprise darted over Carter's face.

"Don't let me speak out of my turn," he murmured, "and destroy any illusions you may have. I forgot you were a newcomer and that I was warned to keep my

mouth shut. I don't want to make myself unpopular with Blakely. Pay no attention to my cynical, rambling remarks."

I saw that I had effectively closed this source of information by my blunder, but the damage was done. You may imagine I was sorry enough, too, for in the following days I never opened another; even though I became more familiar with Carter, whom I always found agreeable and willing to talk on indifferent subjects.

Of course I also grew to know the other nine patients in my group, but found them a close-mouthed, secretive sort, and almost never asking for any medical treatment. From the fact of their coolness in never demanding any narcotic from me, a certain amount of which it would have been right to give, I knew they must be obtaining all the morphine they wanted. But how?

Don't think that I wasn't always on the watch, with my eyes open to find how the morphine was smuggled into Edgewater and then distributed to the inmates.

As I always ate with my own particular group, and made a practice of being the first at the table and the last to leave, I was sure they didn't receive any consignments of dope at meals. Many of them, of course, received mail during the day, but having an insight into Colonel Chalmers post office methods I dismissed that possible means of dope entry from my mind.

Sanatorium attachés didn't slip my men anything. That I proved to my satisfaction by keeping a particular watch on one man or another, for a day and evening at a time, during which period there was no furtive avoidance of my surveillance.

I was both baffled and puzzled.

My normal duties were slight enough. Writing love letters to Julia, meant for her eyes alone, I told her the work was so easy that it was a shame to take the money. I had not communicated with Colonel Chalmers; not hearing from me would indicate that I had up to now failed in my objective.

Yet was I quite sure that the solution, after being found, would prove a simple one. That is the disconcerting angle of all tricks when you discover how they are done.

After I had been at Edgewater nearly a month I knew no more about morphine smuggling in connection with the place than the day I arrived. It wasn't Dr. Blakely's way to confide in his staff, and if the members were aware of his secret they kept the fact to themselves.

I believe he picked doctors, with posts the least said about the better, so that if one *did* stumble on his smuggling method he wouldn't be likely to turn State's evidence and lose a soft and luxurious berth, for a post at his sanatorium was certainly all of that.

There is no telling how long I would have gone on, or rather, how long Colonel Chalmers's patience might have lasted.

My discovery came about one evening in the most natural of ways.

I had gone the rounds of my alleged patients as a matter of course, finishing at Marshall Carter's room where I had become in the habit of lounging for a final smoke before retiring.

That night we were talking in a desultory manner of nothing in particular when I discovered that I was out of cigars.

Explaining my supply was exhausted, I arose and picked one of Carter's cigars out of a box always lying open on his bureau.

To my surprise he snatched the weed from my hand and first cutting off the end of it in the cigar clipper on the wall, handed it back. Then in some confusion he lighted a match and held it for me with fingers that trembled a little.

"I must give my doctor service," he said, with a embarrassed smile.

I laughed and made no comment as I started to smoke the wonderful Havana blend I suppose he wanted me properly to enjoy. But the incident, somehow, left an odd impression. At times the slightest hint will do that and Carter's eagerness to play the perfect host didn't quite gibe with his usual cynical moroseness.

Those cigar clippers, clamped to the wall of every room, beside the bureau, seemed confoundedly thoughtful on Blakely's part.

Just then Carter excused himself and disappeared into the bath room. Instantly,

following an obscure impulse, I picked two cigars from his box, ruffled the row so that it wouldn't seem any had been taken, and stuffed them in my coat pocket. Shortly after his return I finished the cigar he had given me and threw the butt away, bade him good-night, and retired to my own room.

Locking the door I took out the two cigars I had secured, walked over to the steel clipper on the wall and pushed the ends in, cutting them off. Then I pulled out the metal box under the cutter and carefully emptied the contents into my hand. Carrying the tiny ends of cigars over to the table I pecked at one of them with my knife.

From one of the black tips rolled a small celluloid sphere. Opening this I found powder inside which I knew to be morphine, at least a grain of the narcotic.

Those unsuspicious looking cigar cutters, clamped on the walls of patients' rooms, were the answer to where morphine smuggled into Edgewater, in the tips of cigars, was hidden until used. The weeds in which the morphine was contained were, of course, in special boxes openly sold to patients. The doses were snipped off into the metal containers, where they might lie safe during any possible emergency.

If Carter had asked me to clip the end of the cigar off I would have done so unsuspecting. But his too quick move, to keep me from knowledge of the dope laden tip, had given the show away!

CHAPTER XVII.

THE RAID.

THE next morning I requested the afternoon off for the purpose of a shopping trip to Baltimore. Summer was upon us and I wished to order white drill suits. Permission was granted by Dr. Blakely and I smiled inwardly, thinking I would never be at Edgewater to wear them.

Our young office golfer, whose personality was so flat that I could never remember his name, telephoned for me to the nearest garage for a machine. After luncheon, with my incriminating evidence as Exhibit A in my inside coat pocket, I breezed forth.

Arriving in Baltimore I did order a couple of summer suits at a supply concern. Then I strolled to a telephone booth in Kernan's Hotel and feeling like a conspirator asked for the private number Colonel Chalmers had given me.

I knew the pride of an explorer who had found the precise rarity he had been sent after, and couldn't wait to break the news to the man who had backed him.

"Federal Narcotic Department? Colonel Chalmers there?"

Several moments of waiting and his strong vibrant voice was on the wire.

"I have splendid results to report," I exclaimed. "Can I see you immediately?"

"Phoning from Baltimore?"

"Yes."

"Then hop over here and meet me at the Army and Navy Club. I knew that you would ring the bell," was his delighted comment.

And when I arrived in the reception room of the club the colonel was there waiting for me, with the outstretched hand of fellowship that warms the heart.

"Come upstairs to the library. No one ever goes in there except to take a nap," he said.

Colonel Chalmers signed for me in the register and I followed him to the privacy of two big leather chairs in a confidential nook perfumed by the aroma of a lot of ornamental old books.

To my intent audience I told, in detail, just what had happened since I had joined on at Edgewater, and I wasn't interrupted, but allowed to tell my story in my own way.

"Devilish clever," he concluded, when I had finished by producing my evidence, which I transferred to his care. "Who would ever think of cigar tips? The cigars being smoked, everything is destroyed except what's hidden in these little clipped ends—and a metal box in every room to hold 'em. Very cute, indeed.

"Dr. Blakely has had the stuff smuggled directly to the ultimate consumer in a way that wouldn't arouse suspicion; and by the quantity of cigars he could keep

easy tab on what each patient had to pony up. All simple and ship-shape."

He sat for a minute in silence.

"The contraband evidence is in every room," he continued, "as well as in the supply of cigar boxes Dr. Blakely must have on hand. We shall raid the sanatorium to-morrow night, making a general clean up. Several of his staff may possibly be in with him on this, but I don't think so; I believe he kept the game in his own hands. After finishing on this end, and seizing the books for information, we'll see what our men can find at Havana."

I received his attention again.

"When the raid takes place make no sign that you aren't as surprised as the rest," he said. "We don't want your usefulness spoiled for the department by being identified with it, and with all the evidence on tap we won't need you as a witness."

"You think this will please Chief Merritt?" I asked.

"Please him!" replied the Colonel. "That doesn't express the half of it. Edgewater being so near to Washington the place has been a thorn in his side, particularly as several relatives of big politicians have been sent there—with ghastly results. One Senator even intimated we tolerate its continued existence."

"Can't please everybody," I said.

"No; but it never occurs to those who condone the failures of prohibition agents that the bottled goods they're set to seize is in bulk. Opium is a sticky, gum-like body that can be concealed anywhere and morphine in powder form can be passed off under a dozen disguises. Neither take up much space. Consider how much harder task we have in detecting smuggling. Dope traffickers don't need a truck or a ship!"

He laughed, and I looked at my watch. Four o'clock.

"I must be getting back to my job."

"Yes, be on hand for the fireworks. When we close Blakely's place and put him behind the bars the chief will be well satisfied, and you, my boy, will be well launched as an agent. Report the following morning to my office."

The colonel patted me on the back, with the bland smile of one concluding an amicable business deal for cough drops and marshmallows. I suppose one can become accustomed to mostly anything in time. After awhile breakneck escapades and raids may seem but part of a day's or night's work.

But I wasn't as yet sufficiently hardened.

I will not attempt to tell you how long and dragged out were the next twenty-four hours to me. Though I was aware that I had done nothing, and would not do aught to start a flare of suspicion, I had the feverish sensation of a person who has placed a time bomb set to go off at a certain hour. Perhaps there will be a premature explosion, spoiling everything?

An age of weary hours, each slowly following the last, until dinner the following evening.

Knowing what was coming it seemed strange to me, though natural enough, the unconcern of everybody except myself, anticipating as I did the coming terror.

Retired from a world of strife and activity, in a sanatorium one day much resembles another. There is nothing of the competition for survival that makes for the salt of life to healthy people. Here the patients live a neutral, subdued existence, rendered bland and quiet by ever available drugs, and being in such a majority they colored, as with a film of gray, Edgewater's atmosphere of utter stagnation.

That evening nervousness spoiled my appetite, and I picked at my food.

Really, I was obsessed with a sense of dramatic values. I could see the raiding party with drawn revolvers entering at all doors—as they do on the stage—and the leader holding up his left hand, the one not holding the gun, commanding everybody to be quiet when, as a matter of fact, you could hear a pin drop!

Reality is always different. I will tell what happened that eventful night without any underlined emphasis.

The meal wasn't more than half over before I noticed Carter's seat was empty. Having no appetite, anyway, I excused myself, figuring I would take a run up to his room and see if he happened to be sick.

I had heard whispers of various cases

of dope poisoning, from over indulgence, since I was on the Edgewater staff, but my ten patients had not suffered while under my care.

Upon knocking at Carter's door there was no word from inside, so I turned the knob and entered. He lay, fully dressed, outstretched on the bed where he must have flung himself. But he was not asleep. A quick examination showed that he was in a state of coma.

I felt the pulse, slow and full, and noticed the long pauses between each breath. Lifting the lids of his eyes I observed that the pupils were contracted, and the face had assumed a purplish tinge that I didn't like at all.

An advanced case of morphine poisoning.

I rang for an orderly, and when Smithy came, in a hurry, I ordered him to undress Carter and get him into bed.

I telephoned to Dr. Shelton to prepare for me immediately the antidote called for, a solution of aorthpine and strychnine, which I would inject hypodermically.

Sending the orderly for the medicine, after he had our man undressed and in bed, I tried my best to arouse him by shaking and pummeling. But I could not get him out of the comatose condition, which I was well aware was very dangerous.

After the hypo injection, what didn't we do, that orderly and I, in the next few hours? First we applied hot water bags and blankets to maintain temperature. Then we made Carter swallow mustard water, and that having no effect, we administered solutions of permanganate of potash.

But nothing seemed to do any good, and, though we beat him with apparent brutality, the flagellation wouldn't bring the poisoned man back to consciousness.

About ten o'clock Carter entered a third and last stage. The coma became absolute, the pulse rapid and feeble, the breathing shallow and irregular, and the pupils of the eyes were dilated.

"I'm afraid he's going, Smithy," I said to the orderly. "Dr. Blakely should be informed."

As I spoke there was a convulsive movement of the insensible figure on the bed, and then all the muscles seemed to relax and the body lay still.

I made the usual final examinations. Then I looked at my watch. Carter had died of paralysis of the respiration caused by morphine poisoning at ten thirty.

The perspiration was falling from my face from that long exertion to keep the flame of life alive, and I was very tired all of a sudden.

But I must go downstairs and make an official report to Dr. Blakely. In the excitement of looking after Carter I had forgotten for the nonce all about the raid.

I couldn't have timed my entrance at a more spectacular moment.

There, grouped near Blakely's office, were a body of men, motionless, in an arresting tableau.

Colonel Chalmers had evidently just shown himself, and Dr. Blakely recognized him. Men, strangers to me, were stationed at all the exits, and one stood guard over the cigar counter; I knew these to be Federal operators.

"You understand the meaning of this raid, Dr. Blakely?"

Colonel Chalmers was polite, yet firm.

"No, I can't say that I do. I assume you have the proper authority?" he returned with icy coolness.

"Yes, I have a search and seize warrant, and one for your arrest. Those boxes of cigars would be enough—if I didn't have anything," the colonel said calmly.

Dr. Blakely paled, yet still had himself well under control.

"You intend to take all of us?"

"Yes, all, and right away. The patrol wagons are waiting outside."

Into this conversation I stepped unwittingly.

"There's one patient no one will take except in a hearse," I said wearily. "Marshall Carter just died upstairs of morphine poisoning."

"This will go hard with you, Blakely. I'm sorry," exclaimed Colonel Chalmers, and I really think he spoke the truth.

Dr. Blakely shrugged his shoulder; even at that moment I had to admire his wonderful nerve.

"Pardon me a moment, sir," he murmured, and turned toward his office.

"All the entrances guarded?" queried Chalmers of an aid, and the latter nodded.

"The game is up. I will make no attempt to escape," said the head of Edgewater. "I wish to gather together some private papers."

He entered his office without protest.

It looked to me that Colonel Chalmers stood there in an attitude of expectancy, but that may have been my excited imagination.

The next moment there was a muffled report from Blakely's office and the sound of a falling body.

"I thought as much," commented Chalmers. "Suicide was for Blakely the easiest way out. Maybe the best in his case. All the breaks were against him. Who are we to balance that quick escape to oblivion with the rest of a natural life doing time at Atlanta?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

FOR THE DEATH OF THE POPPY.

YES, Blakely had killed himself, doing the job neatly, we discovered, as we trailed into his office after Chalmers. There he lay beside his table, the black automatic clutched in his right hand, faint smoke still rising from the shot that had so neatly punctured his forehead. Instinctively I covered the face with a handkerchief, and in doing so I believed I saw a faint smile on the lips, a hint that he had accepted defeat, but had slyly eluded the punishment by retiring behind the black curtain of death.

Curiously, the suicide of the head of Edgewater, followed by an examination, hasty enough, of his books, changed entirely the plans that had been formed by Colonel Chalmers. The wholesale arrests were called off. Guards were left over the office and cigar stand, and the employees and patients warned to stay indoors the next day until an unofficial investigation had been terminated.

Colonel Chalmers had formerly told me that his department was in the habit of placing a ban on newspaper publicity, but this was one occasion when the curb was removed.

Perhaps Chief Merritt had chafed because of the unjust criticism to which his squad had been subjected during the long, annoying existence of Edgewater Sanatorium so near the headquarters of justice. The next morning, at any rate, batches of Washington correspondents descended on us like locusts, buzzing with questions, and photographers had to be restrained by force from using Blakely's dead body like a bag of burlap to show various stages of the suicide.

If you remember the flaming newspaper accounts, and the fun the cartoonists had with the idea of carrying doses of morphine in cigar tips, showing that neither toothpicks, saltcellars, nor filled teeth were safe from suspicion, you may recall that I never entered into the official investigation.

Dr. Blakely's books were a puzzle, and continued to be, so far as I know. They showed the payment out of various large sums to a mysterious Mr. A, and the receipt of certain supplies from Mr. B. Patients were charged for boxes of cigars at the usual rate, but under the heading "Incidentals," were flat sums against them running some times into the hundreds weekly.

The only man who could explain was beyond any third degree, and there was nothing to implicate any of his staff or minor employees. But the sanatorium was closed, the patients scattered, and that afternoon when I left for Washington the place was like a deserted shell. Another dubious victory had been won over the powers of darkness.

When I put in an appearance at Colonel Chalmers's office, after four o'clock that day, little did I dream that I was to participate in a plot to destroy the world-wide spell of the poppy forever and forever.

Indeed, with the advances of science, one is inclined to hold that the old saying about there being nothing new under the sun admits of numerous modern exceptions.

Colonel Chalmers was busy when I called, and I waited for more than half an hour in the outer office, glancing over medical journals that lay on the table.

Nothing new, indeed! Why, the ancients would turn in their graves if they heard what their grandchildren were accomplishing. A diagnosis of heart trouble in a patient by a doctor many miles away had been made possible through the development of scientific instruments.

He can study X-ray pictures of the organ and records made by the electrocardiagraph. Going further, the heart beat of an unborn baby had been studied and diagnosis found correct after birth.

The device used is known as the electrical stethoscope, and in its development the principle of the radio is used. The faint sounds are amplified by radio tubes, and can be heard over a loud speaker, transmitted over a cable to classrooms, or recorded on paper.

Who could say what the next advance might be in doing something that a few years ago would have been deemed beyond the surmise of probability? In trying to map the last borderland of scientific research one would be rash indeed. The very next day some intrepid explorer might declare "Land Ho!" where nothing but mist and fog had been known to exist in uncharted spaces.

But I had no idea that I was due for a surprise when a clerk beckoned me to follow him.

I found Colonel Chalmers and Chief Merritt closeted together in the latter's private office.

You may be sure that I appreciated the compliments with which I was overwhelmed by Colonel Chalmers, somewhat to be expected, you might say, because I was his protégé, but welcome none the less.

Chief Merritt congratulated quietly, as he requested me to be seated, and we grouped around his desk.

"Dr. Warner, I wonder if, like the public in general, you are more or less ignorant of the world-wide fight against opium?" he asked.

"I believe I have read something about efforts to restrict the growth of the poppy, but my memory is very vague," I confessed.

"Well, unless one happens to be near the subject in some way, it might seem of remote interest, I suppose. Only recently has the public been stirred by the knowledge that there are hundreds of thousands of dope fiends in the United States, and through the efforts of peddlers they are multiplying every day. Of course, every one considering the narcotic habit comes quickly to the conclusion that the way to kill the trade in dope would be to stop the growth of the plant."

"The poppy, you mean?"

"Yes, opium and morphine are derived from the milky exudations from the unripe capsules of the flower, which particularly flourishes in China," continued Merritt, "where ninety per cent of the world crop is grown. There are only six hundred thousand acres cultivated elsewhere, in India, Turkey, Persia, Greece, and Jugoslavia.

"You will be interested to learn that the United States was one of the first nations to go after the opium traffic, and really was responsible for the first Hague International Opium Conference, which never had any decisive effect because many nations were not yet ready to prohibit the export and import of the prepared drug.

"The Porter Resolution in Congress said that it was imperative the United States safeguard its people from the persistent ravages of habit-forming narcotic drugs, and the necessity of limiting the growth of the poppy to the exact amount required for strictly medicinal and scientific purposes.

"Our representatives participated in the second Geneva conferences in 1924, as an Advisory Committee on Traffic in Opium of the League of Nations, to coöperate in an unofficial and consultative capacity. As this country grows no opium, our position was an ethically firm one that something definite must be done, but the vast sums of money bound up in the traffic made us unsuccessful in making other nations agree that the degrading plague be done away with.

"The final meeting broke up with the withdrawal of the Chinese delegation, and a final break-up of any possible success when the American delegation withdrew. The report of our representatives states

that there is no likelihood under present conditions that the production of opium will be restricted to medical and scientific purposes, and that no appreciable reduction in the raw drug may be expected.

"Indeed, no important success could be possible, since the disturbed revolutionary condition of China made enforcement impossible, even if it had been agreed upon, and the government of India repudiated all responsibility to what uses her exported opium might be used. So, after all this struggle for light, the world is still the slave of the poppy."

I wondered what this short survey was leading up to, the story Merritt had told me merely emphasizing the fact of failure after failure.

"What I am now going to disclose to you, Dr. Warner, is in the strictest confidence, though I am all too aware that the great effort I am going to tell you about has been made known to our enemies," said Merritt, in a change to a more conversational tone.

"The short survey I have given you will make it clear that to-day we are powerless to prohibit the growth of the poppy or the smuggling in of the drugs derived from it. But a ray of hope has shown in the distance, and if it develops into realization the poppy may be stamped out of existence! What a boon to humanity! And that is where you come in."

In his excitement he was getting the cart before the horse, and I told the chief that I didn't understand.

"Remember," Colonel Chalmers broke in, "that we have been over this a number of times, but it is all new to Dr. Warner."

"Yes," sighed Merritt, "that's what comes of being too full of a subject. But the prospect is so wonderful, you will admit, that you can understand my enthusiasm running away with me. Have you ever heard of Malcolm Robinson?"

"No," I replied.

He didn't look surprised.

"A man who invents a new dance becomes more famous than a scientist who discovers how to combat the Japanese beetle that destroys millions of dollars worth of crops. Well, that is the way of the world. Robinson is known, of course, in his own field, but the old fellow has always dodged publicity. As important a figure as Luther Burbank, he has kept in the background, and never identified himself with his results."

"The name is familiar, now that you explain that he is a naturalist," I said, not wishing to be thought entirely ignorant.

But my mind was wondering where I came in.

"My explanation may seem devious to you," said Merritt, with a charming smile, "but it will be clear when I inform you that Malcolm Robinson is at work on the fungous diseases of plants, and that they suffer from contagious plagues that spread just as they do in human beings. He believes he is on the verge of discovery of a mildew, rust, smut or spreading blight that may attack the poppy, and the spreading contagiurn will wipe the flower off the face of the earth."

