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THE BLUE BOOK

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Cover design: Painted by Paul Proehl to illustrate "Nobody's Yes Man."
Frontispiece: "Gathering the Remuda," by Will James.

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MAGAZINE

APRIL, 1927

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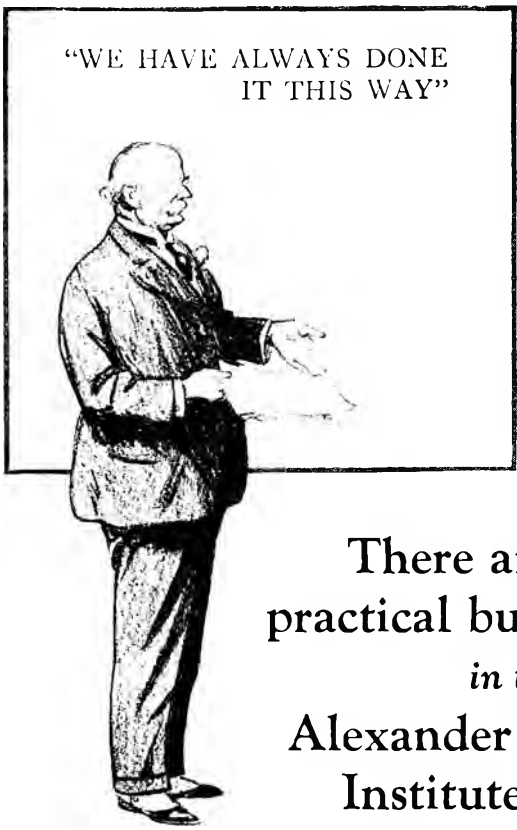

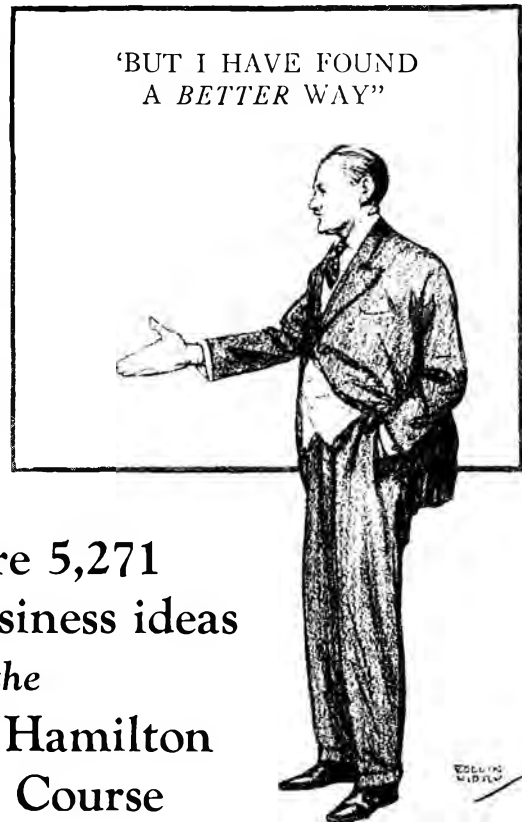

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THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE
Vol. 44 APRIL 1927 No. 6

The Men We Introduce to You

ON page 185 of this issue appears "The Boot," the true story of a rather dull mule-driver miscast as a sailor, who in the split second when the lives of twelve comrades were all but forfeit, proved himself a quick-thinking and self-forgetting man of splendid valor. Please read that story—for its own sake, and for the illumination it sheds.

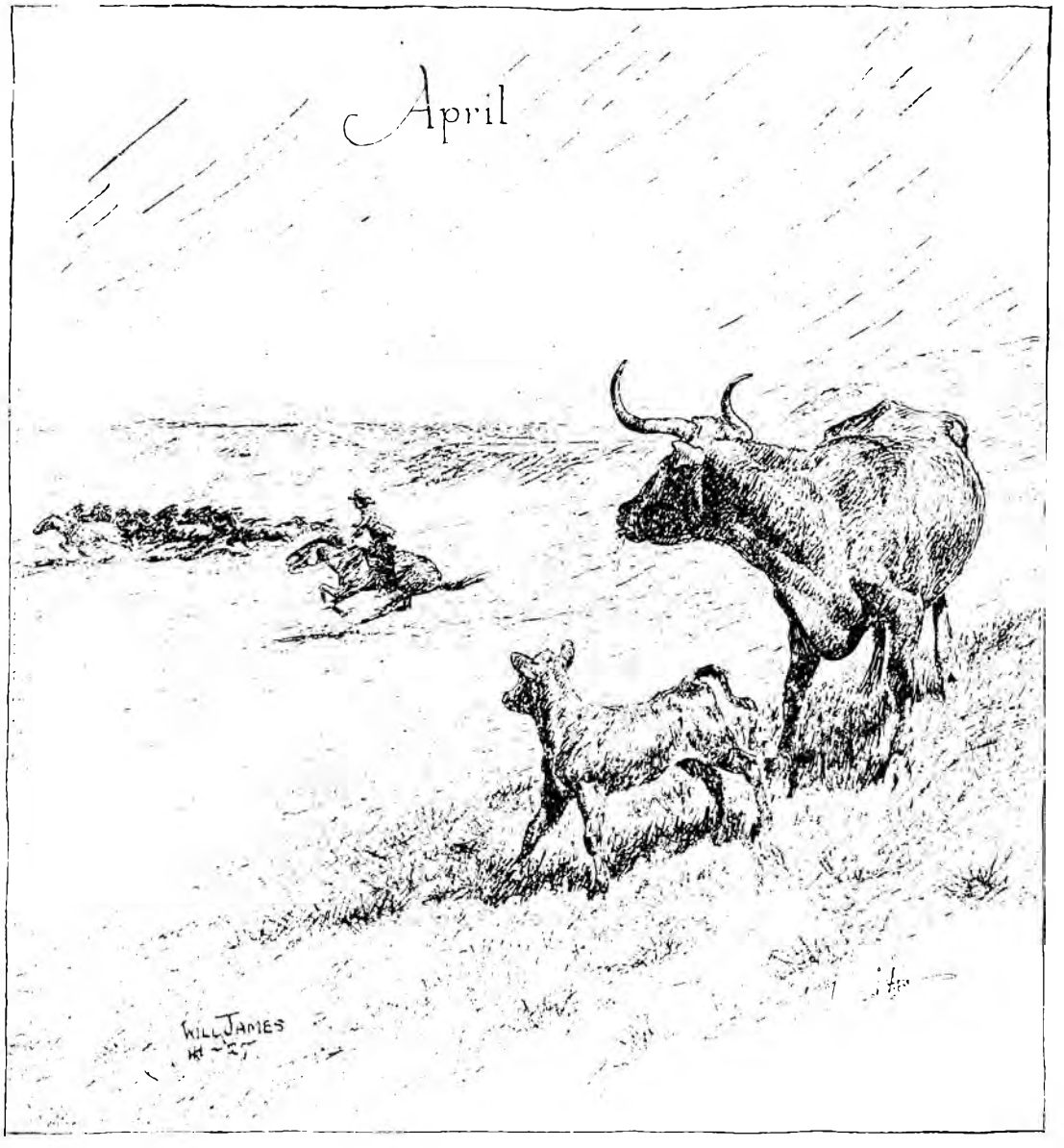
For most of us are somewhat like that mule-driver—not much ordinarily, perhaps, but capable of great things when the moment comes. We believe this most sincerely; and this belief decides the choice of stories we offer you—dictates that the fiction friends we sponsor shall be men whose hands you would be glad to clasp.