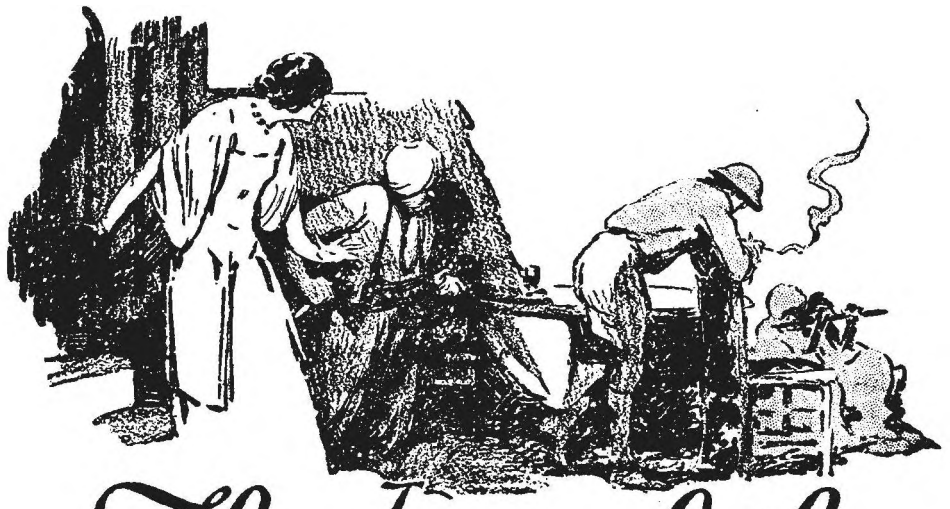
"Wonderful, indeed, if he may succeed!" I exclaimed. "But what has this to do with me?"

"Only this," replied Merritt. "We have reason to believe that the heads of the great international dope rings have a suspicion of the end toward which he is working. Robinson refuses to leave his workshop on Terry Island, so you have been chosen to go there to act apparently as his helper, but really as a bodyguard."

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

THE BULLY OF BISCAYNE BAY—By Loring Brent

A sprightly tale of Florida will be our Complete Novelette next week. The bully is the sort of character you will not soon forget.



The Inn of the Broken Mandolins

By CHARLES DIVINE

I'M going to let Mabrouk tell this story in his own words, as he told it to me one night in his charming little hotel on the white road back of Algiers, a pleasant place to rest after dodging bullets in Morocco. And Mabrouk—wise and courteous son of Allah!—knew how to make repose attractive.

He had once lived in New York, teaching Arabic. Now, here in North Africa, he brought together under one roof two qualities that entranced all travelers—the picturesque and open plumbing. And he believed in romance. Was it a commercial asset? Who knows?

Mabrouk wore a turban as yellow as the lemons hanging in the trees outside in his garden, a burnous as bright as a Fourth of July balloon, in which his corpulent figure floated here and there—on softly sandaled footsteps. When he grew intent on a thing, as he did on the story of his inn, his hairy eyebrows contracted over the bridge of his nose, and his eyes, as benevolent as they were brown, glowed in his bronzed face until you would have thought, as he talked, that it was he who first invented romance.

"You ought to write a book," I told him.

"I *have* translated a volume of Arab poems," he said proudly, "for the benefit of you Christians who are so afraid of love."

But I was going to let him tell the story in his own words.

II.

THE moonlight falls like liquid music on this white road back of Algiers. The Moorish arches of my patio know it. My dining room knows it, here where you sit, monsieur, listening to me over your wine.

And *I* know it, *I* feel it, the spell of the place. I would say so, monsieur, even if you were not paying for the wine. I said the same thing to M. Sewall, who was an

American, like yourself, but he only laughed at me.

"This is your table," I added, when he came into the dining room in his gray riding breeches and the tweed coat which sat so well upon his square shoulders, and I seated him expectantly, waiting for Miss Insley's appearance.

From the moment the two Americans had arrived here, each unknown to the other, I had gone about in a state of unusual excitement. They were so suited for each other. And I foresaw the chance to bring about another proof of the romantic spell of this place.

I am like that, monsieur.

You cannot imagine the impatience with which I watched the guests trickle in from the patio to this meal. Among them were the two Miss Claypooles, elderly ladies who were removing the cold from their London lungs and supplanting it with my sunshine; M. Bordier, that pale Frenchman, who always sat between two rosy-faced bottles of wine; and other people, nice people.

But I looked at none of them when Miss Insley entered. And under my breath I muttered the name of Allah!

She was dark, dazzlingly dark. Her slim, rounded figure moved forward with bewitching grace, her head held high, with an air of being able to take care of herself. That is typically American, I thought.

Then her soft eyes suddenly narrowed as she found me seating her opposite M. Sewall with a flourish. The gesture was elaborate, I admit; but I am like that; it pleases me.

It did not please Miss Insley at that moment. She preferred to sit at a table alone. Not that this American engineer, M. Sewall, was disagreeable to look at; on the contrary, he was tall and handsome.

But Miss Insley preferred to sit alone; her eyes as much as told him so as their glances met; and he replied to her in the same cold manner. I was distressed at their sudden hostility, which challenged the romantic reputation of my inn and caused me to explain hastily:

"I thought, being compatriots, that monsieur and mademoiselle would enjoy lunching together."

Hurriedly, as I seated Miss Insley opposite Sewall, I praised the peculiar quality which invested my hotel.

"Romance here?" echoed this Sewall, who evidently was trying to impress upon me his interest in engineering problems to the exclusion of a woman as beautiful as Miss Insley. I perceived that his firm-lipped speech betrayed a cynicism often seen in American men of affairs.

"Bah!" he said, and looked out at the mountains he was here to survey.

"Monsieur is married?" I inquired.

"No!"

"*Eh, bien,*" I returned, encouragingly. "Neither is mademoiselle. You are both still young. No couple has ever come to this inn without wanting to be together. It's in the air."

"How quaint!" said Miss Insley, with mockery in her low laugh, causing Sewall's figure to stiffen in his chair.

"This is the very room which used to be the old tavern," I continued, "and where that prince of lovers, Amar ben Ali, used to play the mandolin. His skill was great. Pilgrims came from miles around to hear him. Travelers would stop their donkeys outside in the courtyard, and, sliding back over the buttocks to a comfortable seat on the grass, would remove their slippers and sit listening far into the night.

"The one-stringed mandolin, the two-stringed mandolin, the three-stringed mandolin, all of these would Amar play, until you thought you were in Paradise lulled by the music of houris. And why did he play so well? Because of love. And why did he sing so well as he played? Because of love. And why, you may well ask, M. Sewall, was he in love—"

"*I* didn't ask you!" commented Sewall, dryly.

"Because of Bahloula. A maiden as fair as a slice of the moon when it is new. She lived across the road in that house which is now my garage. And why did Amar fall in love with her? Because he chanced to stop at this tavern. Other musicians, other troubadours, have paused at this portal, mountain men on their way to the desert, nomads on their way to the towns—and all have fallen under a spell here. You can

feel it, even when you sit in the garden at breakfast, as you will, mademoiselle—"

"I always have breakfast in my room," interposed Mss Insley.

"—drinking your cup of chocolate in the new air of morning while the eucalyptus trees drop their honey-sweet buds down on your table. A rich merchant, traveling to Fez to marry the daughter of a caid, stopped here for a day—and saw a goat herd's daughter on the hill. He never went to Fez. And when Amar came, and remained to love, he used to leave his mandolins hanging on the wall when he was not playing them.

"Amar's mandolins were sacred. As sacred as though hanging in a mosque. No one touched them until he entered in the evening and took them down, one after the other, played them for Bahloula to hear, listening across the road, and for his rapt audience of coffee drinkers in this old tavern room. They gave him money, a sou here, a two-sou piece there, and when he had gained enough he would be able to say to Bahloula's father: 'I ask for thy daughter in marriage.'

"The day came when Amar made that request. 'You are too late,' replied Bahloula's father, a slant-eyed, mercenary wretch. 'She left this morning for Tizi-Ouzoo, to marry the son of an oil merchant.' Amar stared at him, like one dumb. 'Oh, you!' he cried out at length. 'You hasty seller of hearts! You miserable acre of Thirty Fig-trees!' And with that he took up his mandolins, one by one, and broke them over his knee.

"He hung them back on the wall, the shattered halves held together only by the leather thongs that passed over the neck. He never played again. The world grew sadder. Amar sickened and grew as yellow as a carrot in the field! Then he died. Some say he died of a broken mandolin. But I say it was a broken heart.

"Perhaps, after all, it is the same thing. Since that day this place has been called 'The Inn of the Broken Mandolins,' and sweetly, sorrowfully, the spirit of love haunts its walls. Do you not feel sympathetic for Amar? Do you not, M. Sewall?"

"Why," commented Sewall, "this Amar person was only a beggar playing for pennies. In New York he would have been arrested for peddling without a license!"

"But you, mademoiselle," I appealed to Miss Insley, "you see, do you not, the broken mandolins still hanging on the wall? There, behind M. Bordier's table!"

She looked and smiled.

"I suppose that proves it," she remarked coolly.

"Of course, mademoiselle! You can actually touch them."

But, alas, nothing could touch these two, it seemed; despite their environment, they maintained toward each other an attitude of studied aloofness, a behavior that seemed almost defensive and filled my soul with despair.

I watched them as day followed day across our enchanted Algerian landscape. Miss Insley would go into Algiers to buy native jewelry for the big New York house that sent her here, or merchants would come to her and leave specimens of their wares. Sewall would set off to tramp across the hills. Between these two no romance seemed to bud.

Yet I did not abandon hope. I prayed to Allah and encouraged their privacy. But they often sat silent at the table. Miss Insley engrossed in the letters she received from her employers, Sewall intent on his maps.

And yet once I caught her at her window looking down the road after Sewall's figure, striding along with the youthful Nasseur behind him carrying his tripod and surveying instruments. And, again, I found Sewall one night pacing up and down the patio, gazing up at Miss Insley's lighted window.

"It is a beautiful night," I said. "A man should not be alone."

He muttered something under his breath and moved away.

But I would not give up—I am like that, monsieur—not while there was life in my body, belief in my inn, and a moon in the heavens.

"There are no inns of broken mandolins in your United States," I urged hopefully one evening, hovering over their table.

"Broken mandolins!" echoed Sewall. "Do you know my business here?"

"Yes. Monsieur has come to arrange for the new railroad through the hills."

"Exactly," said Sewall curtly. "I break mountains, not mandolins."

Miss Insley rose from her chair.

"You may serve my coffee in the garden," she said.

I followed her with my eyes until she vanished through the door.

"Ah!" I sighed. "What poise! Do you not see it, monsieur? She has the grace of a gazelle."

Sewall bit his lip in silence.

"Women are like silk," I remarked, "and only those who are true merchants know how to handle them. Unfortunately, monsieur, you deal in mountains."

The next day I told them at their table about the monsieur from Paris who had come no longer ago than the season before, at the same time that M. Duprez and his daughter arrived. The Parisian was accustomed to living in a world apart from the Duprezes, who were born and brought up in this country. He had just finished a tour of the colony, from as far south as the Sahara.

"What can a Frenchman love in such a land?" he cried out, exasperated. "No trees, no rivers."

The inn answered and said: "Mlle. Duprez."

A month later they were married in the big cathedral in Algiers—

"You talk like a salesman," said Sewall. "What are you trying to sell—the cathedral or the Sahara?"

I did not understand, but I lay in wait for Sewall as he came out of the patio after lunch, followed by the slim, soft-eyed Nasseur.

"You profess not to believe in Amar and his mandolins," I said to Sewall, "but you choose Nasseur for your guide."

"What has that got to do with it?" asked Sewall, pausing.

"Nasseur is a younger Amar—and his cousin."

"Huh!" Sewall lifted his transit to Nasseur's shoulder, and together they marched out through the open gate to the road.

An hour later, while Nasseur sat back of him on a hillside overlooking the sandy village street of Madous, Sewall removed his gaze from his transit and perceived a strange agitation at the door of a Moorish coffee-house.

From its obscure interior the silhouette of the *pileur* detached itself—a lumpy figure, trousered in a sack, whose bare arms had been lifting an enormous pestle above a stone mortar. Now the coffee pounder stood in the sunlit doorway, his naked back glistening with sweat, his bearded face covered with brown-red coffee dust, while he let his gaze rest menacingly on Sewall, and then shook his fist at him.

In another moment he was joined by a majestic, fully draped Arab, in a purple burnoose, and both shook their fists at the American.

Sewall turned to Nasseur for an explanation of this strange behavior, but Nasseur was half asleep with a native flute held to his lips.

When Sewall returned to the inn he complained to me:

"Why didn't you tell me that this species of laziness was addicted to the flute? He did nothing but lie on his back all day and blow into a reed."

"Nasseur is a poet and a musician," I explained, "and we all make allowances for that. Even Miss Insley understands. She, like all my guests, is fond of him. He is in love with Ayesha, who helps the cook in the kitchen. Perhaps you have noticed her, her great green eyes fringed with black lashes, but no blacker than Miss Insley's; her brow as white as the moon, but no whiter than Miss Insley's, a beauty that the mouth cannot repeat—"

"You're doing very well at it," interrupted Sewall tersely.

At dinner I had some news for them.

"A lovely thing has happened," I said excitedly. "Miss Claypoole—the one whose hair was less disheveled—and M. Bordier have gone to Algiers to be married. Two of this season's guests already! You know them? Their tables adjoined in the dining room, and their footsteps in the moonlight."

"Oh, yes," assented Miss Insley casually, "the near-sighted old lady."

"Huh!" commented Sewall. "That anæmic Frenchman!"

But Sewall, I know, did not sleep well that night. Some image must have tormented his mind long after the lights in the other rooms had gone out, for he was stirring in the patio when Nasseur appeared and played the flute softly under Ayesha's window over the kitchen.

While the moonlight fell in the courtyard Nasseur played a simple thing of crotchets and crooked flute notes, now with a plaintive minor tune that hurt with its longing. He played, and you felt the romantic sadness of these moonlit walls where once his cousin before him had serenaded an ideal—and found a sorrow.

Shutters began to click faintly above the patio. Behind one of them stood Miss Insley listening, feeling, as she confessed to herself, that she was an anachronism here. How strange that the life on which she had entered should have brought her to this remote world, where the night enveloped voluptuously the Inn of the Broken Mandolins, and a fountain tinkled, lulling and lyrical, and the moon was very gentle, and a moody young Arab breathed into a flute!

Then the flute notes ceased, and Nasseur began to sing:

> Your dear name is on my mouth.
> I murmur it while sleeping
> And mingle it with my lost kisses.

"Ah, it is so sweet!" I said, standing in a lower doorway and wiping a tear from my eye. "It would melt a heart of stone."

But among my guests, as I observed them the next morning, I could find no sign that hearts had been melted.

III.

And then occurred a series of incidents which disturbed my inn and shattered my peace of mind. Contentment is a lazy ideal, perhaps, and I should have remembered that until the coming of Miss Insley and Sewall I had never had under my roof two such resolute representatives of American enterprise—and one of them a woman!

A business woman! Miss Insley's traffic with Algerian jewelmakers had attracted attention, with unexpected results. Sewall, lounging silently in a corner of the courtyard late one night, after the others had gone to their rooms, perceived a burnoose-clad figure crawling over the wall into the court, the gate to the road having been shut at sundown.

The last visitor to leave by that gate had been an Algiers jewelsmith who had called to spread a tempting array of his wares in front of Miss Insley—silver and gold ornaments, Kabyle earrings, hands of Fatima, incrusted with gems—which he left for the American women to examine further and decide upon the next day.

Sewall, watching this stealthy figure now stealing across the courtyard, remembered the jewelry over which Miss Insley had bent her alert, dark head in the garden, just before twilight fell. Up to the balcony outside Miss Insley's window the figure swung silently and the next moment slipped inside between the shutters.

Sewall waited no longer. Following the man into that room, he collided with him in the darkness; at once there was a struggle, a chair overturned, a shutter smashed; and in Sewall's grasp the intruder reeled to the balcony outside the window, and, eluding the American, made his escape.

With a lizard's swiftness his figure disappeared over the wall as the lights came up in the inn and Sewall stood wiping the blood from a cut on his forehead.

Everybody crowded into the downstairs *salon*—what disorder and *brouhaha!*—and Miss Insley, most of all, lost none of her attractiveness by appearing in hastily arranged apparel. Here she stood, facing Sewall, and thanking him for what he had done.

Their glances clung for a moment, and in that moment so fraught with possibilities, as I thought, my speech grew excited. I mentioned love, and their glances parted.

"You have saved her life!" I cried to Sewall.

"Don't be absurd," he returned, moving away. "The man was only a sneak thief."

"But you prevented his robbing her," I insisted, following him. "You are heroic."

"You are hysterical, Mabrouk. It is no

more than I would have done for any one here."

And in that manner the incident ended, with Miss Insley returning to her room, her head held a little higher, her dark eyes a little darker. The next day she insisted upon having a table to herself in the dining room, since one had fallen vacant at a guest's departure. When Sewall came to lunch and found his table deserted by her, his eyes, after their first surprise, narrowed queerly and he did not glance in her direction again.

IV.

To have an attempted robbery in my inn was disturbing enough, but to have it followed, as it was a few nights later, by an attack on a human life, was more than should fall to an innkeeper's lot. It was the second in the series of incidents.

The night was warm and luminous, and Nasseur, flute player to Her Majesty the Moon, was again filling the air of the courtyard with his rustic plaint.

The music had a varying effect on the guests. Miss Insley stood in the window of her room, between the partly opened shutters, and listened without moving. Sewall, however, the music seemed to make restless, for he left the balcony outside his window, walked down the short flight of steps to the courtyard, and paced in and out of the shadows.

Nasseur began to sing:

> Your dear name is on my lips,
> Your sojourn is in my heart—
> How can you then be absent?

As Nasseur sang on, oblivious to everything except love—a natural behavior in our country—a third person entered the courtyard. This third person, like the visitor of a previous night, was an intruder. This bulky figure had no business in my inn.

He belonged in the coffee-house at Madous; he was Youssef ben Ali, the coffee pounder, a stupid, superstitious fellow. It was he who had shaken his fist at Sewall and Nasseur, when the American had set up his transit on the hillside above the coffee-house, and had looked through it and past it, while Nasseur lay on his back dreaming in a flutey world.

Since that moment Youssef's labors had gone awry. His coffee had spoiled in the making. The American had looked at him with a baleful gaze. The evil eye! The curse of an infidel!

Certainly Youssef had no business in my inn, least of all of such a stealthy nature, stealing quietly toward the side of the courtyard where Nasseur was playing and Sewall stood near, leaning over the back of a chair.

Youssef crept up on them from behind. Once he paused, and in that instant, where the moonlight shone on his white burnoose, a knife was seen gleaming in his hand. It was seen by Miss Insley, standing in the dark at the top of her balcony steps, still as a statue.

She stood suddenly tense, watching Youssef's steps and divining his intention. Then she glided softly down the steps to the courtyard and flung herself in front of Youssef with a cry.

Nasseur dropped his flute.

Sewall turned in time to see a knife flash in the air and Miss Insley spin dizzily aside. The next moment Sewall's fist stretched Youssef flat on the pavement of the court.

Again lights, and a room full of agitated persons, but none more moved than I, seeing Miss Insley's gown torn at the shoulder and her fair white arm streaked with blood. It proved to be only a surface cut—praise be to Allah!—but beneath the event I thought I saw—oh, so hopefully!—certain depths of feeling.

"Regrettable as it was, this villainous attack," I said eloquently, "it is only destiny again at work within these romantic walls. Oh, mademoiselle, you have saved monsieur's life!"

"Not at all," returned Miss Insley evenly.

"Oh, monsieur," I said to Sewall, "how brave for you she was!"

But before Sewall could reply Miss Insley interrupted:

"I did not know it was monsieur who was in danger. I thought it was Nasseur."

And in that manner the incident ended.

My distress was as nothing to what it became a day later, when I asked Sewall my usual question about the projected route of the new railroad.

"Yes, I have decided," he said in the dining room where I stopped him. "The railroad will pass through this spot."

"Through here!" I gasped. "Through my inn?"

He nodded.

"The inn must be torn down?" I demanded, desperate. "The Inn of the Broken Mandolins?"

"Demolished." Sewall pronounced his verdict with deliberate calm.

"But, monsieur," I implored, my hands shaking, "the other route straight across the valley from Madous is just as good. You yourself pointed it out to me."

But Sewall shook his head.

"I'm sorry, Mabrouk," he said coolly. "This route will save the railroad a minute's running-time."

"A minute! All of a minute!" I was beside myself, my voice in a frenzy. "What a wonder is man, to send engines belching uproar and cinders through an inn where the sweet and famous Amar left a spell of enchantment! There are his broken mandolins still hanging on the wall. And now even the walls are to be broken. Oh, Allah, Allah, why have you paid me like this?"

The company will pay you better, Mabrouk. Cheer up! You'll feel different when they give you a good lump sum for the right of way."

"Yes, I will feel different. For I will feel dead."

My lamentations filled the inn. From guest to guest I ran, repeating the news. I beat my breast.

All were sympathetic for me, especially Miss Insley, who voiced her opinion at dinner so opportunely that Sewall could not but hear. To him I said:

"You do not like my inn. You are hostile to it. Yes, yes, I feel it. You are inhuman."

"Come, come, Mabrouk," was all he urged in reply, "this is business, not romance."

I was forced at length to admire his steadfastness in the face of the general disapproval, for during the ensuing days he was as unpopular as a slant-eyed camel—he who was so tall and handsome as a man, but so ruthless as an engineer.

V.

And then came the sad morning when, after the guests had left the breakfast table to pursue their respective diversions, Miss Insley stood in the patio saying good-by to me. An automobile waited at the gate.

"So you are going to Spain, mademoiselle?"

"Yes, Mabrouk, I have jewelry to buy in Toledo. You'll forward my mail, *n'est-ce pas?* The Hotel de Lino?"

I nodded disconsolate.

"And you'll leave me alone—with Monsieur Sewall?"

Her dark eyes suddenly narrowed and her voice fell low, musing. Yet I caught the words:

"I don't think I could have endured that man another day."

She turned away with her head held high, her footstep falling gracefully on the path. I watched her departure wistfully, seeing in the car which whirled her out of sight along the bend in the road the symbol of the first—and the last!—romance that had ever failed at The Inn of the Broken Mandolins.

VI.

At sundown Sewall came back from the hills, surprised to hear of Miss Insley's departure.

"We shall miss her, monsieur," I said quietly.

"Huh!" Sewall knitted his brows. "To tell the truth, Mabrouk, she was beginning to get on my nerves."

He started to pass on, and then paused to ask: "You don't think she was so very beautiful, do you?"

"She was as beautiful as the night!" I said, with a sigh.

Sewall turned away whistling intently.

The next day, announcing that his work

was finished here, he too stood in the court-yard bidding me farewell.

"But the inn?" I begged him. "Will you not change your plans? Must the railroad pass through here?"

He waved his hand with an air of finality and climbed into the car at the gate.

"I have to make my report in Paris, Mabrouk."

Still more sadly I watched this second car glide away in the bright dust, another symbol of shattered hopes, bearing Sewall around the bend where Miss Insley had disappeared before him, and whence only my gaze came back, empty and pained, though I watched through the lengthening days to the very end of the season.

Mabrouk put the cork in the empty wine bottle and nodded across the table to me, indicating that his story was at an end.

"Well," I said, looking around, "unless my eyes deceive me, Amar's old mandolins are still hanging on the walls and the walls still stand. Evidently the railroad changed its mind."

"Yes, praise be to Allah!"

"Did you ever see Sewall again?"

"See him again?" echoed Mabrouk, with sudden enthusiasm in his voice. "How little you know The Inn of the Broken Mandolins! Sewall and Miss Insley have been coming here every spring since their honeymoon in Toledo—"

"What? They were married?"

"It was inevitable, having been here, my friend. Don't you know our Arab saying that 'the look of love is often indifference pretended?' The spirit of my inn could not be denied, though they did say that at Toledo the inn-keeper minded his own business. Was that a reflection on me? I have always felt that they did not mean it as such.

"They are fond of me now, and my inn. They make Nasseur sing his songs in the patio in the evening, until his heart heals though his voice breaks, and midnight comes and the train whistles on the new railroad that passes a good mile away in Madous— Ah, my friend, did I not tell you that the moonlight falls like liquid music on this white road back of Algiers, and there is a spell of love here? To-morrow I will give monsieur a table with Mademoiselle Garnier, that charming young woman from Paris—"

THE END

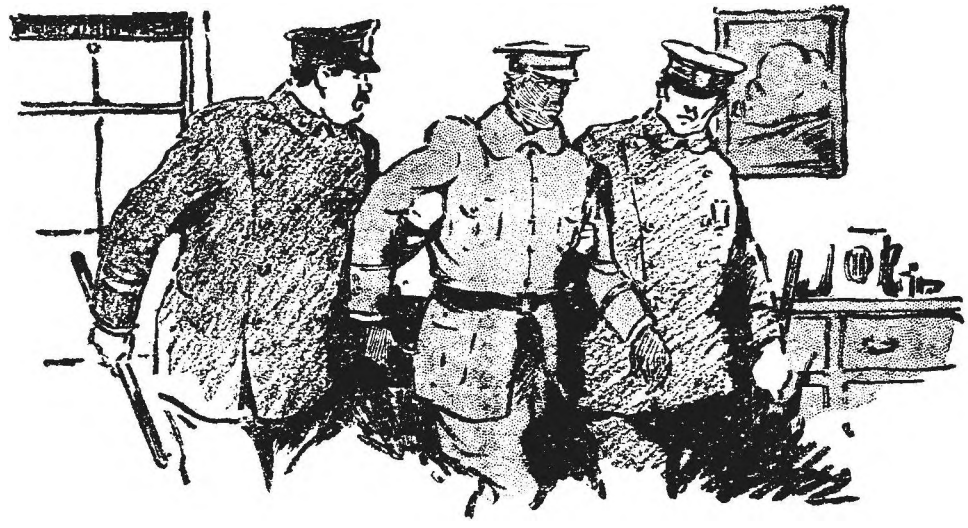
SEPTEMBER

SADDLE and bridle and up and away,
Clear is the call of the prairie to-day.
Suns in the heavens, but what should we fear?
Saddle and bridle, September is here.

Saddle and bridle, ahead lies the trail,
Cactus is calling and why should we fail?
Eastward and westward our way stretches clear,
Saddle and bridle, September is here.

Saddle and bridle and up and away,
Bit in our teeth we are free for to-day.
Grouse in the sagebrush our supper to cheer,
Saddle and bridle, September is here.

L. Mitchell Thornton.



Desperate Chances

By FRED MacISAAC

Author of "The Pancake Princess," "The Seal of Satan," "The Mysterious Stranger," etc.

CHAPTER XXIX (*Continued*).

THE PHOTOGRAPH OF A SOLDIER.

IT seemed to Tom that it was essential to find out why Mrs. Braden owned a picture of Bliss Hermann and cherished it. Perhaps it was just the weakness of a foolish middle-aged woman.

Perhaps she had bought the picture from the photographer—Bliss had been a handsome devil in his uniform—and had made an idol of it without knowing the identity of the original. Such things are sometimes done by lonely women.

He decided to ask Mrs. Wentworth, his ally, to make an excuse to visit the housekeeper's room, notice the picture, admire it, and ask who it was.

Later in the day he found an opportunity to communicate his information to Mrs. Wentworth, who received it with astonishment.

"Do you think it is possible she just picked up the picture and liked it?" he asked.

"No," she said reflectively. "I doubt it very much. Mrs. Braden impressed me as an unusually intelligent woman for her type. And the way we are finding out things regarding your friend Bliss Hermann is almost uncanny. Tom, do you suppose that she is the relative of whom you told me, who supplied his education, took him from the orphan asylum?"

"A servant? Oh, no, that's unlikely."

"That would explain why he never spoke of her, never talked about his family. He would be ashamed of her. This afternoon, I'll make an excuse to take something up to her, something to decorate the room, a picture to hang on the wall, or a bureau scarf; I'll notice the photograph and ask, in the most casual way, who the handsome young officer may be."

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for August 27.

She was as good as her word. About six o'clock she went up to the housekeeper's room, on her arm a pretty bureau scarf of Madeira embroidery. Finding Mrs. Braden sipping a cup of tea in a chair by the window, she entered and made the presentation; but there was no photograph on the bureau. It had vanished.

However, the fact that the housekeeper had changed her mind about displaying the picture was, in itself a confession that it was not an unimportant photograph. For some reason she had concluded that it was indiscreet to leave it on the bureau, and she had hidden it. Had her decision anything to do with Tom's exhibition when he dropped the trunk?

CHAPTER XXX.

MASKS OFF.

SHORTLY after eleven next morning a big runabout drove into the Wentworth grounds and a tall blond young man stopped it before the front door. As it happened to be warm and sunny, the owner of the house was on the porch busy with some sewing. She rose and approached the entrance when the driver of the car ascended the steps.

"Mrs. Wentworth?" he said with an agreeable smile.

"I am Mrs. Wentworth, yes."

"Have you a colored man named Thomas Brown employed as a chauffeur?"

"Yes, I have," she said, hesitating and regarding the visitor with anxiety.

"I have a little business with him. May I have your permission to seek him at the garage?"

"I suppose so," she assented. She was eager to ask who he was, but, after all, it was not her business to question persons who wished to see her colored chauffeur. But she watched him go to the garage with apprehension.

At that moment Tom emerged from the garage, started violently at the sight of the visitor, then stepped back, and motioned him inside.

"Tom Eldrich," said the stranger, "are you completely crazy?"

"Hello, Bliss," grinned Tom. "This is indeed a surprise."

"Thought you could fool me with your stove polish and your flat nose!" said Bliss sharply. "What in hell is the matter with you? What do you mean by sneaking back here like this, and why didn't you get in touch with me at once?"

"I thought you had done enough for me, Bliss," said Tom gravely. "It is a crazy thing for me to come back, and I didn't want to get you into trouble. I didn't tell anybody, just took advantage of the fact that you all supposed that I was dead. You've changed, Bliss, you look older. Come up to my room where we can talk."

"I'm certainly glad to see you," declared Bliss genially when they were seated. "But in the name of all that's holy, why have you left safety and security, and thrust your head into the lion's mouth?"

"It's a long story; shall I begin at the beginning?"

"Yes, for Heaven's sake."

Tom told him frankly most of what had happened, how he had been recognized by the New York jeweler, how he had been injured against the side of the steamer, and how he had taken advantage of the smashing of his nose and his swollen lip to escape Barton after he was rescued, and stowed away on the Montparnasse.

He told of his unhappiness in London, how he had encountered Horace Lee, and how he had returned to the States on Lee's passport. Certain things he kept to himself because he no longer trusted Bliss.

"Well," declared his former friend, "I'm tickled to death that you are alive and well, but you have got to get out of here."

"Why?"

"Because you can't get away with it, that's why. I saw you yesterday driving Mrs. Wentworth, and despite your burned cork and changed features, I had no trouble recognizing you. If I knew you, the police will know you.

"It's a fine state of affairs, if I risk my liberty to rescue you from the chair—a twenty-year stretch is waiting for me for that if they get me—only to have you walk right back and commit suicide. Does Mrs. Wentworth know who you are?"

"Of course not."

"Wasn't she on the Alamana with you? It was in the papers."

"Ye-s."

"Then why do you lie to your best friend?"

"I deny that Mrs. Wentworth knows me."

"All right. Now what's the idea?"

"I couldn't stand it on the other side. I prefer to be home even if I have to go around blacked up, and I hoped I might get a clew to the real murderer of Francis Eldrich."

"You poor fool!" said Bliss contemptuously. "That case is closed. It can't be reopened. I have been working steadily since you went away trying to get some new evidence, paying my own money to private detectives, and have got nothing.

"Meanwhile you are in hourly danger of being grabbed. You'll go to State prison without another trial, understand that, and you'll be railroaded to the chair. Your execution is set for November 1."

"What do you want me to do, Bliss?"

"Get out of here. Beat it back to Europe, or to South America. Disappear just as fast as you can."

"But my money is all gone."

"I'm almost broke, but I'll dig up a few hundred dollars. I'll do that for you. That's the kind of a friend I am, but you get out to-night."

"And leave you a free hand with Muriel."

Bliss, who had kept up a fine pretense of friendly anxiety, suddenly dropped the mask. An ugly scowl disfigured his face, and he sprang to his feet.

"What in hell do you mean?" he exclaimed.

Tom was also standing, his anger taking charge of him.

"I mean that Muriel tried to communicate with me in jail. She sent letters by you. You destroyed them. That's the kind of friend you are."

"So!" snarled Bliss. "Where did you get that information? It's a damned lie!"

"Perhaps Horace Lee told me."

"Lee told a deliberate falsehood."

"Muriel met him one day and told him that she had never given up her belief in my innocence. He told me that you have been making love to her ever since my disappearance."

Bliss suddenly changed his tone and manner, and became apologetic.

"All's fair in love and war, Tom," he said. "I love Muriel. She can never be anything to you. The field is open, and she might as well take me as anybody else. I have done enough for you. I stopped the prison van and got you out. Now I am entitled to win Muriel if I can."

"But if I prove my innocence?"

"You can't. You haven't got a chance. I offered to get you a few hundreds. I'll make it a thousand."

"You are liberal with my money."

"And now what are you insinuating?"

"I have learned a lot, Bliss Hermann, since I came back to Broughton, and I expect to learn a lot more."

"I'll pass over your dirty charges because of your mental condition," said Bliss smoothly. "It's my belief that your trouble turned your brain. That crack in the head you told me about has made you crazy. Otherwise you would never have come back here or turned against your best friend.

"But you've got to get out of town. You are not safe, and you are endangering the friends who helped you get away, and who are willing to help you now. This Wentworth woman, for example, will go to jail for knowingly harboring a convicted murderer."

"Thank you, Mr. Hermann, I shall look after myself," said a feminine voice. Bliss swung around, and saw Mrs. Wentworth, a flush on her cheek and a bright light in her eye, framed in the doorway.

Bliss regarded her with some embarrassment and much indignation; for she never looked as stunning as when she was indignant.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Wentworth," he said courteously. "I was merely pointing out to Tom that he ought to consider his friends."

Without replying she entered the room and possessed herself of a chair, after which she looked at him searchingly.

"Judging from your tone, you should

not be included in that category," she remarked.

" On the contrary, I have proved my friendship in no uncertain manner."

" Granted," said Tom. " In a certain incident you surely have."

" In some way you have discovered that Mr. Eldrich is in Broughton disguised as a Negro, and in my employ," said the lady. " Now what are your intentions?"

" I have no intentions," declared Bliss. " I consider it the height of folly, and naturally I am trying to induce him to escape while he has a chance. I expect you to join me. I am willing to assist his escape financially. I have risked too much for him to wish him recaptured."

" Then you are not going to denounce him," she said quietly.

Bliss flushed very red. " Certainly not."

" How did you happen to recognize him?"

" I saw him driving your car. When you know a man as well as I do Tom, you have got to disguise him more effectually than this."

" Admitted that you knew him, isn't it very unlikely that anybody who did not know him well, the police, for instance, would recognize him?"

" Why take chances at all? What does he gain by remaining here? What's the sense of it?"

" Are you afraid that Tom, if he is recaptured, will implicate you in his first escape?"

" No, of course he won't."

" Then since nobody will suffer except Mr. Eldrich in any event, why try to compel him to do what he does not want to do?"

" What's your interest in this, Mrs. Wentworth?" he demanded, turning a penetrating glance upon her. " Why are you encouraging him to risk his neck?"

" Mr. Eldrich happened to save me from drowning when the Alamana went down. Any service I can do him I am glad to do. I tried to dissuade him from returning, but when he insisted, I arranged to help him."

" Don't you agree that there is nothing to be gained by remaining?"

" I'm not so sure. We have already secured very important information. We may get more. I think it's worth risking."

" Well, I don't," he declared angrily. " Once again I ask you, Tom, to come to your senses and leave town at once. Will you do it?"

" Nope," said Tom with an exasperating grin.

" Then when you change your mind, telephone me. My offer is open. And keep away from people who knew you."

" Muriel, for instance."

" Yes, Muriel."

It seemed like a cue. Muriel Heming, at that instant, turned in at the front gate, and ran her little car up to the front entrance. They saw her get out, look curiously at the other car, then, apparently, recognize it.

Mrs. Wentworth laughed slightly. " Walk over to the house with me, Mr. Hermann," she said. " I'll explain that you are here on business."

" Wha—what is she doing here?" he demanded, white with apprehension.

" Miss Heming has become quite a friend of mine."

" Does she know—" he glanced at Tom.

" Not yet. Come, Mr. Hermann."

They descended the stairs and walked over to the house together. Tom saw Muriel greet them; then all three went inside. He looked after them wistfully.

Appreciating that the discovery of his identity by Bliss complicated things he sat down to study the situation. If a glance at a chauffeur driving a car had enabled Bliss to see through his dark coating, and identify him despite his flattened nose, it meant that the police might soon make the same discovery.

Only he did not believe that Bliss had recognized him in that fashion, because Bliss said he had seen him driving Mrs. Wentworth the previous day, and it happened that he had not driven Mrs. Wentworth on that day. He had not been outside the garage.

Now, how had Bliss learned that Tom Eldrich, convicted murderer, was working as a chauffeur for Mrs. Wentworth under a chocolate coating, Bliss, who had been confident that Tom Eldrich was at the bottom of the sea?

And he had behaved like a fool with Bliss.

He had let him know that he was aware of the deception practiced as regard Muriel, and that he believed Bliss had appropriated his funds. If he had been wise enough to keep his knowledge to himself, Bliss would not have become actively hostile; that he was an enemy now, Tom was absolutely convinced, and that he would strike in some way, he was very much afraid.

Meanwhile the traitor was talking with Muriel, and he had to lurk in a garage and keep out of sight lest the dear girl set eyes on him.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AN ASTONISHING THEORY.

IN fifteen or twenty minutes Muriel came out of the house accompanied by Bliss, and followed by Mrs. Wentworth. The girl entered her car, and drove off; Bliss followed in his roadster. Mrs Wentworth looked toward the garage, shook her head, then went back into the house.

He continued to ponder upon recent events. Bliss had been so eager to get him away that he had offered to advance another thousand dollars; that he now cared so much for Tom's safety that he was willing to deplete his bank roll to such an extent was rather unlikely, he wanted him away in his own interests.

Most important might be his fear that his freedom with Tom's savings would be made public between arrest and execution, but common sense should tell him that gratitude for his action in the case of the prison van would prevent Tom from disgracing him.

Next, he was afraid that Tom would get into communication with Muriel and discover the true situation between the three of them. That was an urgent reason. Was there anything else?

He knew that the statement that Bliss had been spending his money seeking new evidence in the Eldrich murder case was untrue. Was it possible that he didn't want Tom and Mrs. Wentworth poking about in the ashes of that old fire? Was there any reason why Bliss did not wish the real murderer of Francis Eldrich to be discovered?

Bliss was in some way connected with Mrs. Braden. Mrs. Braden had been Eldrich's housekeeper. Good Heavens, was it possible that she had murdered the old man?

He had insulted her in Tom's presence. She had retired in anger. She looked now as though she were suffering from some mental trouble; she had lost thirty pounds since the trial.

No, it was absurd; elderly women like that do not go about shooting off guns. Such a woman might have poisoned her employer, she never would have shot him.

And yet she had a terrible temper. She had been violent when he dropped the trunk; his cheek had tingled for half an hour from the slap she had given him. And he recalled the look on her face after she had struck, a look of rage and also terror; he had supposed it was fear of her own fury. Was it?

Mrs. Braden—Bliss Hermann; now he knew how Bliss Hermann had discovered him. At the moment she struck him, when she saw him gazing at and evidently indentifying the photograph, she had recognized him. That was why she had immediately hidden the picture.

And having this extraordinary piece of information in her possession, she must have called up Bliss Hermann and told him what she had discovered.

He recalled the evidence at the trial; he would never forget a word of it; Mrs. Braden had come into the room when she heard the old man shouting, he had roughly ordered her out and she departed, obviously offended.

She had descended to the kitchen, Tom himself had heard the basement door slam. But she might have slammed the door without going downstairs, she might have hidden on the first floor.

When Tom heard the shot he had entered the library, seen his uncle dead on the floor, observed the pistol, stooped, and picked it up, and then Mrs. Braden had rushed into the room followed a second later by the other servants.

Tom had supposed they had run up the basement stairs together, all three, but had they? It had not come out in the evidence.

She had not been in the same room with the others when the shot was fired, she had been in the kitchen, they in the servants' sitting room at the front of the basement.

There were two doors in the library; the woman might have slipped through the rear door immediately upon firing the shot, come around through the hallway as the other servants dashed up the back stairs, and entered just ahead of them.

Tom had been convicted because he had been the only person above the basement when the shot was fired. No one else had been in the house according to the testimony of Mrs. Braden.

The servants were below stairs, the defense had admitted that without question, and it had never occurred to Tom or his lawyer to cross-question them upon this phase of the case at all.

It had never entered his mind for a minute that this poor woman might be the murderess; and he really did not think so now, although he was making out quite a case against her.

Impressive as the case might seem to himself, however, he knew that it would not weigh very strongly with anybody else, because he knew that he had not killed his uncle, that somebody else had done so, while the others did not have his absolute knowledge and in his case, a very strong motive for the deed had been proved to exist.

What could have been Mrs. Braden's motive? Surely anger at being ordered out of the room was not sufficient to drive a usually motherly old soul to assassination, and it was quite unlikely that she owned a pistol or knew how to discharge one.

Assuming, however, that she was capable of the crime, she owned a picture of Bliss Hermann. Mrs. Wentworth had suggested that she might be the person who had taken the boy from the asylum and given him his education.