Consider, for example, that simple-minded Scandinavian in Roy Norton's fine story, "Honest Anse," which begins on the second page following. Consider a very different type, that intrepid rapscallion One-eyed Hortet in Warren Miller's spirited tale of the Foreign Legion "How the Croix Is Won." And consider the indomitable boy who carries on to victory in Forbes Parkhill's colorful novel of the Rocky Mountains, "Nobody's Yes Man." Worth knowing, aren't they? And each of the many other stories you will finish with a renewed conviction that you and your fellow-man deserve well of each other.

Next month will likewise bring to you in the pages of this magazine a memorable assemblage of men who are interesting, differing, but alike in meriting your acquaintance. The central figure in "The Man Who Died," for example,—an engrossing story of the Northwest by William Byron Mowery,—will live long and welcome in your memory. Larry Redmond, the star reporter about whom Frank Parker Stockbridge's fascinating novel "Modoc Rock" is built, is a notably companionable and attractive fellow. So too are the folk who people Joseph Blethen's picturesque novelette of Chinatown, "Jade." And, as you know, the central figures in Agatha Christie's stories of that clever detective Hercule Poirot, in Clarence Herbert New's "Free Lances in Diplomacy" and in Harold MacGrath's sprightly novel of wild youth "We All Live Through It" are distinctly worth knowing.

Here's hoping, too, that we have another story of real experience as dramatic and as significant as Lieutenant Gooding's tale of "The Boot." We have already set aside a promising group of candidates, and additional stories are coming in with every mail.

—*The Editors.*



Gathering the Remuda

The Cowboy's Calendar—By Will James

"THE month when the cowboys begin shedding off their heavy coats and often wish before they get back to camp that they'd kept 'em on. The green grass has come up to take the place of the snow, and the result is there's no more weak stock for the cow-man to worry about.

"The riders are out gathering the saddle horses, and them ponies having many long months' rest on the pick of the range are not at all easy to catch up to and turn. They're fat, and the long winter hair falling off in big patches leaves a slick shiny hide. As the cowboy hazes the ponies toward the big corrals where the *remuda* is gathered, he rides by many a cow what looks up at his coming but keeps on a-chewing on tall blades of green. The little feller that's by her side looks up too, and all interest, but he don't as yet know what all this horse-chasing is about. He don't know that these running ponies he's seeing will soon be packing riders to round up him and his kind, and being so young he aint worried none."

HONEST ANSE

By

ROY NORTON

The famous author of "Captains Three," "Drowned Gold," "The Great Samarkand" and many another widely popular novel here offers you the story of an Alaska stalwart who is indeed well worth knowing.

Illustrated by O. E. Hake

THE event which distinguished Anse in my first view of him was a feat of rare strength. An Indian had found gold in what was then an unknown region of the Yukon River some hundreds of miles below Circle City, and inside of a month a tiny camp had sprung up on the bluff above the shore, with perhaps a score of residents, most of us known to each other in a land which at that time had but few white men.

It was on a clear, crisp, frosty morning in late autumn with the gray smoke from the newly built log cabins climbing straight upward, when some of us saw a whipsawed boat coming down the river with a huge man pulling heavily to escape the current that was already gaining strength to tear through the narrows below. The boat slowly gained until it struck the shelving beach just below the camp; the rower got out with the cumbersome yet agile certainty of a grizzly bear, and had barely jumped when the clumsy craft, caught by the stern in that mad current, started to swing for freedom. In his anxiety to save his outfit, the man caught the boat's bow with two huge hands, overexerted his strength, and actually split the planks down each side.

"Good Lord! Nobody but Honest Anse could do that!" I heard a voice behind me exclaim, and looking up saw old Mayo, the trader, hurrying down to the river.

The man had beached what was left of his boat and was now looking with dumb ruefulness at the wreckage.

Any arrival in that newborn camp in the unknown was a subject for curiosity, and I found myself with some others sauntering downward. I saw a man with shoulders as broad as I had ever seen, high, slightly rounded and supporting enormous arms and hands. He wore an old homemade mink cap from which much of the fur had departed, and it covered a shock of hair which had perhaps originally been blond but was now seamed with white, as was his beard, which was roughly clipped as if he had carelessly reduced its proportions to keep it from covering his great chest.

And then his eyes met mine, and I could not fail to observe that there was something in them so frank, so straightforward, so guileless as to be almost childlike, and yet they suggested a great and simple courage. He greeted two or three others who had evidently known him "upriver" and there was a trace of that sing-song *liaison* of words so often evidenced in the Norseman who has learned our tongue. His voice was musical and hearty.

"By damn!" He laughed. "I break my bo-a-at; but she bring me hare all raight, so—that's all good. I stay here now, I t'ink."

THE trading post was as yet without stock or roof. Mine was the only finished cabin that wasn't crowded, and something, perhaps that kinship of mankind, that hospitality of the unknown outer world which influenced us all, prompted me to say to the trader: "Here, Al! This man is a friend of yours, and he's probably had a long run, and is tired. No need for him to stick up a tent if he wants

to come up to my place. He can, if he likes, come in with me until he fixes something for himself."

Anse waited for no reply from the trader but looked across at me with those strangely honest, appraising eyes that always seemed to me to read through everything into a man's innermost mind, and then said: "Good! I come. T'anks. My name is Andersen—Anse Andersen."

THAT was the beginning of our friendship, although he proved to be a more or less uncommunicative man, as far as his own vicissitudes were concerned. In fact I learned less from Anse regarding himself than from others. It seemed that he had garnered a pseudonym—which was the regular certainty in a land where there was a "Kentucky Smith" and a "Texas Smith," and a "Shakespeare George" and a "Hardpan George"—and that he had achieved the name of "Honest Anse." Somewhat flattering, I thought, in a land where, at the time, nearly one hundred per cent of men were honest as the term is ordinarily used.

Rumors of that new Eldorado, the Klondike, were brought to us by natives and from other sources. Its feverishness was impressed upon me on that day when the last steamboat of the season came cautiously down and tied up for a few hours at our miniature landing. Two men who were much too civilized to suit our camp got off and came to my cabin. They asked for Anse Andersen, and Anse came out with his hands white with the flour which he had been kneading for a batch of sourdough bread, and asked them their needs.

"You staked one, and bought another claim up on a pup off Eldorado," one of them said, "and did a lot of work on them. The Gold Commissioner says you've got clear title to 'em. Well, you seem to be down here, so aint working them. What do you want for 'em?"

"I don't care to sell," Anse answered without hesitancy, and that was my first intimation that he had anything on earth of value beyond credit at the trading-post, and a limited supply of grub. But they insisted on bargaining, and I was by this time a curious listener. And my amazement grew, for their price arose in exact proportion to his obstinate refusals, from five hundred dollars to ten thousand. Long before this point was reached, he had tried to dismiss them by returning to his batch of bread within the cabin and fallen to monosyllables consisting mostly of the single word, "Nope." Finally in exasperation one of the strangers said: "Well, damn it! What do you want? You can tell us that, can't you?"

The big, stoop-shouldered man carefully wiped the flour from his hands and arms, washed them in a tin basin, and then faced his visitors. In his quaint English, with its queer inflections, he spoke.

"You ask what I want for those claims, and now I tell you. They're not for sale. Why? That too I'll tell you. I know men of your kind too well. I bought one of those claims from just such men as you—with the last dollar I had on earth, all I had worked for and saved, in all my life. All I had! And I have worked hard, and honest. I believed a man told me the truth. He didn't. He lied. There is a rush up there in Klondike. Next year there will be many men like you selling many claims to many poor people who take many chances in the desire that they wont have to work all their lives hopelessly. They'll be people who don't know, and will believe that you are selling them something which is worth buying. You know, an' I know, you will not. Those claims of mine are no good, and—"

"To hell with all that! What difference does it make to you whether they're any good or not? We're offering you cash because you've got a good title," one of the men broke in, as if impatient to buy before the steamboat's whistle sounded.

"You see, we are going to organize a company and want those claims to—" his partner broke in with additional argument. But Anse slowly shook his head and then put his batch of bread on a shelf and covered it with a flour sack.