Supposing that Mrs. Braden had been his mother; unable to support him when young, she had put him in an asylum; years later she became prosperous enough to take him from the institution, to send him to preparatory school, and college.

Once Tom had read somewhere that it is often the ambition of servants to make gentlemen and ladies of their sons and daughters.

If Mrs. Braden was the mother of Bliss Hermann, and had scrimped and scratched to send him through college and set him up in business, it would be quite likely that she would make him promise to keep their relationship a secret; she would take pride in the knowledge that her boy was a gentleman, and be content not to be acknowledged by him publicly.

Assuming this wild theory to be accurate, then the time came when the woman committed a crime. In her terror at the consequences she had called upon the boy and confessed. Bliss would have to stick to his mother, even when his best friend was accused of the crime.

The pair had carried on during the trial, hoping against hope that Tom would be acquitted, but the verdict had been guilty. And they were face to face with the terrible knowledge that they were sending an innocent man to the chair.

Bliss had feared that Tom would be convicted weeks before the verdict, and he had laid all his plans for a rescue. If the facts were as Tom was supposing them, wasn't that exactly what a fellow like Bliss would do?

There was too much decency in him to let the scapegoat be executed without trying to save him, and he was willing to take a big chance to save himself and his mother from blood guilt.

There must have been some gigantic reason to force a man of the sort that Tom now knew Bliss to be into braving the police power of the State by snatching a victim from the chair, and this would be such a reason.

Following the line of argument, he would now be just as eager to get Tom away. The knowledge that the victim, with such a keen and gifted ally as Mrs. Wentworth was probing again into the mystery must be terrifying to Mrs. Braden and her precious son. Of course they wanted him out of the way, and would pay a large sum to put him to flight again.

Tom's head was burning with excitement induced by this extraordinary explana-

tion of an unconquerable mystery, and his cheeks were flushed. And then he heard the bell at the kitchen door which summoned him to his dinner.

The reaction followed. What a completely preposterous yarn he had concocted from nothing except the ownership of a picture of Bliss Hermann by this harmless, hen-headed old woman! A marvelous theory built upon an inadequate hypothesis.

Maybe that blow on the head which he had received at the sinking of the Alamana had affected his reason as Bliss had insinuated. Anyway it was the only logical explanation of the conduct of Bliss Hermann that he could think of, and it did him some credit; no other would.

When he entered the kitchen he found Mrs. Braden, who was smiling and good-natured.

"I let the cook go for the afternoon, and cooked dinner myself," she said. "I like to potter around a kitchen stove once in awhile. Pull your chair up, Brown. I want to tell you I'm sorry I slapped your face, but the truth is I had a bottle of gin in my trunk, and I was afraid you broke it and ruined all my clothes."

Alongside his plate was a shining fifty-cent piece. He looked at it in surprise.

"It's the fifty cents I promised you for helping me with my luggage yesterday," she smiled.

"Thank you, ma'am," he muttered. Even if she could have seen that his face got red and his ears a bright pink, she would not have realized, of course, that he was ashamed because he had just been considering her as a murderess. And by the time he had finished a delicious dinner he had ditched his entire theory.

Muriel's visit to Mrs. Wentworth, which happened to coincide with the call made by Bliss Hermann upon her colored chauffeur, had no purpose except a desire to talk about Tom.

The girl's state of mind since she had learned that her *fiancé* was alive and still loved her can readily be imagined. She deluged her parents with her good spirits, was so gay and vivacious that her evening callers, Bliss and Frank, were enraptured.

Both diagnosed her symptoms favorably for themselves, concluding that she had finally ceased to mourn for Tom Eldrich, had got back into her normal frame of mind, and might be interested, now, in them.

Fearing she could not control herself, Muriel, who had always led the conversation with the young men to the subject of Tom Eldrich, now avoided any reference to him, and as both were considerably fed up with Tom, Bliss Hermann particularly, they considered this a very good omen.

To Mrs. Wentworth she could unburden herself, and she had come to do that very thing when she found Bliss Hermann present, and was forced to make an excuse for the visit, and depart when he did.

Meantime Tom was studying Mrs. Braden as he ate his dinner. Surely the woman had little guile. Believing Tom Eldrich to be the murderer of his uncle, having been the chief witness who secured his conviction, it did not seem possible that she would dare be alone in the same room with him if she had already penetrated his disguise.

Of course, if she knew he had not committed the crime, she would not be so much afraid of him, but even so it was likely that she would have betrayed some nervousness.

Perhaps she had not recognized him, but if she hadn't, then how had Bliss Hermann learned that he was alive, in town, and where to find him? Not from Muriel; she supposed he was alive, but in Europe.

Not from Horace Lee, because the Negro no longer admired Bliss, was unlikely to have written him, in fact had advised Tom not to communicate with him. And even Horace did not know of his arrangement to work for Mrs. Wentworth.

It was possible that Bliss had recognized him at the wheel of Mrs. Wentworth's car. Although he had said he had seen him the day before, he might have slipped and meant two days before.

But it was unlikely Bliss would have waited two days to get in touch with Tom. The whole thing was a perplexing mess, and he wanted to talk it over with Mrs. Wentworth, whose woman's intuition and naturally keen brain might work it out.

A conference was urgently needed, too, because if Mrs. Braden had recognized him, she might first tell Bliss Hermann, and then decide to claim the reward offered by the State for his capture and bring the police down on him.

If his elaborate theory concocted in the garage regarding the relationship between Mrs. Braden and Bliss were correct, she would not think of notifying the police. If the connection were less close, she might do so.

He could not see any resemblance between the woman and Bliss Hermann, but that meant nothing, she could be his mother or his aunt just the same.

After dinner he went around to the front of the house, found Mrs. Wentworth cutting some late roses in her garden, and suggested an auto ride, to which she immediately agreed.

Once away from the town, Tom unfolded his problem.

"It's all based on the photograph in her room, and the fact that Bliss Hermann lied when he said he recognized me yesterday when I was driving you about."

"I didn't hear him say 'yesterday,'" she said.

"Perhaps not, but that was what he told me before you came into the room. Now I worked out a crazy theory, probably all wrong, but, assuming certain things, it holds water pretty well."

Rather apologetically he explained his theory, and waited for her judgment.

"I don't know," she said slowly. "It is not so utterly impossible. Being a man, you naturally find it hard to believe that a woman committed this crime. But as a lawyer you know that some of the most atrocious crimes in history were accomplished by old or middle-aged women.

"I don't suppose she would have killed him because he was rude to her in your presence, but how do you know what relationship might not have existed between old Eldrich and his housekeeper, or what more serious grounds for resentment a man with his wicked disposition might not have given her."

"Then you think that there is something in it?"

"I doubt that she would have used a pistol. Most women are afraid of the things, they are so noisy. But there is another possibility, based upon the connection we know exists between Bliss Hermann and Mrs. Braden, which you have entirely overlooked, but which, to me, seems more plausible."

"What, for pity sake?" he demanded eagerly.

"That Francis Eldrich was murdered by Bliss Hermann."

Tom laughed loudly. "Why, that's utterly preposterous."

"I don't think so. If Bliss were hidden in the house, she could have effected his escape. If she is his mother or his aunt she would naturally try to save him. And that would explain why a selfish person, which I knew him to be as soon as I clapped eyes on him, would have gone to the extreme of rescuing you after you were condemned.

"You had saved his life during the war; he had some sense of gratitude; probably it harrowed his soul to think of you paying the penalty for his crime. That might have caused him to hold up the prison van."

"I can't believe it of Bliss, even considering how much he has disappointed me. Besides, he had no reason in the world for killing my uncle."

"How do you know? Was he acquainted with the old man?"

"In a way; they were both in the same line of business, real estate, you know; but uncle had retired."

"Men like that never retire. Be sure he was interested in business in one way or another. I'll tell you what I'll do: I'll ask my husband to call on me, and find out from him if he knows anything about the activities of old Eldrich and also about Bliss Hermann. Mr. Wentworth manages his own estate, and handles a lot of real estate transactions."

"But won't it be painful for you to see him after the way he treated you?"

She laughed shortly. "He didn't treat me so badly, now that I have had time to think it over. Of course he's a fish, but he is rather a nice fish."

"Will he come?"

"Oh, yes. I've seen him once or twice since I came back. He is always courteous and considerate, and I think he did love me in his cold-blooded way."

"If this theory is accurate it makes Bliss Hermann out to be one of the vilest brutes who ever breathed," protested Tom. "My theory excused his conduct upon the ground of filial affection, but yours makes him a hypocrite, a false friend, a murderer —it's horrible, and I can't believe it."

"All except the murder has been demonstrated to your conviction, hasn't it?" she asked calmly. "The murder is the least of these things. Mrs. Braden might have fired a pistol at her employer, but it is most unlikely that she would have shot straight. Hermann was a soldier, knew all about firearms, probably an excellent shot."

"Regimental champion marksman," admitted Tom. "But what good is all this; we have no motive, and we can never prove it. We can't go to the police and say we suspect Bliss Hermann. They'll say, 'Oh, Tom Eldrich killed his uncle. He was tried and convicted, and when we catch him we'll electrocute him.'"

"We'll bring them proofs so convincing that they can't deny them," she said enthusiastically. "Turn back now. I want to call my husband at his club and ask him to drop around to-morrow."

"Do you suppose," suggested Tom, "that Muriel might be told now? Since Bliss knows I'm here, what's the harm?"

"Do you want to see her, looking as you do?"

"Don't you think she will understand?"

"Suppose you wait a few days longer; meanwhile let's find out if Cutting knows anything.

Of course he had to acquiesce.

CHAPTER XXXII.

INTRODUCING MR. J. CUTTING WENTWORTH

CUTTING WENTWORTH called upon his ex-wife about three o'clock next afternoon. He was a tall, slightly stooped person, with a prominent nose, a high forehead, near-sighted eyes, and a closely cropped brown mustache.

He was formal in his manner, evidently a man with a keen sense of dignity, well-bred, polished, a perfect aristocrat. He extended his hand to Mrs. Wentworth; when she gave him hers he pressed it, laid his other hand upon her wrist, sighed, then smiled; it was rather a winning smile, with a touch of pathos in it.

"Hello, old dear," she greeted him cheerfully. "Are you glad to see me?"

"You are always good to look at, Eleanor," he said as he sat himself stiffly in a chair. "And I am glad that you have settled at home instead of wandering around the world alone. It's a hard life for a woman; it corrupts many of them."

"The only reason I went away was because so many women here in town were mean to me. I had no desire to be the gay young divorcee of Paris."

"You need not have been a divorcee at all."

"We'll let that pass. Now, I asked you to call to do me a favor. As I told you when I first came back I would have lost my life on the Alamana if young Eldrich had not saved me. Since I have no occupation I am busying myself trying to see if I can do anything to clear the poor boy's memory."

"Very praiseworthy, but hardly likely to be fruitful."

"Oh, don't be such a stick! I want to ask you what you knew about old Mr. Eldrich. Did you have any dealings with him in recent years?"

"None that I could avoid. He was a very unprincipled man, a sharper, although it is hardly the thing to say when he is dead."

"Did he transact business of any sort after he was supposed to have retired?"

"Why, yes. I believe he loaned money at a high rate of interest on fair security. Charged ten per cent and a bonus. Usury."

"Ha," said Mrs. Wentworth. "I wondered if something like that was not so. Now, tell me, do you know Bliss Hermann?"

"Oh, yes, slightly. I've done some business with him."

"Do you know if he borrowed money from Mr. Eldrich?"

"Well, people don't advertise transactions of that sort. But Hermann was always biting off more than he could chew. It's not at all improbable that he got money from Eldrich.

A clink of china behind her caused Mrs. Wentworth to look around. In the center of the room was Mrs. Braden.

"I didn't ring for tea," she said sharply to the housekeeper.

"I thought you would be wishing it, ma'am."

"Set it down," she said tartly. She tried to signal to her husband, but he did not observe anything.

"About a year ago young Hermann bought a parcel of land in Florida," he said reflectively. "It's likely that he got the cash from Francis Eldrich."

"You may go, Mrs. Braden—at once," she said as the woman lingered.

"You'll pour it yourself, then, ma'am?"

"Certainly. I always do."

She rose and followed the housekeeper to the door of the room and saw her depart toward the back of the house. She frowned.

If her husband had only kept his mouth shut! How much had the woman overheard, and did it mean anything to her? If the wild speculations in which Tom and his employer had been indulging the night before had any solid foundation, the remarks of Mr. Wentworth might mean very much. But there was nothing to be done.

Wentworth departed reluctantly after half an hour. The old fascination of his wife was evidently still operating as far as he was concerned, and she smiled kindly at him. When he had gone she rang for the housekeeper, but it was the cook who responded.

"She went out for a breath of fresh air about a quarter of an hour ago, mum," said the queen of the kitchen. "Said she would be right back. I'll tell her you wished to see her."

"It's of no consequence," she observed, although she could not conceal her vexation.

She had secured some very important information from her husband. Eldrich was a money lender, and Bliss Hermann might easily have been in his toils. Here was the missing motive.

On the other hand, Mrs. Braden had left the house immediately after overhearing the conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Wentworth. Had she appreciated the significance of the questions and answers, had she gone to warn Bliss that the trail was getting hot, or had she thought nothing about the matter and stepped out, as the cook said, for a breath of fresh air?

There ought to be some way of finding out if Eldrich had lent money to Bliss Hermann; the papers of the Eldrich estate should reveal the transaction if there were one, and she remembered that Muriel and Frank Eldrich had been over all these papers in hope of discovering something that might help to clear Tom.

Of course they would not consider a business relationship between the old man and Bliss Hermann important; Bliss was a friend and associate. But now!

It was time to admit Muriel into full confidence, push her into the arms of her lover, get the Eldrich papers, and go over them again. She immediately called the Hemings on the telephone, and this time Mrs. Heming responded.

"Is Muriel at home?" she asked.

"Who is this please?" answered Mrs. Heming.

"This is Mrs. Wentworth."

"Oh, Mrs. Wentworth—" Mrs. Heming's voice was obviously embarrassed but she knew her duty, "Mrs. Wentworth, I am sorry to be obliged to say this, but I do not approve of friendships between my young daughter and older women, married women—er—divorced women. You understand my position, don't you? Muriel is not at home."

"So sweet of you, Mrs. Heming," cooed Mrs. Wentworth. "Old cat," she said as she hung up. "I suppose dear Bliss Hermann told mother that he caught daughter Muriel calling on me. She's afraid I'll contaminate the child. Well, perhaps I'll get even with Bliss Hermann."

Just the same, she was deeply hurt; women take snubs from other women with extreme seriousness. Even accustomed as she

was to this sort of thing, the jab from Mrs. Heming had taken her unprepared, and the wound was deep.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

TOM ELDRICH IS TAKEN.

ABOUT half past eight that evening, just after dark, a big automobile from Broughton entered Riverside, turned up Pleasant Street, and stopped just below the Wentworth residence. Eight men tumbled out of the car.

Two of these men remained in the street, two others went around to the back street, after five minutes delay the remaining four entered the Wentworth grounds by scrambling over the hedge instead of going in through the gate, and slipped cautiously toward the garage.

One man remained outside, the others entered through the small door, and crept quietly up the staircase to the second floor.

A heavy rap on the door of his chamber informed Tom that he had visitors. He had been reading by a table lamp, now he laid down his book, rose, and opened the door. A man thrust a gun into his face and, as he backed away, followed him into the room, the others with drawn revolvers entered also.

"Thomas Sage Eldrich," said the chief of police of Broughton, "I arrest you in the name of the law."

His rich brown skin covering prevented them from seeing how pale their prisoner grew.

"I deny I am Thomas Sage Eldrich, whoever he is," protested Tom. "I'm a chauffeur, and my name is Thomas Brown."

"You come with us," said the chief. "At the station we'll scrub you. If you're fast black, we'll let you go and apologize."

Tom shrugged his shoulders, put on his coat and hat, and went with the police. There was nothing he could do. He had been betrayed. He thought he knew who had betrayed him, and much as he had come to suspect Bliss Hermann, this base treachery sickened him.

"May I tell my employer, Mrs. Wentworth, why I won't be on duty to-night?" he requested.

"That's fair enough," agreed the chief. "One of you ring the front doorbell, and tell the lady her chauffeur turns out to be an escaped murderer."

An officer went obediently toward the house, the others hurried Tom out of the gate, and pushed him into the automobile. He was taken to headquarters, where an acid solution quickly removed most of the dark stain, and revealed the white skin underneath.

"What a jackass you were to come back!" said the chief in a tone of wonder. "You were safe away, everybody thought you were dead. And you had to come nosing around the scene of your crime! Well, you won't get away this time if we have to send a regiment of soldiers to escort the prison truck to Benton."

"I'd like to know how you found out where I was," he said sadly.

"Can't tell you my boy. The names of stool pigeons are sacred, damn them. This is a feather in my cap, but I'm sorry I had to catch you. How did you get your face bunged up?"

"Happened during the wreck of the Alamana."

"I bet you wish you went down with her, the way we thought."

"You bet right," he told the officer.

To her horror and dismay, Mrs. Wentworth was bluntly informed what had happened.

"It's a wonder you weren't murdered in your bed," said the policeman as he turned away.

Eleanor Wentworth felt herself growing faint; she was obliged to grasp pieces of furniture to hold herself upright until she reached a davenport into which she sank.

The apallingness, the dreadfulness of what had happened grew on her, she wrung her hands helplessly, she moaned. The picture of the electric chair rose before her; she could see them strapping poor Tom into it.

She saw somebody press a button, though she covered her eyes she could see a still figure lying dead in the chair; and it was Tom Eldrich, the dear boy who

had saved her life, for whose vindication she was fighting.

She was not in love with him, although she had been near it once or twice. He had come into her life when things were at their blackest for her, and his plight was so much worse than her own that it had heartened her to try to help him.

She remembered his strong arm about her in the black water, his life preserver around her, the frightful moment when the wave dashed them against the ship and he protected her with his own body.

Surely they would not kill him now, after his brave fight for life. If she went to the Governor and told her story, perhaps he would pardon him, or commute the sentence.

And meanwhile something must be done, the real murderer must be found, there was so little time, and suspicion was not evidence. In her emergency she turned to her husband, the cold, just, but resourceful man she had divorced. She ran across the room to the phone and tried his club; he might be having after-dinner coffee in the smoking room.

There was no question in her mind that he would come if he could manage it, and she was quite right. Wentworth summoned his automobile and entered the house in half an hour. She hurled herself upon him, weeping wildly, and he comforted her as though they had not passed through a divorce court.

When she regained her self control she told him the whole story from the beginning, and he listened with rising alarm.

"But, my dear girl, you have been harboring, knowingly, a convicted murderer," he said at the end. "It's a State prison offense."

"I don't care anything about that. They won't do anything to me. We've got to save him; we've got to prove that this Bliss Hermann did it. You've got to help me because it was your indiscretion in talking before my housekeeper this afternoon that brought this about."

When she had explained that to his satisfaction she related all their suspicions regarding Bliss Hermann and his presumed relative, the housekeeper.

"You haven't got a shred of evidence," he told her. "If we can dig up something tangible, we can go to the Governor and get a reprieve. You can't show any connection between the woman and Hermann; they'll both deny it. Wait a minute. Let's get that photograph."

"But it is in her trunk."

"We'll get it out. As her mistress, you can tell her something has been stolen. Give her the chance of letting us search her luggage or sending for the police. Knowing she is innocent she will allow the search. Then we'll confiscate the photograph."

"I'd never dare," faltered Eleanor. "I'm afraid she is a terrible woman."

"I'll do it," he said. "She doesn't terrify me. Come along."

They ascended the stairs together, the first time Cutting Wentworth had been above the ground floor in his old home since the divorce. There was a thread of light under the housekeeper's door, which gave evidence that she had not retired.

Wentworth knocked sharply; they heard the old woman crossing the room, then she opened the door and regarded the couple with surprise and displeasure.

"Mrs. Wentworth has lost a valuable breastpin," said Mr. Wentworth brusquely. "Have you any objection to a search of your belongings?"

"Do you suspect me of being a thief?" bristled the housekeeper.

"By no means," he retorted. "It's a necessary precaution, and everybody in the household must submit."

"Probably your chauffeur stole it; he's just been arrested," she volunteered. "I saw the police taking him away as I was looking out my window."

"His things have been searched. Will you consent to an inspection of your trunks and bags?"

"It's an outrage!"

"It will save you the humiliation of having a policeman go through them. If you are innocent you risk nothing."

The woman hesitated, looked at the impressive and determined face of Cutting Wentworth, and yielded sullenly.

"There's nothing locked. You can

look," she said. "Out of this house I go in the morning."

Wentworth was already going through the bureau drawers, and found nothing. Then he searched two handbags and the small trunk without result. Mrs. Braden watched him sharply and indignantly. He came to the big trunk, lifted off the tray, and there lay two square gin bottles full, which he took out and set alongside the trunk without comment.

At the bottom of the trunk he found the photograph, and rose from his knees holding it in his hand. With an exclamation of annoyance Mrs. Braden rushed toward him and attempted to snatch it from his hand, but he thrust the hand behind him.

"This is a picture of Mr. Bliss Hermann. How do you happen to possess it?" he demanded.

"That is none of your business!" she shrilled. "You ain't found any stolen property. Now you can go."

"I'm not so sure. Where did you get this photograph?"

"He gave it to me."

"Why?"

"That's my business."

"Well, I know Mr. Hermann. I don't propose to leave it with you. I'll return it to him and ask him if he knows it was in the possession of one of my wife's servants."

"You give that to me, or it will be the worse for you," she snarled. "I know why you want it; you're trying to pin something on that boy. Well, I did steal the picture. I saw it and I liked it; so I took it. He doesn't know anything about it. You can take it. I'll leave this house tonight."

"I am sure that will be satisfactory to Mrs. Wentworth," he said with a grim smile. "Come, Eleanor."

Once below stairs he went outside and whistled for his chauffeur.

"Mrs. Wentworth's housekeeper is leaving shortly," he said. "I want you to follow her without being seen. I am particularly anxious to know if she calls on Bliss Hermann. Do you know him?"

"Yes, sir."

"Hang around. Follow her until you are sure she has put up somewhere for the night. Then go home. Take the car with you; I'll get a taxi back to the club."

When he reëntered he explained what he had done. Wentworth was an entirely different sort of man from the clammy aristocrat when he went into action.

"Now, see here, Eleanor," he said crisply. "I think you have got hold of something important. To tell the truth I didn't take much stock in your theory, because I assumed like everybody else that young Eldrich killed his uncle.

"But this woman was the housekeeper; she knows more than she admits; she is covering up Hermann in some way. Did you notice the slip about our trying to pin something on him?

"She overheard our conversation this afternoon, phoned to Hermann, and they decided the safest plan for them was to get Eldrich recaptured and executed as quickly as possible.

"That would make further probing into the murder of no value to poor Eldrich, and you would do no more about it. It's my belief that either the woman or Hermann killed old Eldrich."

"Cutting!" she exclaimed delightedly. She hesitated, then ran to him, threw her arms around his neck, and kissed him heartily.

Greatly embarrassed, he unfastened them and drew away. "Oh, say now, you remember we're divorced!" he protested.

"We never would have been if you had behaved like this. What are you going to do?"

"Put detectives on the woman and Bliss Hermann first thing in the morning. Go to the orphan asylum and find out if she took him out, what their relationship may be. Then go over the business career of Hermann with a fine-tooth comb.

"If I can show that he owed money to Eldrich, I can take the facts to the Governor and get the boy reprieved. Later we may be able to get more evidence, and convict the right man this time."

"We haven't much time," she wailed. "They'll kill poor Tom on November 1."

"Three weeks. We ought to turn up a lot in three weeks. What fools the police

were to accept a surface circumstance and not look deeper! Why, the fact that a man like Hermann effected the rescue from a prison van shows that he had a troubled conscience. Now, I suppose he is so frightened that he would let Eldrich be executed to save his own skin."

"Or hers. She may be his mother."

"I hope it turns out that way, but I don't think so. Do you feel safe in the house with this woman? The chauffeur will be lurking outside to follow her."

"Oh, she won't bother me. I'll keep out of the way until she goes. I won't forget your attitude, Cutting."

"It's mere abstract justice that chiefly interests me. We have got to save young Eldrich."

"And don't forget he saved my life."

"I'm not forgetting it. Don't you think you were rather foolish—er—precipitant in that other matter, Eleanor?"

"I'm beginning to think so," she said with a shy smile. "Good night, and thank you."

They shook hands and he departed. Mrs. Wentworth sighed, then smiled. And hearing a step on the stairs she hastened toward the back of the house just as Mrs. Braden came into the hallway and proceeded to the telephone, where she summoned a taxi.

Mrs. Wentworth sent the cook to the woman with an envelope containing two weeks' salary, and heard her slam the front door with a sigh of relief. Then she nerved herself for another ordeal; she must communicate with Muriel and break the news to her; the child had to be told, or the morning newspapers would tell her in a frightful fashion.

Timidly she called the number of the Hemings, and rejoiced when the cool, sweet voice of Muriel answered; she had feared to encounter the mother again.

"Muriel, this is Mrs. Wentworth," she said in a low tone. "There is something terrifically important I must tell you at once. Can you manage to get here very soon?"

"Immediately," said the girl. "Is it about Tom?"

"Yes, dear."

"Oh, is he dead?"

"No, not that. I can't tell you on the phone."

"I'll be right over."

In less then ten minutes her little car was at the door, and she came rushing into the arms of her friend. Mrs. Wentworth led her to a divan and, with one arm around her, she told what had happened.

Ghastly white, Muriel heard the tragic story in silence. When it had been told she said bitterly:

"I can't forgive you and Tom for not letting me know he was here, that he was looking in the window when I was in this room."

"He was afraid, dear, to have you see him with his poor broken nose, and his skin all black."

"What did that matter? You were cruel, both of you, cruel. But I shall see him now. I'll beat on that prison with my fists until they let me in. Oh, what are we going to do? Mrs. Wentworth, are you going to let them k-k-kill him?"

"No, darling, we are not!" declared Eleanor. "We are going to save him. My husband has been here to-night. I've told him everything. He is very rich, he has tremendous power, and he believes in Tom's innocence. And I think we are on the trail of the real murderer."

"Thank God, thank God! sobbed the girl. "Let me help. I've been trying everything I knew since Tom was convicted. Maybe I can help somehow. Who do you think did it?"

"Prepare for a shock; my husband suspects Bliss Hermann."

Muriel straightened as though a jolt of electricity had entered her body; her eyes seemed to enlarge.

"Yes," she said decisively. "I see it all now. Bliss was in love with me. He was jealous of Tom. He stopped my messages to Tom.

"He began to pester me the very day of the escape, and he used to get annoyed when I insisted he must help me find the murderer. He's been afraid that Frank Eldrich would find out something, and he has been hateful to him. Do you think he told the police about Tom being here?"

"Either Mrs. Braden did it, or Mr. Hermann; there was no one else who knew."

"Oh, the fiend!" exclaimed the girl. "The cruel, wicked monster! To think I was ever fool enough to listen to him for a moment. Why don't you have him arrested at once?"

"Because, my dear child, we only have suspicion. We have no evidence as yet. We can't find a motive. If we only could prove that he was afraid of Mr. Eldrich, that, if he didn't kill him, the old man would injure him some way, that he owed a lot of money to Mr. Eldrich—anything like that."

"But he did," said Muriel. "He had borrowed several large sums from Mr. Eldrich, and paid them all back. He put up stocks and bonds, and gave mortgages on real estate."

Mrs. Wentworth grasped her wrists tightly. "How do you know?" she demanded sharply.

"Why, we found records of it in Mr. Eldrich's handwriting. You know Frank Eldrich and I went over all his papers trying to find something that would incriminate somebody. But, of course, we never thought of Bliss Hermann. He was just one of a lot of people who borrowed money from Tom's uncle."

"Muriel, I think you have saved Tom yourself," said Mrs. Wentworth. "Can you get Frank Eldrich on the phone and have him come right over? And I'll try to reach my husband again. Mr. Wentworth said that he would try to find some transactions of this sort, and you have found them."

Muriel threw her arms around the other woman's neck, and they sobbed and kissed. Then the young girl ran to the telephone.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MURDERERS' ROW.

AND in the meantime, Thomas Sage Eldrich wore handcuffs. Determined, this time, that there would be no rescue, the police of Broughton concealed the news of his arrest from the newspapers, and made arrangements to send him quickly and safely to the State prison.

Within one hour of his arrival at police headquarters he was again in the prison van. Two officers sat with him with drawn revolvers. Two touring cars filled with police preceded the van, and two other officer-laden cars followed it, as it left police headquarters and started immediately for Benton.

Three hours later the van arrived safely at the State prison, and the Broughton police department triumphantly turned over to the warden the much-wanted man.

Tom was thrust into prison clothes, photographed, finger-printed, shaven to the scalp, and conducted to his cell in murderers' row with great rapidity. When the door clanged upon him and he was left alone in his cubicle, he realized that he had come to the end of his hopes, and nearly to the end of his life.

There was no sign over the passage leading to this section of the jail, "Abandon Hope, ye who enter here" because it wasn't necessary; the only exit was through the chamber of execution.

He had started on the first journey in a state of hopelessness and numbness, he believed that the girl whom he loved had abandoned him and all his friends had turned their backs on him; life, after all, was not worth living.

This time he suffered the agony of one who wanted to live and love. Muriel was true to him; he had begun to hope for vindication. With the aid of Mrs. Wentworth he had dissolved the darkness of the mystery surrounding the death of his uncle and, given time, he was sure they would have turned up the criminal, either Bliss Hermann or some other.

And he would not be given time. In three weeks he would be led into the lethal chamber. His whole soul was in rebellion against his fate; his impotence was killing him. Every nerve in his body shrieked against his incarceration.

He paced the short length of his cell like a caged rat. He grasped the bars and shook them noisily, which caused half a dozen other wretches on that corridor to do the same.

And then a shout went up from all the cells in that wing of the prison, a wild,

snarling bellow which brought the guards running and swearing, determined to locate and punish the cause of the disturbance.

But when they had traced it to the new arrival, they shrugged their shoulders, grinned pityingly, and did nothing. The poor fellow would get his punishment soon enough anyway.

There was no sleep for Tom that night; he writhed and moaned, and turned and twisted on his hard cot, and his brain busied itself with a hundred theories which would solve the crime and effect his release immediately, if only they were not utterly absurd.

He began to think of Bliss Hermann who had betrayed him, who had perhaps made him a scapegoat for his own crime, and he gnashed his teeth and curled his fingers as he yearned to get his hands on the man.

He even considered informing the police that Bliss had effected the escape from the prison van; but much as he hated Bliss, he knew that his other friends had been honest and loyal, and they must be protected even if the traitor escaped thereby.

It was the most terrible night of his life, far worse than the night he had been first arrested, for then his consciousness of innocence consoled him; one could not be convicted of a crime which he had not committed. But after an endless period, the late sun of October began to brighten up the whitewashed walls, and the sound of a multitude arising resounded throughout the prison.

His breakfast, a tin dipper filled with soggy oatmeal, and a cup of coffee lightened with thin milk and sweetened with half a teaspoonful of sugar, was pushed through the bars of his cell by an attendant. He permitted it to lie untouched for an hour; then hunger drove him to consume the unpalatable stuff.

The warden, in person, visited him, and he had difficulty in being polite to the well-meaning official.

"We always try to make things easy for condemned men," said the warden. "If you would like a newspaper, you may have it. If you want to write letters I'll let you have materials. You can have better food if you want to pay for it, and you are welcome to take books from the prison library.

"I'm sorry for you, young fellow. It's no pleasure for me to see a man come here for execution. Since you had escaped, I hoped I'd never see you here. That was your hard luck. I understand you are an educated man, a lawyer, and if there is any special favor you want don't hesitate to send for me. I don't suppose you want to confess who helped you to escape?"

"Hardly."

"Don't blame you. We'll probably find them anyway. Try to make the best of it."

Having done his duty the warden continued on his way, considering the new convict a singularly unappreciative subject.

CHAPTER XXXV.

CONCLUSION.

ABOUT four that afternoon, when he had sunk into a stupor in which he sat hunched on his cot, his chin in his cupped hands staring into vacancy, completely smothered in his despair, he heard a voice which galvanized him, for it was Muriel's.

A second later, the door was opened, and the girl hurled herself into his arms. They did not speak a word; he just gripped her tight and she grasped him about the waist with her two slim, white arms, and buried her nose in his breast. Then she looked up at him, and she was smiling.

"Tom," she said, "you funny-looking darling, I've come to tell you that you are going to be released."

"Never mind, dear," he said, touching her dark hair worshipfully. "I don't care what happens now that I know that you believe in me and have come to me."

"But I'm going to get you out."

"You can't, dear. I'm condemned to death."

"It's going to be all right," she persisted.

"Better let us tell him," said Mrs. Wentworth suddenly appearing at the door followed by J. Cutting Wentworth, who bit his mustache because he was embarrassed.

"God bless you, Eleanor," Tom said gravely, "for bringing me my little girl."

"Tom, will you listen to us," said Mrs. Wentworth, almost hysterically. "The Governor will sign your pardon to-night."

"Pardon! You mean I will be released? How, why?" he exclaimed. He had in his arms tangible happiness; he was unable to comprehend the rest.

"This is my husband, J. Cutting Wentworth," said Mrs. Wentworth.

"How de do?" said J. Cutting.

"He will explain. He is responsible for it all," said Muriel.

"You mean that something has come up so that I am to be pardoned? Did I hear you say pardon?" asked Tom incredulously.

"It's this way, Mr. Eldrich," said Mr. Wentworth. "My wife called me in when you were taken. I'm damned grateful to you for saving her life."

"Never mind that; tell the boy," impatiently from Mrs. Wentworth.

"We took that picture of Hermann from the housekeeper by force," said Wentworth. "That scared her. She thought we were hot on the trail. She left at once, and my chauffeur followed her to Hermann's apartment. Meanwhile my wife found out from Miss Heming that Hermann had been borrowing money from Francis Eldrich. Possible motive. See?

"With these slim facts I went to the chief of detectives of Broughton, under obligations to me, willing to oblige. We didn't have any evidence to amount to anything, but he knew his business.

"He pounced on Mrs. Braden at the address where she went after leaving Hermann. Easy to scare a woman like that. He scared her. She told everything she knew.

"She's no relation to Hermann, but she wanted an adopted son, and she took him from the asylum. She sent him through college.

"Night of the murder he came to the house, Eldrich's house. Note was due, and he had no money. Five thousand dollars. Valuable piece of property as security, and Eldrich wanted it.

"Hermann tried to get an extension. The old man wouldn't give it. The mortgage note was on the library table. Hermann saw it lying there. He departed, but after going out the front door went around to the rear and called on his adopted mother.

"You came in, had a fight. Meanwhile he told Mrs. Braden to slip in and steal the note. When you went upstairs she went to the table, where the old man was writing, and tried to slip away with the note.

"He caught her, grabbed her arms, said he would call the police. Hermann stepped into the room, the old man pulled a revolver out of a drawer in his table. Hermann grabbed it from him; in the struggle it went off and killed Eldrich.

"The pair slipped out through the rear door of the library with the note just as you came downstairs and ran into the room. She let Hermann out the back way, and then entered with the servants to catch you in the act.

"She suffered like the deuce during the trial and afterward, and Hermann arranged the rescue to save her from going insane, as well as himself. Then you come back and spoil everything. Mrs. Braden thought if you were arrested everything would be dropped, so she phoned the police after she heard my wife and I talking about a connection between Hermann and old Eldrich.

"Last night she went to him to tell him the jig was up, and he skipped town. She made a written confession, signed it, and that's the whole story."

"So Bliss Hermann killed my uncle and let them put the blame on me," said Tom sadly.

"He did it to save the poor woman who had been so good to him," said soft-hearted little Muriel.

"It was Cutting who did it all, Tom," declared Mrs. Wentworth. "I don't know what we should have done if it hadn't been for him."

"I thank you, sir, from the bottom of my heart," mumbled Tom, now weak with the reaction of it all.

"It was a case of guilty consciences doing it," explained Wentworth deprecatingly. "We had no proof of the existence of the last mortgage note, only evidence that Hermann had borrowed money in the past and repaid it. They supposed we had the goods

on them, and we really had no evidence at all, nothing but suspicion."

"I hope they don't catch him," said Tom. "It's punishment enough to be a fugitive from justice."

"Do you realize what this means, Tom?" demanded Mrs. Wentworth. "It means you are pardoned at once. Then the verdict is annulled, and you are vindicated. Furthermore, you are your uncle's heir, and inherit his fortune. Frank Eldrich has to turn it all over to you."

"He seems to have been a nice kid," said Tom. "I'll divide the estate with him; there's plenty of money."

"Tom, darling," said Muriel. "You can get your nose fixed and your lip restored and everything. Isn't it wonderful?"

"Don't you like me the way I am?" he asked, teasing.

"If I can't get you any other way, but you were much nicer before your accident."

"Then I'll see a beauty doctor for your sake."

The warden now joined the party, smiling and bursting with good tidings.

"Good afternoon, ladies. How do you do, Mr. Wentworth? Well, young man, I've just had word from the Governor's secretary that you never committed a murder and your conviction was a miscarriage of justice, and a pardon has been signed and is on the way."

"Not wishing to be too sensitive," said Tom with a bright smile, "it seems to me that a pardon isn't the thing if I never committed any crime. It should be the State of Manshire which asks a pardon, not I."

"It might take a week or so to annul the verdict and get an order for your release," explained the warden. "The pardon cuts red tape and opens your door at once. Of course, if you wish to refuse it—"

"Not on your life," he laughed. "I don't care to stay in jail an extra minute on a technicality. Let me out; that's all I ask."

"You may come out of the cell now," smiled the warden. "I'll take you to my office and send for the clothes you were wearing when you arrived last night. You may entertain your friends comfortably until the official papers arrive. Then, of course, you may leave the prison."

"Let's get out of here by all means," said the prisoner.

"But, Tom, it isn't so terrible," said Muriel. "It's white and clean, and the cot isn't uncomfortable."

"It's the notion of being in murderers' row that doesn't appeal to me," he smiled. "We'll be much better off in the warden's office."

"Cutting and I are going into town," said Mrs. Wentworth. "We shall be back in an hour with the car to take you to Broughton. Isn't there something private you want to tell Muriel?"

"Rather."

When the pair were alone in the big office, Muriel came and sat on his knee, prison garb and all. Lovers' chatter is always much the same, though the conditions here were very unusual.

There is nothing more marvelous than the human gift of adjusting one's self to circumstances. An hour before Tom was in the lowest depths of despondency, locked in a cell, with execution for a crime he had not committed imminent, and now he sat in a big overstuffed chair, with the prettiest girl in the world cuddling in his lap, kissing his ear and his broken nose, whispering sweet, loving expressions, telling him of their future happiness, and the whole ghastly experience of six months was as if it had never been.

No one intruded; they were quite alone, and they looked in each other's eyes for two hours which passed like five minutes. Then the door opened, and the Wentworths came in.

There was a smile on Mrs. Wentworth's lips and a soft light in her eye, while Wentworth looked ineffably smug and contented.

"You foolish children," exclaimed Mrs. Wentworth, "what have you been doing all this time? Muriel, don't you see that Tom hasn't changed his prison costume."

Muriel, in pretty confusion, rose from his lap.

"I don't think it's such a bad costume. It's rather becoming, as a matter of fact."

"Sort of goes with the broken nose," he grinned.

"We have an announcement to make," said Mrs. Wentworth.

"I've guessed it," announced Muriel.

"Cutting has been so wonderful through all this that I realized that I was an awful fool to leave him just because he was a fish," she continued, ignoring the young girl's observation. "And Cutting has been very lonesome. He says I wasn't a scarlet woman, only just the tiniest bit pink. Now he likes pink women. So, we decided—"

"Going to get married again," said Wentworth. "Crazy to ever get a divorce."

"Congratulations!" exclaimed Tom. "Though if you had not got a divorce, I am afraid I should have gone to the chair. Mrs. Wentworth has been entirely responsible for cleaning up this mystery; by myself I could not have done it."

"Cutting did it all," she declared.

"You gave me the ideas; I only carried them out," he protested. "Young man, suppose you get into decent clothes and we'll take you back to Broughton. The pardon has come."

This seems to be the end of the story, and a good place to stop, but when you have been living with a lot of people, suffering with them, rejoicing with them, it is hard to say good-by. Tom and Muriel got married in a month; since he was now a millionaire and vindicated, her parents made no objections, and it would not have done them any good if they had done so.

Frank Eldrich gratefully accepted half of his father's estate, and declared that he couldn't begin to spend the income of it; he had lost his taste for throwing money away.

In time Horace Lee returned, cured of his desire for social equality abroad. Tom set him up in business as a haberdasher, and he has made good. As for Bliss Hermann, he is still at large, creeping from place to place, lurking in unpleasant quarters, trembling at every sound, fearing the touch on the shoulder from the never-forgiving police.

Tom Eldrich, from bitter experience, said that to be a fugitive from justice is a worse punishment than to pay the extreme penalty of the law. And so Bliss is receiving his punishment.

There is a movement on foot in Manshire to abolish capital punishment, and Tom and Muriel are very active in it. In a pamphlet which he contributed to the cause he related in great detail his personal experience, and he concluded as follows:

> At least nine convictions out of ten in murder cases are based on circumstantial evidence, as it is very rare that a murderer is captured in the act of killing. While the majority of such convictions are just, there is always a possibility of a terrible error as in my own case, and there are many authenticated instances of men being executed for a crime which was afterward proved to have been committed by another. Therefore it is most logical that in all such cases the sentence should be life imprisonment, which will give the condemned person the benefit of what light time may shed upon his case. It is my belief that life imprisonment is such a terrible sentence it will deter murder as effectually as a sentence of death, and it saves the community the dreadful risk of assassinating the innocent.

THE END

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FALL

A TOUCH of chill in the evening air,
A glint of goldenrod,
A russet apple, a yellow pear,
A ripened lily-pod.

A flash of color in the tall oak tree,
A lazy cricket's call,
A hazy sun, a quail—oh, gee!
And autumn's here, that's all.

Lulu Minerva Schultz.

A Couple o' Danged Cannibals.

By GARRET SMITH

SOMEBODY had been prowling around Zeke Pennyman's farmyard. Zeke was all stirred up over that surprising climax to a morning that had already gone cussedly cross-grained enough, Lord knew.

Callers were scarce at Pennyman's hill farm. And this was no friendly visitor, Zeke suspected. Neither of his distant neighbors would have gone snooping all over the place. Nobody else that Zeke knew would come "traipsin'" out all this way before sun-up.

"Some danged tramp goin' South for the winter," Zeke opined.

If it hadn't been for the wayward Naomi, the peppery old hill-billy would have been on hand to receive the fellow and send him packing with appropriate remarks backed, if necessary, by an ancient shotgun. Tramps were the one living species of man or beast whom Zeke couldn't abide.

Naomi was Zeke's favorite cow. Of course, she had to take this morning to cut up when he'd aimed to get an early start on his semi-monthly trip to town for provisions.

Some time during the night she had wriggled through an incredibly small hole in a rail fence and gone seeking pastures new, as Zeke had discovered when he went down to the back pasture to milk his diminutive herd. It had taken a two-hour search to retrieve her from the wood-lot of his nearest neighbor a mile away.

On his return Zeke's suspicions of an intruder were aroused first when he set down his two brimming milk pails at the barnyard gate. King David, his elderly shepherd dog, crawled sedately through the bars without waiting for his master to open them, then, suddenly, with a sniff and a short suspicious bark, began hurrying, nose down, across the soggy, straw-strewn yard.

"What's ailin' you, King?" Zeke demanded querulously.

The old dog replied with a rumbling growl ending in a falsetto whine. His voice had a quality surprisingly like that of his

master with whom he had lived, dog and pup, for a full dozen years.

"Somebody's been 'round this mornin' sure as shootin'," Zeke declared. "Somebody King don't take to neither. That's the trouble livin' alone like this. Can't never go away fer a minute 'thout somethin' happenin'."

With a perplexed scowl on his lean, wrinkled face, he watched the dog's antics. As he stood stooping, hands resting on knees to favor his rheumatic back, he reminded one of an ancient and withered grasshopper. It would have seemed quite in keeping if he had started after King in long, jerky hops.

The dog circled the straw-stack, stopping to sniff and whine at the ladder leading to its top, then went directly to the barn-door and stood scratching at it.

"All right, King! Keep yer shirt on!" Zeke called and hastily letting himself through the bars crossed the barnyard a little hesitantly, peering to the right and left as he went.

"Wonder 'f they's anybody hidin' up on the stack," he speculated, but he forebore to explore.

As he opened the barn-door, Cain and Abel, his service-worn work-horses, snorted and jumped in their stalls, then gave little whinnies of relief as they saw their master.

"There! There! Boys!" Zeke soothed, and setting down his pails, he stroked the nose of each. "Somebody been here sure enough! Did he skeer ye, ol' fellows?"

He looked inquiringly around a pile of straw in the corner that he had brought in from the stack to dry for bedding. It was tossed about as though some one had hastily probed it to the bottom.

"Dang it! Who did that?" he demanded. Zeke was a meticulous barnkeeper. The mysterious intruder was growing more offensive by the minute.

Little shivers of apprehension trickled down the rheumatic back. Hastily he picked up his pails and made for the house.

As Zeke emerged from the barn a well-fed and important feeling Shanghai rooster left off strutting before his hens and charged straight at his master, bringing up with a flap against the man's thin legs.

Zeke impatiently poked him one side with his foot.

"Git outa my way, you Hezekiah!" he snapped and strode on into the woodshed.

Within a few feet of the kitchen-door, he stopped short and set the pails down suddenly. There in the middle of the clean cement were the fresh tracks of muddy boots, two sets of them, one set going in, one out.

And the kitchen door was ajar! Zeke was certain he had left it closed!

For a full minute the householder regarded this distressing phenomenon. Then he tiptoed forward cautiously.

Presumably from the two-way tracks, the intruder had come and gone. But Zeke was taking no chances.

Silently he swung open the door and reached around the jamb to the corner where he kept the old shotgun loaded ready for use. To his intense relief the weapon was still there.

With the gun in the crook of his arm, Zeke's confidence returned. He went over the house from attic to cellar. Everywhere he found traces of the muddy boots but a hasty inventory of his meager belongings showed nothing missing.

Further inspection of the barn and other outbuildings proved that the stranger had been thorough in his visitation, but if he had been bent on robbery, had found nothing to his liking.

At any rate, the fellow seemed to have taken his departure. This conclusion was confirmed when in his muddy driveway, Zeke discovered the fresh tracks of an automobile making a loop around the back yard and out again.

He rose from the inspection of the auto trail, scratching his head in perplexity.

"S'pose it's one o' them revenooers got a notion in his head I'm bootleggin'?" he queried of himself.

At that moment, Hezekiah, undaunted by his recent repulse, charged his master's legs again. This time Zeke played true to established custom. He swooped down and caught the big fowl around the body with both hands and tossed him in the air above his head.

Hezekiah, with prodigious squawking and

flapping of wings, descended awkwardly, but unerringly, on his master's shoulder where he regained his balance and settled down contentedly, pecking at Zeke's face with little throaty sounds of contentment.

"That's right, ol' boy. Tell me about it," Zeke commanded, stroking the glossy feathers. "Who's been snoopin' around here this mornin'? You're so blamed human, Hez, like enough you're tryin' to tell me. All you're lackin' o' bein' human is the gift o' gab an', by cripes, lots o' humans would be more human if they had less of it."

Hezekiah rode the shoulder to the grain-bin, followed by his expectant harem. Zeke took a measure of grain and scattered it about the yard, whereupon Hezekiah deserted him for the business of eating, toward which this little by-play invariably led.

Still puzzling over his strange caller Zeke finished his chores and prepared and ate his lonely breakfast as usual. He had decided to take his belated trip to town according to plan, and a half hour later was on his way in his creaking old buckboard behind the patient Abel.

As he struck off into the long, winding road, little more than a trail that descended toward the valley, he could make out clearly tracks, of the mysterious car, probably the only horseless vehicle that had attempted this hazardous by-path in months.

Apparently, from the way the tracks slewed back and forth on the slippery road-bed, it had come at high speed. He noted, too, that it continued on after its visit to his place, though which direction it was going he could not make out.

"Cussed contraption!" Zeke snorted. "What a danged fool a man is to risk his neck in one o' them fire-wagons! You're good enough fer me, Abe. Giddap, ol' boy. You gotta limber up a little. I'm nigh three hours late an' want to get back in time to husk a leetle corn 'fore night."

Zeke hated automobiles as he hated all modern mechanical contraptions. He'd never ridden in one in his life and never would if he could help it.

At Caleb Brown's place he saw that the car had turned in and out again. He slowed Abel down and momentarily considered driving in and seeeing if his neighbor could solve the puzzle, but he abandoned the idea at once.

"Caleb's such a cantankerous ol' cuss he'll like enough tell me 'twa'n't none o' my business," he muttered. "Go long, Abel."

It might be added that Caleb entertained the same opinion of Zeke. They had never neighbored much, though they'd lived "nearest neighbors" for nearly fifty years, with only a mile of woodland between them. Since Zeke's wife died, ten years before, communication had practically ceased.

As he emerged from the woods where the road flattened out into the valley another of Zeke's abominations smote his eyes and ears. There was a loud staccato roar directly overhead. Abel snorted and shied, then broke into a fantastic gallop.

Zeke sawing at the bit and glancing hastily in the direction of the sound saw an airplane dipping and swooping just above the tops of the trees.

Zeke had read about airplanes in his *Weekly Gazette*, his only literature besides the family Bible. He had heard them discussed at the village store. But this was his first sight of one. His Mauchung Hills farm was far out of the beat of such craft.

He brought Abel to a stop now and watched it, not so much from curiosity as from fear that the thing might drop on him. "Danged hell-bent contraption!" he grumbled. "Ought to be a law ag'in' floppin' around in a dumbed steam-buzzard like that!"

The machine circled about endlessly, always just missing the tree tops. Zeke could see two men, one sitting behind the other. As the plane swooped near him he made out that the man in the rear had a rifle under his arm and was peering steadily over the side of the cockpit.

"New-fangled way of huntin'!" Zeke opined, and being deeply disgusted with such foolishness, he gave rein to Abel and the buckboard wabbled on.

Zeke always followed the back roads into Myrtle Hollow, the little hill village where periodically he did his shopping, seven miles from his farm. By this route he

avoided as much as possible meeting automobiles, which Abel resented as much as he did, and much more actively.

He had pretty good luck to-day avoiding these bugbears until he reached the point where the hill road ended in a State highway. Just before he made the turn three motor cycles in a row, manned by State troopers, roared by at a good sixty miles an hour.

Abel's snort rivaled the exhaust of their motors as he sat down in the shafts and waved his forefeet in the air, almost wrecking the dish-wheeled buckboard.

" Gosh A'mighty!" Zeke roared. " Whoa, boy! What in time an' tarnation's got into everybody these days, tearin' round in one kinda stink-engine an' another! They oughta be a law about it!"

He calmed Abel at last and tied up a broken breeches strap. The last mile to Myrtle Hollow was negotiated in a state of temper even greater than he usualy worked up on the road to the village. He was bent on doing his shopping and getting out of the " cussed place " again just as fast as the Lord would let him.

Accordingly, he was in no wise mollified, when he approached Bemish's store where he usually traded, to find a crowd of craning necks banked in front of it and overflowing the sidewalk. A bellowing monotone rolled from the open door of the place.

With a grunt of disgust Zeke turned back to the establishment of Bemish's rival in the next block.

" Bemish got that cussed radio of hisn goin' agin. How'n time's he expect to do any business playin' with that devilish dingus durin' store hours! Look at them gawpin' fools!"

Zeke was turning in at the other store when he was nearly bowled over by the village newsboy hurrying from the railroad station with a bundle of fresh papers.

" Extra!" shrilled the youngster. " All about the waw—waw—waw— What paper do you read?"

Zeke in his irritation missed everything but the last blurred sentence.

" I read the *Weekly Gazette!* Got this last number a'ready!" he snapped. " Git outa my way, bub, 'fore I step on ye."

The boy grinned and hurried on.

Had Zeke caught the boy's words in full, had he read even the last lurid headline in the proffered paper or caught a few words of the announcement from the radio at Bemish's store, he would have been in an even less placid frame of mind when he started back home a half hour later. The headline read:

BANDIT MURDERERS RANGE JERSEY HILLS

And out of the radio horn were coming these even more startling words:

" The two bandits who killed the bank messenger in Newark last evening and got away with fifty thousand dollars in negotiable securities were trailed out through Kekamaw Valley as far as the village of Myrtle Hollow, through which they raced at midnight in a high power car. From there they struck into the hills where they are believed to be in hiding. All farms and woodlands throughout the Mauchung Hills are being searched thoroughly by armed posses with autos, motor cycles and airplanes. All residents of the hills are warned to go armed and keep a lookout for these men as they are killers who shoot on sight.

" The men have been identified as Blood Rayner, a red-headed, slender man with a scar under his left eye, about thirty years old, and Snake Mosier, dark and rather thick set, with a slight limp in the right foot, about twenty-five years of age. A reward of five thousand dollars is offered for their capture dead or alive."

But Zeke Pennyman, hater of all these mechanical devices for speeding up transportation and information jogged away toward home behind the equally eager Abel, along the least traveled back way, growing steadily more contented with life as the higher mechanics of modern civilization receded into the distance.

Almost forgotten was the perturbation of the morning. He remembered his mysterious visitor only to chuckle at his theory that his place had been overrun by a misguided prohibition officer. Zeke was utterly innocent of any infraction of that statute. Anything nearer its jurisdiction than new-

born cider was outside his knowledge or desire.

By the time he reached the lower solitude of his beloved hills, he was again at peace with all men. It was a balmy fall afternoon. There was an odor in the hazy air of ripe wild grapes and drying corn stalks, and here and there a faint overlay of the fragrance of burning leaves.

This essence of autumn was untainted now by gasoline fumes. The hue and cry of noisome motors that crawled and flew had passed on over the ridge. The neighborhood of Zeke Pennyman had been scoured and found wanting in bandits.

As Zeke began mounting the last rise, his eyes fixed raptly ahead on the great variegated mound that was his home mountain, he missed one feature of the immediate landscape. Perhaps more accurately one should say two features, for it was literally the features of two young men that peered cautiously over the top of a low huckleberry bush by the roadside, just before Zeke reached the corner of a narrow lane that led through the curtain of undergrowth to the hidden Pennyman homestead.

One of the two heads that seemed perched on the top of the bush like jack-o'-lanterns set for the affrighting of passers, was lean-visaged and blond, red hair showing from under a jaunty fedora. A livid scar running from under the left eye across the cheek bone gave a sinister cast to the face that was in no wise relieved by the dead stare of the cold, gray eyes.

The other tended to the moon type, if one could imagine a swarthy moon in partial eclipse from a shock of black hair that tumbled over a low forehead from under a nondescript cap. It might have been a merry face, but for the fierce hot glare of coal black eyes.

As Zeke passed innocently on into his own lane the eyes of the pair followed him.

"There you are, Blood! There's our meat!" whispered the black head, motioning toward the old man.

"What's the dope?" asked Blood coldly. "Listen, Snake, don't kid yourself ever about these old grass-eaters. Some of 'em can draw a double-barrel cannon like a Big Bertha an' scatter ye all over hell with a handful o' buckshot before you can put a finger on your gat."

"Sure, I know. I didn't say anything about walkin' up and askin' him to please shoot. I just figgered the ol' egg lives back there in the sticks outa sight of anybody. We could slip in and bean him and his family and hide out there's long we please now the cops have already given this place the once over for to-day."

"Fair enough. Only, I'm tellin' ye to go slow. In the first place every guy in these hills got the alarm by now. They all got the radio and phone and daily paper full of our pictures. This old bird's got our mugs and our hist'ries by heart. He'd know us on sight and shoot us just the same. We got to be ready to shoot first.

"But just the same, we don't want to do any killin' up here in the hills if we can help it. These people ain't any too strong for rich companies like the one we robbed. A lot of 'em are bustin' the law with moonshine stills and wouldn't work very hard to catch us. Shouldn't wonder if this old bird was one o' that kind. Maybe he could be reasoned with if there was a little in it. A few dollars looks like a million to these hill-billies.

"But if we kill one of their own people. Oh, boy! Good night! Even the jack rabbits would come after us with gats. So let's try this old bird out and drill him if he speaks out of turn or makes any funny passes at a phone or gun."

"Suits me. You know 'em better'n I do," Snake agreed.

Together they crawled out of the bushes and advanced cautiously but purposefully up the Pennyman lane, Snake limping along with a gait that appeared deceptively painful.

By the time they reached the remote farmyard Zeke had unharnessed Abel and was out in front of the barn playing for a moment with Hezekiah, while King David was expressing his delight at his master's return by racing around in circles barking wildly.

Zeke was bent over, his back half toward them. His coat was off and his slender old form was clearly visible to the advancing gunmen as he turned this way and

that to meet Hezekiah's charges. It was evident to the two pairs of suspicious eyes, trained in such matters that their involuntary host was unarmed.

They relaxed and dropped their hands from their pockets.

At this moment the preoccupied King David caught an alien scent in his nostrils. He turned, saw the strangers and charged, his festive bark instantly turning to a belligerent growl.

Zeke was in the act of tossing Hezekiah into the air. Just as the big fowl reached the peak of his upward flight and was starting down toward his master's waiting shoulders with the usual squawk and flap of wings, Zeke, attracted by King's attack, became aware of the strangers.

"Here, King!" he shrilled, starting forward to stay the execution.

That unexpected move of his disconcerted Hezekiah greatly. The big fowl, with frantic flapping, maintained his altitude for an instant then volplaned past his master and landed skiddingly on the head of Blood, knocking off the natty fedora and clawing his talons into the red hair.

With a yell and burst of picturesque profanity, the panic-smitten bandit fought to dislodge the panic-stricken bird. Zeke, hands on knees, shook with unsuppressed laughter.

Snake rolled on the ground and roared with delight. King danced around in a circle, adding to the tumult.

Finally Blood, with a desperate side thrust of his arm, dislodged the rooster who flopped to the ground, righted himself, then, his panic gone with the touch of solid earth, charged undaunted at the shins of the bandit who kicked at him viciously.

Zeke rescued his pet and squatting, held him on his knee, stroking his feathers with soothing words, interspersed with resurgent chuckles.

"There now, Hezekiah, hold yer horses! Sorry, stranger, it was my own dumb fault. Hezekiah's a gentleman. Wouldn't go to assault and batterin' a stranger fer the world—jest made a leetle mistake."

He set the bird down and stood up, inspecting the strangers closely for the first time.

They weren't tramps. They were too well dressed for that. Might be agents.

Agents always amused Zeke. He liked to "string" them along, confident of his ability to resist selling talk.

Then another possibility struck him.

"You ain't perhaps the fellers that called here this mornin', be ye?" he asked with a grin.

"Not we," Snake answered.

"Thought maybe ye might be. Somebody come in a car and went all over the place inside and out while I was huntin' up a cow got lost. Thought mebbe they was officers lookin' fer a still. They didn't take nuthin'."

The gunmen stole glances at each other. Was this wily countryman stringing them, sparring for time? He must have recognized them. He must know what the morning visitors were looking for.

The reference to the still also left them in doubt. Was this a moonshiner who might in a measure be a kindred soul?

"They might be cops looking for somebody," Snake suggested with dry sarcasm.

"Who'd they be lookin' fer round here? Ain't anybody hidin' out far's I know. Didn't see anything in last week's paper anyhow."

"Don't read a daily paper, then?" Blood pursued. "You must have a radio?"

"I do not!" Zeke denied the aspersion as though it involved moral turpitude. "Don't have a telephone neither. Hate all them noisy contraptions."

Again the bandits eyed each other questioningly. This old hill-billy was too good to be true.

"Well, anyways, might I ask who you folks be an' what you figger I can do fer ye?" Zeke pursued.

They still suspected Zeke of guile, but Blood decided to play the part and keep a sharp watch-out for trickery.

"My name's White," he replied, selecting one at random. "This is Mr. Howard. We're taking a walking trip through the hills. Mr. Howard fell and wrenched his ankle. We seem to be quite a way from any town. We wondered if you'd put us up overnight."

They studied his face carefully to see

how he took this statement. But Zeke's guileless countenance showed only a mixture of sympathy and embarrassment.

"Why!" Zeke scratched his ear and grinned. "Sure, I kin put you up. Wouldn't turn no stranger away that needed shelter, even if Hezekiah an' King David here's gotta be shown 'fore they begin gettin' real friendly. Sorry about that ankle. I got some arniky might help. But ye might a heap sight better sprain yer ankle walkin' than break yer neck ridin' one o' them devil-made autymobiles.

"But, as I was sayin', yer welcome to stay here, o' course, if ye can put up with what I got to offer. This ain't no hotel, but we kin feed ye an give ye a place to sleep long's ye need it. Come right in. Wouldn't have ye standin' on that bad foot."

Zeke led the way, the two gunmen following warily behind. They looked at each other significantly and again their hands sought their pistol pockets.

This old hick was altogether too readily hospitable. They couldn't believe he really didn't know who they were. They might be walking into an ambush.

But their host trotted calmly on without a suspicion that at the slightest doubtful move his back would be drilled full of bullet holes.

Zeke produced a key from under the doormat on the woodshed floor and unlocked the kitchen door. Then he stepped back politely for them to enter.

They peered anxiously into the roomy kitchen dim in the late afternoon shadows. Beyond on the right an open stairway led mysteriously up in the blackness of the half story above.

At the left through an open door they saw the length of another larger room, seemingly crowded with ghostly furniture. They hesitated till Zeke prompted.

"All right, gentlemen. There ye be sich as it is. I'll git ye some supper soon's I've done my chores."

Then they pushed quickly through the door and whirled to face their host as he followed, at the same time sweeping the room with all-seeing glances.

Just as the unsuspecting Zeke followed through the door, both started violently. Their eyes, at the same instant had fallen on Zeke's shotgun, leaning against the doorjamb inside right within Zeke's reach.

Instinctively they slipped swiftly across the floor and backed against the sink where they could face the householder and the two inner doors, beyond which might lurk others of his clan. At the same instant, their automatics flew from their pockets and covered him.

Then bewilderment swept their faces, followed by chagrin. The old fellow had his back toward them. He hadn't even seen their defensive move.

He ignored the shotgun and took down a lamp from the shelf. Lighting it, he led the way into the farther room.

"This way, gentlemen," he invited.

Thrusting their weapons back into their pockets, but keeping firm hands on the pistol butts, they followed into a combination dining room and living room. Zeke set the lamp on the table and waved a hospitable hand around.

"Help yerself to cheers, folks. Here's where we live. Got a parlor on yonder, but don't keep a stove in it. Never used it since mother died. My bedroom's on beyond, and they's a spare room overhead heated by the pipe from this stove. Reckon I kin make ye comfortable fer the night. Now I'll do the chores and then git us some supper."

"Haven't you a family, then?" Mosier asked. "You said 'we' a number of times."

Zeke chuckled.

"Oh, that's jest a way I got to talkin'. I mean King David, my dog, an' Hezekiah the rooster that wrastled with yer friend an' Abel an' Cain an' Naomi an' the rest all members o' the family an' pretty damn near human, specially Hezekiah. Livin' alone, ye git to appreciatin' dumb critters. Why, they seem so human to me I can't scarcely kill an' eat one o' the chickens any more, seems like bein' a murderer and cannibal almost."

He trotted out to the barn.

"What do you make o' that bird?" Blood Raynor demanded.

"I think he's stringing us," Snake Mosier

declared. " He's stallin' for time till somebody comes or till he can get word somewhere. I'm going to trail him. He may be sneaking off to give an alarm. I'm all for bumping him off and playing safe."

" Nothing doing," Blood Rayner vetoed. " Not yet. Not a bad idea for us to watch him, though. I'll give the house the once over."

Zeke went calmly about his chores, watched by the unseen, menacing Snake, while Blood Rayner combed the house from end to end.

The precious pair of guests met in the house again just ahead of Zeke and his full milk pails.

" The old bird acts all right, for a fact," Snake reported. " This is a good hide-out, too; no other house in a mile. I followed him down to his back pasture."

" Nothing in the house, no phone, no radio or daily paper, like he said," Blood added.

Meanwhile Zeke pottering around the barn with his lantern was ruminating on the nature of his guests.

" Don't like that pair's looks none too well," he told himself. " They got mean eyes. They're dressed decent, though, and talk pretty good. Maybe they're all right. Might be a couple of them confidence men, though. By golly, I hope they be. Ain't never seen one of them fellers, and I'd kinda like ter watch how they act. If they kin skin me they're good ones.

" Don't feel jest easy about 'em, though, but I can't turn 'em out with night comin' on. King David don't like 'em none and that's a bad sign. Besides that red head hit Hezekiah. I'd like ter bust 'im one fer that. Well, 'tain't as if I kep' any money in the house. They wouldn't be pickin' on a poor little place like this ter rob it. Guess probably they're all right."

By the time he returned to the house ready for supper, he had swallowed his misgivings and whistling a monotonous old hymn tune he set about preparing the evening meal.

Blood Rayner and Snake Mosier were fastidious patrons of the table. In their metropolitan haunts, when in funds from a recent job, they lived high. When out of luck Dutch Gorman staked them to meals and Dutch was a good cook.

Accordingly they regarded with lack-luster eyes the meal of underdone salt pork and boiled potatoes that Zeke set before them with no little gusto.

" Jes' good plain cookin's all I aim to do," he told them with no hint of apology in his tone. " You city folks eats too much fancy stuff. Do you good to have some stimulating country diet. Lucky I went to the village ter-day before you come. I was all out o' sugar an' coffee," he added, as he placed two cups of muddy-looking fluid before them.

" Don't you get down to the village very often?" Blood Rayner asked.

" 'Bout every two weeks," Zeke told them. " Won't be goin' agin now till December. Git some extra supplies then and kinda hole in till spring. Roads are somethin' fierce up here in the winter, an' I don't aim ter go ter town more'n a couple o' times while the snow lasts."

Rayner and Mosier stole significant glances at each other. They were both thinking the same thing, that this would be an excellent and safe hiding out place as long as the hue and cry lasted. If they could only be sure the apparent innocence of their host was genuine.

" You don't very often see anybody up here, do you?" Mosier asked.

" Not once in a blue moon," Zeke told him. " Why, I reckon there must 'a' bin more folks round here ter-day in one day than's usually through here in two months. Didn't know jest how to figger it out. Thought maybe some o' those city clubs was goin' to make it stylish to do their fall huntin' here.

" First there was them fellers thet rummaged round here in the mornin'. Then there wus actually two fellers huntin' from one o' thim flyin' machines. Then, farther on, there wus a lot went by on these devilish noisy motor cycles. Then you gentlemen comes round. Not thet I ain't glad ter see yer, specially as ye come quiet like on foot."

" What was the news down to the village?" Rayner asked innocently? " My friend and I have been tramping through

the hills for the last two days and haven't heard any news at all."

"Well, now, as a matter of fact, I didn't hear none either," Zeke assured them. "I gotta late start, an' didn't stay any longer than I had. Aimed ter git back an' husk a little corn before dark, but didn't make it. I usually pick up a little news 'round Bemish's store, but the darn fool's put in one o' them cussed radios, an' it was bawlin' out somethin' when I went there. Half the village was standin' 'round listenin' an' there was such a crowd I didn't try ter git in.

"There waren't anybody in the other store but a dummish kinda girl thet waited on me, and she acted as though she wished I'd git out as soon as I could, an' I was glad to accommodate 'er. I can git along pretty well on what news I git in the county paper. We ain't got any rural delivery up here yit, so I only git the paper once in two weeks at the post office when I go down.

"Way I look at news is, if it's true when it happens, it's still true when I read it, and it's new ter me whenever I read it, even if it did happen two or three weeks before. Mos' folks's in too dang much of a hurry these days anyhow. They wanta know everythin' and git everywhere about day before yisterday, else they ain't satisfied."

While Zeke was clearing and washing the dishes in the kitchen the two bandits held a whispered consultation in the far corner of the dining room, while pretending to discuss the news in the county paper.

"I tell you, this guy has got my goat," Snake Mosier insisted. "He's playing some sort of a deep game. He's bright enough; too damn bright, if he is a little queer in the head. I tell you he knows who we are. The thing to do is to bump the old bird off and stick around here for awhile. Nobody'd miss him for weeks. If we try sticking around and him alive we may get caught like rats in a trap."

"You just wait a little," his companion cautioned. "We'll just stick around tonight and keep our eyes peeled. We'll take turns sleeping. He can't get word to anybody without leaving the house, and we'll know it if he does. If anybody comes in the night that dog of his will raise hell, time enough to warn us. The bulls think we're miles from here by this time. They'll never find our car buried in that swamp-hole, and that's a cinch."

So by the time Zeke returned from the kitchen his guests announced that they were weary and would turn in. Zeke led the way up to a bare little bedroom under the roof and left them, hoping they would get a good night's rest.

The stovepipe from the big coal-stove in the dining room passed through the corner of the room and had a sheet-iron drum attached to it. This furnished heat for the little bedroom, which was gratifying to its transient occupants. They were distinctly hothouse plants and had little use for the fresh air fad.

To their relief they discovered that the stovepipe where it came through the floor, was surrounded by a perforated tin-jacket designed to furnish meager ventilation. Through the perforations they could command a view of the dining room table, by which sat Zeke, contentedly poring over his county paper.

It was arranged that they would divide the night into two watches. Blood Rayner took the first watch until midnight, while Snake Mosier slept in the ample feather bed. Blood threw a pillow on the floor by the stovepipe, where he could rest comfortably while he watched their host in the room below. Snake Mosier was presently snoring merrily.

Zeke went on with his reading, nodding a little now and then. Presently the watcher at the stovepipe hole found himself getting drowsy, after a strenuous day and night of dodging around among the hills ahead of the pack of manhunters.

He had nearly dozed off when he heard Zeke rise and yawn. The old man disappeared from his vision in the direction of the kitchen. When he came back in sight again he had the shotgun under his arm.

Blood Rayner drew a sharp breath and instinctively snatched his own weapon from his pocket. The old man passed out of the range of vision in the other direction and Blood heard a door open and close.

Again the outlaw's fear of ambush

gripped him. He arose and shook Snake Mosier awake. From long training Snake awoke noiselessly and sat up. He had gone to bed with his clothes on.

"Wait here, unless I whistle," his companion whispered. "There may be something doing."

Blood, with his automatic in hand, tiptoed quietly down the back stairs on his rubber soles through the now darkened dining room to the door at the far end, which he found by the use of his flash light. Through this he crossed the parlor to another door, around which he saw a light streaming.

The door was slightly ajar and Blood, pistol ready for use, placed his eye to a crack, and heaved an almost audible sigh of relief. Zeke was quietly preparing for bed, the old shotgun innocently resting against the wall by the bedside, according to Zeke's nightly custom.

The outlaw, after watching till Zeke put out his light and crawl into bed, pocketed his weapon and returned to the room upstairs. The rest of the night passed without incident, and over a breakfast of salt pork, boiled potatoes, muddy coffee and burned apple sauce, the worthy bandits came to the conclusion that their host, miracle though he might be, was exactly what he seemed.

Nevertheless they in no way relaxed their vigilance. Zeke Pennyman husked corn that forenoon under the eyes of one or the other of his two guests who strolled about the little farm with apparent aimlessness, but taking care at all times not to expose themselves in a vista through which an unexpectedly arriving manhunter might get a view of them in the distance.

The dinner at noon, a third repetition of fried pork and boiled potatoes, broke the camel's back of endurance. Zeke's guests merely toyed with their food, which Zeke did not fail to notice, though he forebore comment.

He confided his thoughts to Hezekiah, however, stroking the big rooster's feathers, as the bird nestled against his cheek on the way to the barn for the noon supply of chicken feed.

"Them fellers don't take to my cookin' none too well, Hezekiah. But if I fed 'em too good they'd stay too long, an' I don't aim to keep boarders all winter. That feller's ankle ain't so bad but what he kin tromp 'round the farm pretty handy."

When Zeke returned to the cornfield, Blood Rayner turned to his companion as they sat smoking on the sunny side of the farmhouse.

"Listen, son," he confided. "I'm going to kill two birds with one stone. That's to say, I'm going to get even with one bird and treat us two birds to a square meal. Watch me."

Zeke was well out of sight by this time, and the history of the morning had given them confidence. Blood strolled around the corner of the barn to where Hezekiah was parading before his harem.

The bandit stooped and slapped his knees, as he had seen Zeke do several times. Hezekiah ruffled his feathers and charged. The bandit gathered him up, and before the astonished fowl could give more than one squawk of protest, had deftly wrung his neck.

"Now," Blood exclaimed triumphantly, "here's where we eat. You remember we saw that old sap kettle down in the hollow in the woods back of the barn this morning? You rummage around the kitchen and gather up some salt and pepper, and potatoes, and join me there. I've been some little camp cooker in my day."

When Zeke returned to the house just before dark that afternoon he promptly missed Hezekiah. He trotted all around the yard, calling him, but though the other fowls followed, expectant of an evening meal, no Hezekiah appeared. He prowled through the barn and out into the barnyard. Still no sign of his missing pet.

By the gate in the lane he came upon King David gnawing contentedly at something between his paws. It was the fresh drumstick of a chicken, a suspiciously large one.

Zeke knew with one agonized glance that no other bird about his place could supply so large a thigh-bone as that, excepting Hezekiah.

"Oh, my gosh, all hemlock!" he groaned. He cuffed the astonished King David fiercely and retrieved the bone.

"You dang murdering brute," he roared at King. "Have ye gone crazy, killin' Hezekiah, an' you an' him friends fer years!"

But as he held the bone before his eyes in reverent horror, he saw that he had accused King falsely. There was a slivver of cooked meat still attached to the bone. Light dawned on Zeke's mind in an instant.

"So it was them did it!" he exclaimed.

King David, as if to clear himself of suspicion, whined and leaped through the bars of the gate, starting off down the lane with his nose to the ground, whining. Zeke took the hint and followed, and so came to the sap kettle in the hollow, with the signs of a recent fire under it.

Scattered all about were the feathers of Hezekiah, and other remnants of the bandits' feast.

Torn with mixed rage and grief, Zeke returned slowly to the house, in deep thought. By the time he arrived he had settled upon a policy of dissembling. His guests, at ease in body and mind, were playing pinochle in the dining room. They eyed Zeke furtively, but his cheerful greeting allayed their fears that he might attribute his loss of Hezekiah to them.

Indeed Zeke was more than ever garrulous that evening. For an hour after supper they sat about the table, Zeke airing his philosophy of life and listening with apparent interest to his guests' accounts of big cities. But all the while his brain was busy with a crafty plan.

As soon as his guests had retired for the night he shook the coal stove down thoroughly, as if in preparation to go to bed himself. He waited a few minutes until the stove, with all drafts wide open, was roaring briskly, then he filled it to the top with fresh coal and closed the drafts at once.

Any one who has tended a coal stove knows what that means. Zeke had made a mistake himself once years before, and by closing the drafts of his stove too soon after putting on fresh coal, had been nearly asphyxiated by coal gas.

Zeke waited a moment till he caught the deadly odor of the gas seeping into the room, then he quietly tiptoed out into the fresh air, leaving the stove to do its work.

Up in the close little bedroom, Snake Mosier was already snoring in the bed. Blood Rayner lay propped on the pillow by the stovepipe, smoking and spying on the room below.

He was more than usually drowsy that evening. He was vaguely aware of the odor of coal gas through the fumes of his cigarette, but thought nothing of it. Zeke Pennyman's old stove was an odorous affair at best, and Blood had had no experience with coal gas.

When Zeke tiptoed into the room a few minutes later, the bandits were completely unconscious. Zeke held his breath until he had opened the little bedroom window and taken a gulp of fresh air.

Then, with stout straps that he had brought from the barn, he swiftly bound the two gunmen hand and foot, and dragging them to the window sill, laid their heads across it until they revived. Then he dragged them back to the bed and sat patiently nodding in the corner of the bedroom for the rest of the night with his old shotgun across his knee, while Blood Rayner and Snake Mosier alternatiely swore and pleaded, and offered extravagant bribes in vain.

Early next morning Constable Giles Hoyt down in Myrtle Hollow was awakened a good half hour before his rising time by a sharp rap at his front door. He found Zeke Pennyman standing there.

"Good morning, Mr. Hoyt," Zeke greeted him. "I got a couple o' fellers out in the wagon I want ye to arrest."

Full of curiosity, Giles followed Zeke out to the street, and stared in amazement at the two sullen victims stretched out lengthwise in the back of the buckboard wagon.

"Well, I'll be damned!" Giles exclaimed. "If you haven't caught them two bandits we been hunting all over hell for!"

"Bandits!" Zeke snorted. "I don't know nothin' about any bandits. They're a couple o' danged cannibals! They et Hezekiah!"

THE END

T. D. S. and S. A. P.

By LAURANCE M. HARE

SCRUB SMITH was in hot water clear up to his neck Mr. T. D. S., the division superintendent, had dropped down out of a clear sky from nowhere in particular and Chicago in general, to investigate personally the failure of the 469 on the highball cattle train, with which he had hoped to establish a record run.

As Scrub had predicted on that hectic night, the run had been a flop. But it had to have a reason for flopping and the elegant Mr. Pringle's dislike for work was the reason.

So T. D. S. had arrived at midnight on No. 9 from Chicago and had come directly to the roundhouse, unheralded, expecting to happen in on a considerable amount of loafing and other examples of inefficiency.

He hadn't yet finished looking over the shops when Pat Connelly hove into the office, pickled to the *n*th degree in the elixir of an Irishman's life. He'd been over in Hunkytown and he had a grievance.

He shouted it for all the world to hear. Scrub sat petrified in fright. He bided his time until Pat had to stop for breath.

"Shut up, you idiot," he bellowed. He clapped a hand over Pat's mouth and hissed in his ear. "T. D. S. is out there in the shop. Cork up that trap of yours and go on home to bed."

Pat fought Scrub's hand away.

"Don't you go sayin' noshin' about Oirland," he warned. "It'sh a good plashe to be. I wisht I was there now."

"So do I. The old man's on the warpath and if he sees you now and finds out about your missing a call the other night, you'll miss a lot more and miss 'em by request. Now, beat it."

"Aw, Scrub, you gotta go over to Blacky's wizh me an' help me git me watch. We'sh always been good friends, ain't we, Scrub? Come on. Blacky an' hish gang took my new watch that my darlin' shister give me when I was afther goin' on the road, an' you know I'd git fired if I went out wizhout it, don't you, Scrub, huh? Come on."

"You'll get fired anyway if T. D. S. finds you here pickled like a last year's cucumber. Now for Heaven's sake, go home and sleep that stuff off so you can work when we call you."

Pat shook his head stubbornly. "Not

wizhout my watch. Old man 'd fire me if I went out wizhout my watch. You wouldn't want to let old Pat git fired, would you, huh?"

"Oh, damn it!" Scrub exploded.

He was more scared than he had been the night he discovered the Patch Gang. A clammy perspiration broke out all over him. Only the kindliness of the gods that be had kept the superintendent away from the office this long, and they might at any moment release their hold on him.

Scrub didn't want to work the ex-dispatcher into one of his tantrums by trying to throw him out. He was just about ready to give up the ghost when old Mother Necessity inspired him with an idea.

"All right," he agreed. "Come in here, Pat."

He led the fireman into a sort of washroom behind the dispatcher's office. There was a square hole in the ceiling reached by a ladder. It gave entrance to the attic in which were stored old records and reports for the last thirty years.

Scrub pointed to the hole.

"Go up there and 'way back in that corner you'll find some short pieces of rope. Bring down two of 'em. We'll tie knots in 'em to use in case those guys get rough. Now don't light any matches because you'll set the place afire and fry in your own fat. You'll just have to feel your way."

Pat grinned at his former call boy happily and sprawled up the ladder, missing his step every two or three rungs. Scrub watched him disappear in the blackness, then he lowered the ladder and laid it on the floor out from under the hole.

He dusted his hands and walked back to his desk. He was afraid to breathe the customary sigh of relief for fear Pat would start yelling for the ladder before he could get rid of the superintendent.

That grizzled old war horse walked into the office as one of the telephones on Scrub's desk rang. The superintendent let it ring.

"I've been hearing about the reception my cattle train got here at Rockbury," he said. "You're a nice bunch of apes up here. What the hell do you suppose I sent that memorandum out for? Just to keep you birds entertained so you wouldn't go to sleep and forget to wake up? What 'd you do to Pringle?"

"Yes, sir. Why—I—I—there wasn't any fireman for the engine Mr. Pringle got ready, so I used No. 6's fireman on the cattle train because she left first, and I asked him to fire No. 6, and he did."

"Why the hell wasn't there any fireman? Why didn't you pull somebody off another run? What do you think we're payin' you for, anyway? Answer that damned telephone!"

Scrub was hurt at the injustice of the superintendent's attitude. He couldn't see why he should be made the butt of the whole affair when the fault was Pringle's. He tried to explain.

"Answer that phone, I tell you!" T. D. S. repeated savagely.

Scrub picked up the receiver. "Hello!"

"Train dispatcher talking. The yard office is bringing over an order for the wrecker S. A. P. You birds loosen your legs up there and if that train ain't sailing by the depot so damned fast I can't see the engine number in just half an hour, I'm gonna raise particular hell with somebody."

"Keep your shirt on. It's already raised. Where'd it happen?"

"Why, some half dead hogger was probably takin' a beauty nap in the cab and he run broadside into one of the P. M. C. trains where the lines cross at Pyramid. No. 6 is on the other side and can't git through. And you've got to dead-head a fireman to watch the junk pile because the crew that's on it was both knocked out."

"Is that all?" asked Scrub.

"Shut up! It's enough."

Both receivers clicked together, and Scrub, his face the color of a red flannel shirt, looked up at the superintendent.

"The wrecker's ordered for Soon As Possible, Mr. Sims. There's a collision at Pyramid where our line crosses the P. M. C. And we've got to dead-head a fireman to watch the engine, or what's left of it, because both the crew are hurt."

Mr. Sims's mouth dropped open, and he stared. For a moment Scrub felt a wave of sympathy and pity for this tired old man

who seemed to shrink in his clothes. But it lasted only a moment, for the superintendent revived as suddenly as he had slumped, and he proceeded to air his wrath on Scrub.

"What're you lookin' at me for? Do you think you can git three men by whistlin' for them? What's that corpse over on the table? Is he supposed to be a call boy? Lord, when I was dispatching, the damned wrecker would have been halfway to Pyramid by this time. Git to hell outa that chair and duck that mummy in the sink and git a spark of life into him."

Mr. Sims sat down in the chair that Scrub had just vacated and looked over the book.

"Hey! Isn't there an engine in this place marked O. K.?"

"No, sir."

"Don't 'sir' me."

"Well," Scrub amended, "the passenger engines are ready."

"Yeah, ain't that nice that the passenger engines are ready? All right, we'll take No. 6's engine. Won't need it for about a week. Good Lord, I could do as much around here in one night with one hand tied behind me as this whole outfit does in a month. Where the hell is your spare list? Go out and tell the hostler to bring No. 6's engine around."

Scrub went. When he returned, T. D. S. was waiting for him.

"Sit down here and call the nearest birds you can find and make it snappy!"

"There is nobody on the spare list," said Scrub, "whose rest is up. We've been awfully bu—"

"Spare list be damned! Get anybody you can find." He leaned over Scrub's shoulder. "What's the idea of this 'on leave' list? You've got half the men in the place marked up on leave. You oughta have your neck broke. Call somebody!"

Scrub turned his head and met the superintendent's eyes. He could be calm on occasions when he was mad, and this was one of them.

"My dear man," he said, "please shut up until I get something done. The men who are marked on leave are not my responsibility, and you'll have to have it out with the man who put them there. As for the cattle train, it never would have left here at all if I hadn't used No. 6's fireman on it and made Pringle fire No. 6. The failure of the engine is a concrete example of what happens when a foreman thinks he can run a roundhouse without doing any work. Now please sit back and rest yourself until I get this wrecker started."

He regretted his audacity as soon as the words were out. But he didn't care just then what happened to him. It looked, though, like he was about to die a violent death.

Mr. Sims bristled and towered over him, his face changing color like a chameleon. He jerked out his watch and looked at it.

"You young squirt," he began, "I'll give you just fifteen minutes to have a crew for that engine and a man to dead-head on it. If you flop, I'll wring your neck. If you don't, I'll stick by you through fire and flood. Maybe I've been a little hasty. Let's see what you can do."

Scrub motioned to his call boy.

"Go across the tracks and call Simpson to fire the 347 on the wrecker S. A. P. Don't knock; just go in and drag him out of bed. Pick up his clothes and help him on with 'em on the way. If you're not back here in ten minutes I'll drown you. When you go out, tell the hostler to oil the engine around and get it ready."

He picked up the phone to call an engineer who lived on the other side of Hunkytown, three blocks away. Then he looked over the book.

Firemen were as scarce as rattlesnakes in Paradise. Scrub's clothes were soaked with perspiration. It would be just his luck not to be able to find a fireman.

He glanced fearfully at Mr. Sims, who sat with his chair propped against the wall, his eyes on his watch.

Then a human voice, lifted in song, disturbed the ominous silence of the office.

"I was drunk last night,
I was drunk the night before,
And I'm gonna be drunk to-night
If I never get drunk any—"

There was a crash in the washroom that shook the partitions. A yell followed it

that made the very foundations of the building tremble.

Scrub hurried, but he knew what he would find before he got there. Pat Connelly was rising unsteadily to his feet and trying to rub a bump on the back of his head at the same time. There was a frightened, imploring look in his eyes.

"The sh-sheiling f-fell hin, Shcrub."

"What's this?" T. D. S. demanded.

Scrub thought quickly.

"This," he said, "is a fireman on tap. He isn't very drunk, Mr. Sims. Let him dead-head. He'll be sober by the time he gets there. I'll take him out and duck him in the trough now and sort of wake him up."

"But my watch, Shcrub. I can't go wizhout my watch."

"Oh, shut up! I'll get your watch."

Scrub had forgotten that Blacky's gang had Pat's watch. A soldier who goes to battle without a gun is in a far healthier state than a railroad man without a watch. It is the unpardonable sin.

Scrub wondered if anything more could happen to him. The least he could do would be to try to get Pat's watch.

"Mr. Sims," he said, "you're a pretty big man. You take him out to that big trough in the shop and duck him good in cold water. I think you'll find some dry overalls in one of those cupboards and maybe a shirt. I gotta find his watch."

Scrub went out a side door and through a gate in the high-board fence that separated the railroad property from Hunkytown. He hastened through the darkened streets. He passed the engineer he had called and hurried him on his way.

He stopped before a dingy house where light shone around the edges of drawn shades. This was Blacky's place. Scrub crept up the steps and knocked at the door.

There was no answer. Finally he rattled the knob and pounded savagely on the glass. A husky voice called out:

"Who iss it?"

"Scrub—Scrub Smith from the roundhouse. Let me in, quick."

The door opened cautiously.

"What you want?"

"Listen, Blacky. Gimme Pat's watch. The wrecker's ordered and he's got to go on it. Old T. D. S. is over there raising hell. I've got to have it."

"Me no got. Who you mean, Pat?"

"Come on, Blacky. You know who I mean. Gimme that watch."

"Me no see watch. You be careful what you say to me."

"Oh, well, I suppose I'll have to let it go. But if the big boss ever finds out about it, your job won't be worth a whoop."

The door opened a trifle wider. Scrub couldn't see what came through it, but he caught it right square in the eye.

"Beat it," he was told.

The door slammed. Scrub thought he might as well go back, which he did, nursing alternately his eye and his feelings. He walked like a fat hog in a slaughter house.

Just inside the gate, though, he stopped. The 347 was pulling away from the water plug. Scrub picked up his feet and dashed for the office. Mr. Sims stood at a window watching the departing engine.

"Where's Pat?" asked Scrub.

"Gone. Say, where'd you get the idea he had lost his watch?"

"He told me that a gang of gamblers over here in Hunkytown stole it."

"Stole it, hell! He had it right in his clothes when he put on the overalls."

The superintendent looked at his own watch.

"Son," he said, "you've got two minutes grace. That was nice work. If I had a man like you, we could run this damned place alone. That Pringle is a natural born jackass, but you've got a night foreman now that will give you all the coöperation you need."

Scrub hesitated. "Mr. Sims," he asked, "what're you going to do to Pat Connelly?"

"Nothing that I haven't already done. I guess he thought I was going to hang him for awhile there, and I think that hereafter he'll be on the job when it's his turn to go out. I know how he feels because I had a celebration myself when I first went on the road. What happened here to-night is just between you and me."

THE END

Bill Dopes It Out

By JOHN H. THOMPSON

SOMEBODY had murdered Howard Hyatt, the town's leading and wealthiest citizen—a retired realty operator. He had been stabbed to death in the library of his palatial home.

Bill and I learned this before we had been in Torrington five minutes. There had been no escaping the news. It was smeared all over the front pages of the papers like jam on a baby's bib.

Furthermore, it was the chief topic of conversation. The restaurant man handed it out with the soup, the barber sandwiched it with his suggestions for shampoos and singes, and the grocer tossed it in for good measure with every sale he made.

The mayor's daughter could have eloped with the garbage man and the incident would not have created a ripple on the surface of Torrington's social pool. It would have been lost in the shuffle.

When Bill and I, drifting into the country as usual, happened into town and heard that Howard Hyatt had been slain, the news held no particular kick for us, but after the subject had been hammered on our consciousness by glaring headlines, crosses showing where the body lay, arguments as to why the slayer didn't adopt more refined methods, and confidential statements from every loafer who claimed to have all the inside dope, we became almost as interested as the oldest inhabitant, and he couldn't have been stirred up any more if a weather record had been broken.

So far as I could see, the case was as open as a third-story sleeping porch on a hot summer's night—just one of those obvious cases for which the police win a lot of renown without working themselves to death.

Hyatt was last seen alive at his club late in the evening. He had expressed to several of his friends worry over his nephew, Arthur, a happy-go-lucky chap who had resented an ultimatum that he go to work or be cut off without a bequest.

Hyatt's butler, in accordance with custom when his master was late at the club, had retired, leaving dim lights burning in the hallway and library. The nephew had been seen in the vicinity of the house during

the evening, though he claimed that he had merely been out taking a walk.

The following morning, the housekeeper, who slept at home, entered with her passkey and discovered the body. She rushed hysterically from the house and summoned the police.

Investigation disclosed that Hyatt had been stabbed in the back with a hunting knife which had Arthur Hyatt's name engraved on the handle. In the coat pocket of the slain man was his will leaving all his estate to his nephew, but in the same envelope was the skeleton outline of a new will leaving the estate to various charities and cutting off his nephew without a cent.

The nephew, of course, was promptly arrested.

It was one of those wide open cases which wouldn't have attracted more than passing interest were it not for the fact that the victim was the leading citizen of the town and the nephew was well known and popular. There wasn't that element of uncertainty and mystery which drags many a sordid crime to the front page. There was no room for speculation, except over the question whether the guilty nephew would be hung in the fall or the following spring.

"They ought to hang him right away," I declared indignantly to Bill as we sat sunning ourselves in the park.

"I don't know whether they had or not," retorted Bill.

"Why not?" I demanded. "That's no way for a nephew to treat his uncle, stabbing him in the back so he could get the estate before the uncle changed the will. Hanging is too good for him."

"Who said he stabbed him in the back?" countered Bill.

I looked at him in surprise.

"You read the papers, didn't you?" I asked. "You've heard all the dope on the street? It's as plain as the nose on a man's face."

"A man might have a bushy beard that would hide his nose—like a department store Santa Claus," remarked Bill.

Bill's line of reasoning was missing my mental receiving set entirely.

"You don't think the nephew did it?" I demanded.

"Of course he didn't do it," said Bill calmly.

"Why, you poor idiot," I pointed out. "There's no question about it—absolutely none. Here's an old man stabbed to death in his home. He had no enemies apparently except his nephew. The nephew was about to be cut off in the will. He had a row with the old man and made threats against him. He was seen loitering in the vicinity of the house that night. The next morning the old man is found dead, the victim of an assassin. What more do you want?"

"The nephew didn't do it," insisted Bill doggedly.

"Well, then, who did do it?" I inquired sarcastically.

Bill reflected for a moment. Then he dug the morning paper out of his pocket and glanced over the account.

"It's as obvious as a mole on the neck of a bob-haired girl," he said finally. "The butler did it."

"The butler?" I echoed. "How do you figure that out?"

"The butler did it," insisted Bill.

I took the paper and scanned the write-up again, thinking that perhaps I might have missed something important.

"There's nothing here about the butler," I protested, "except that he went to bed early, leaving dim lights burning in the hallway and parlor. Where do you get your dope?"

"The butler did it," Bill parroted.

"Why don't you tip the police off to the secret, if that's the case, instead of being so dog-goned mysterious about it," I snapped.

"I think I will," said Bill calmly.

He fished around in his pockets, dug up a stub of a pencil and a somewhat soiled and crumpled piece of paper and proceeded to scrawl a note.

"How's this?" he asked, and read the following:

"POLICE DEPARTMENT:
"Question the butler some more in the Hyatt killing. CONFIDENTIAL."

Knowing that Bill was inclined to be sensitive, I tried hard not to laugh.

"Now if the police are on to their job, they ought to get busy as soon as they receive this note; and the butler will be arrested by this time to-morrow," said Bill complacently. He bought a stamped envelope and dropped the note into the letter box.

"How do you figure out that the butler did it?" I asked after an ineffectual attempt to stifle my curiosity.

"Just a matter of using a little common sense," said Bill evasively.

I had been traveling around with Bill long enough to know the futility of trying to pump him when he didn't want to be pumped, so I gave up my quest for information, though I was as full of curiosity as an idle housewife watching a moving van stop in front of the house across the street.

Not that I had any faith in Bill's dope. The nephew did the slaying, there was no question about that in my mind, but as a student of human nature, I wanted to know how Bill arrived at his extraordinary conclusions.

I twitted him off and on for the next twenty-four hours and then stopped, for at at the end of that period the afternoon papers came out, screaming the news that the butler had been arrested and confessed the crime. The arrest had been made on an anonymous tip from an amateur sleuth.

In the butler's possession were found securities and money which he had taken from his employer. Facing detection, he had resorted to murder in an effort to save himself. His confession completely exonerated the nephew, who had been the victim of circumstantial evidence.

Bill was offensively complacent as we read the account.

I curbed my curiosity as long as I could.

"Bill," I remarked finally as we plodded over the hills toward the next town. "How in thunder did you know the nephew was innocent?"

"I didn't know," said Bill calmly.

"Well, how—" I began.

"You've read detective stories, haven't you?" demanded Bill.

"Hundreds of 'em," I conceded.

"Well, did you ever read one in which the character toward whom every finger of suspicion pointed was actually the guilty person?"

"No," I admitted after reflecting a moment.

"Don't you see, then," he said triumphantly, "that on the face of it, the nephew could not be guilty in this case—that it was unreasonable to suspect him?"

"But this is real life, not fiction," I remonstrated.

"Isn't fiction based on real life?" demanded Bill.

Bill certainly has a wonderful brain and a keen sense of logic.

"Just one more question, Bill," I continued as we plodded along. "How did you come to suspect the butler? Why did you pick on him?"

"Simple," said Bill airily. "The guilty guy is always the one mentioned incidentally—just enough so he can be placed when the dénouement comes. This butler was mentioned just once in the newspaper accounts—he retired early and left dim lights burning in the hallway and parlor. He was the only person connected with the case who seemed absolutely innocent, so I figured that he must be guilty."

"But—but—" I gave up in despair.

"Admit that I'm right. Admit that you are speechless over such a remarkable demonstration of detective ability," said Bill.

"I'll admit that you were right," I conceded, "but what makes me speechless are the inscrutable ways of chance."

THE END

THE READER'S VIEWPOINT

"If George Washington could only see America as it is to-day!" Plaint often voiced by our elder statesmen, leading editors, and average citizens.

The foregoing is quoted from the note which stands at the head of

"THE RETURN OF GEORGE WASHINGTON,"

by George F. Worts,

the astounding serial which begins in this magazine, October 15. Nothing like it has ever been written before. Not only is the subject extraordinary in itself, but the story has been handled with such consummate cleverness that we defy any one to forecast the big surprise that is sprung in the sixth and final installment.

Speaking of guessing, our readers continue to hazard their opinions on the authorship of "Eyes West." There are over a hundred of them to date—September 1—all wrong but one. Of course we dare not print too many of these surmises, but some of them are too good to keep, as for instance, this one:

TORRINGTON, WYO.

I accidentally picked up a copy of your publication for July, and see you ask for guesses. The story "Eyes West" pictures in my mind a sense of flavor—feminine, not masculine; it also pictures a conviction that the writer is not a regular writer for your publication. The lady is a great writer, but she writes for the big magazines. She shows the familiarity, of long experience, with dude ranches. She started as a very obscure writer. No man wrote "Eyes West"; so it is a woman. The whole trend of her composition is feminine. The story and its word pictures indicate a woman's style of composition.

I can now see a certain dude ranch in Wyoming; she seems to me to be groping around in the fields south not familiar to her. But she is very ingenious; like all women she can cover her ignorance with fancy phrases; I have only read that part of the story in the July issue; but that part uncovers the author's name: *Rinehart*. So there you are. J. M. H.

FRANKLIN, TENN.

Although my subscription does not expire for another month, I am inclosing check for two dollars for renewal from that date, as I don't dare miss a single copy of ARGOSY. I have been reading magazines for twenty years, and the ARGOSY beats them all to a frazzle, and then some.

My favorite author is Edgar Rice Burroughs. Let us have a sequel to "The War Chief," and some more Tarzan tales. "Nevada Gold" was fine; I also like Garret Smith's stories. The novelettes and short stories come in just fine, and the four serials make it tiptop.

Of course some of the stories are punk; for instance, "Pounding the Rails," and "Battle Sight." I am a railroader, and "Pounding the Rails" doesn't ring true as a railroad yarn. Of course, there is no earthly way to please all; so keep it as it is.

Yours for the ARGOSY every week. J. E. K.

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIF.

So many readers tell how they first read the ARGOSY that I would like you to know it was a cowboy on my brother's ranch who asked me to read "The Confidence Man"; to please him I read it, and liked the story. Later I saw it in the movies—not so good. Then I read "The Flight to the Hills," found it intensely interesting, and saw *it* in the movies—*bunk;* cured me of the movies. But I became an enthusiastic reader of the ARGOSY; so did my husband and sons.

We like MacIsaac's stories best. He has never disappointed us. We do not care for the Westerns; we are used to cowboys and ranches. I can't imagine our boys going to town and raising Cain, as the stories say they do. They are respected in North California. They frequently stay out for days hunting for lost persons, fighting forest fires, and tracking down robbers, and escaped convicts. The West is not at all as the movies show it; we still have lovable *Hopalong Cassidys* who like to sit on the porch and tell terrible tales of my grandfather's day, his fearlessness, and narrow escapes. (Granddad was a Forty-niner from New York; he passed up gold mining, and raised cattle with great success.) The spring round-up is still the same. It's a joy to watch the chuck wagon hauled out of the big shed; then the bed wagon, packed with blankets, ropes, *et cetera;* then out come the saddle horses, or remuda—everything like clockwork; cowboys certainly know their business. Most of them read the ARGOSY, or *Flynn's Weekly Detective Fiction*, and *Munsey's Magazine*.

We liked Ben Conlon's story, "A Western He-Man from the East," and Don Waters's tale, "Pounding the Rails." "The Mysterious Stranger" was fine. Many of the stories are excellent. We did not like "The Old Hat"; our worthy sheriff up north almost had a fit when he read it; said he'd like to put that lady in jail. Fires are serious up in north California. No one in

our outfit complains of first-person stories. "Those Lima Eyes" was delightful, and the Mme. Storey tales enjoyable. We like the poetry, too.

How can you give us all this for ten cents? It's such a relief to read the fine, clean ARGOSY stories. After reading certain of the other well-known magazines, my husband says, "Let's take the Munsey line instead." ELIZABETH T.

NEW YORK, N. Y.

The ARGOSY has always met with my approval, but, in my estimation, the issue of August 20 was unusually good. For one thing, the announcement that Fred MacIsaac is the author of "The Seal of Satan" confirmed my guess and enabled me to pat myself on the back and inform my friends that "I told you so," which, as everybody knows, is a pleasant experience. Also, the announcement that a new MacIsaac serial was about to start caused me to utter a few exclamations denoting pleasure, gratification, delight and similar sentiments.

Then there is "Thunderbolts of Jove," by Joseph Ivers Lawrence, which promises to be of exceptional interest. Loring Brent's Vingo story is excellent, as are all the stories from his facile pen; and "A Cavalier of the Range," by George M. Johnson, is one of the very few Westerns that I can truthfully say I enjoyed. Another attraction was the cover by D'Armeris, which was exceedingly well done. All told, the August 20 issue seemed to me better than most other numbers—which is high praise, indeed.

After reading the last installment of "Eyes West!" I am inclined to believe that the author is John Holden; though I must say that the assumption is not wholly complimentary to Mr. Holden. Incidentally, I'm wondering whether the brilliant lad who picked Primo de Rivera, of Spain, in lieu of Fred MacIsaac will suggest Horace Greeley as the author of "Eyes West"!

A. L. G.

MONTREAL, CANADA.

Picking a magazine for night reading on a train started a regular sequence of purchases of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY which does not seem likely to end for some time. That issue contained the first chapters of "The Moon Pool," the most colorful and poetic of all the imaginative tales you have published within the period elapsed since then, as "Future Eve" is, to my mind, the least interesting, probably because creatures of weird form which are normal in their own surroundings do not repel us, whereas a creation of steel plate, girders and paint, actuated by electric current to simulate ourselves is repulsive to a degree which is not softened by the difficulties of translation.

Your Western tales may not be strictly accurate, but what of it? They are good reading, either as serials or shorts, among the latter especially those dealing with the affairs of *Hopalong Cassidy*. Some of your correspondents appear to demand photographic accuracy in all stories, even objecting to such a fine production as "Moonglow" on this score. Such criticism is hard to understand. And a tale which presents to the reader's mind so vivid a picture of its characters and the surroundings in which they are set should surely not be criticized as a cartographer's report?

For example, a series of tales concerning the adventures of a young lady named *Janie* among the houseboaters and pearl fishers on the Mississippi may not have been quite in accord with the life as it might be described by one of the permanent houseboat population, but it imbued me with a desire, still existent, for time and means to make such a trip myself, and I am still hoping to hear more of *Janie*.

Other correspondents object to the first person story. These stories are mainly of the detective type, and it appears to me that the fault lies, not in the first person method of telling the tale, but rather in the fact that the supposed narrator almost always makes such an idiot of him, or herself, to heighten the brilliance of the detective. This is less evident in the current Mme. Storey tale, *Bella* making more of a normal human being of herself, without detracting at all from the skill of her heroine. ("The Pot of Pansies," April 30, 1927.)

May I take this opportunity to ask why so many American authors take every chance possible to misrepresent all things English, and to make an Englishman invariably an impossible fool? Your magazine contains less of this element than many others, but this offense must irritate thousands of British born readers, and is a reflection on the intelligence of your American ones. As an example, in the "Pot of Pansies" this week *Bella* describes a very disagreeable old gentleman, as "Nothing more English could be imagined." "A caricature out of *Punch*." J. B.

MERRICK, L. I.

I wish to take this opportunity to tell you that I think *our* ARGOSY is the best magazine on the market regardless of price. I think your present policy can hardly be improved upon generally. Personally, however, I would prefer a few more psuedo-scientific novels and stories. I believe that many of us would also welcome more of Mr. Burroughs's stories of *Tarzan* and of *John Carter*.

In closing I wish to add my voice to the controversy concerning the author of "The Seal of Satan," "The Great Commander," *et cetera*. These stories are very similar in style and in the general method of handling the respective plots to the previous stories written by Fred MacIsaac. I am a bit disappointed when I do not see his name on the index page.

Hoping to see many more of Mr. MacIsaac's and Mr. Burroughs's stories, I am, an interested reader, J. A. B.

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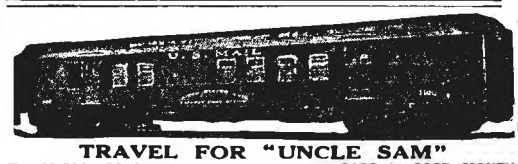

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