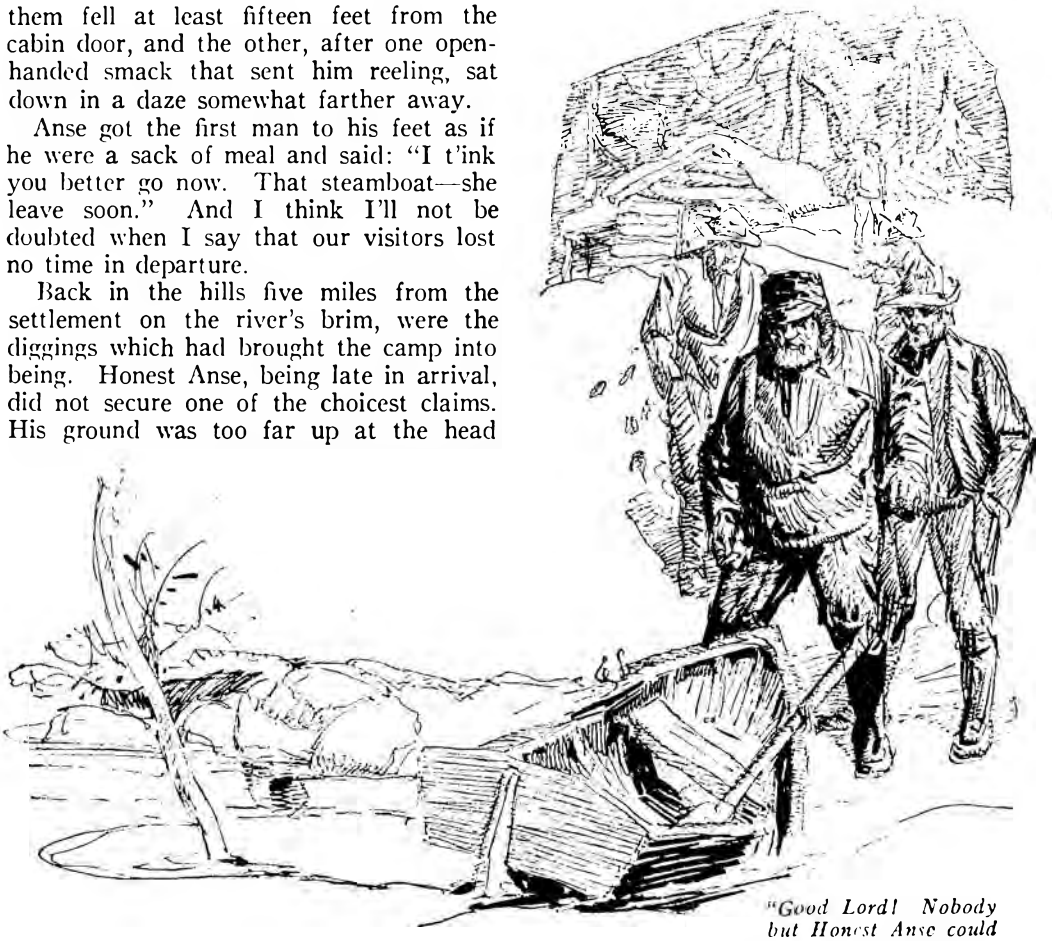
"That's just what I t'ought you wanted them for and just why I wont sell," he said, again facing the visitors. "Those claims no good. Nothing in them. I'm too good a miner not to found out before I left them. That's why they're not for sale. If a friend of mine want to waste time on them, thinkin' I was mistaken, I'd give them to him for nothing. But to men like you—no! Not for more than you could pay! Now you get out before I t'row you out!"

They couldn't believe it. They couldn't understand such an attitude, and before I could interfere—he had done just what he threatened to do—thrown them out! He did it in a calm, remorseless, patient, matter-of-fact way—so effectually that one of

them fell at least fifteen feet from the cabin door, and the other, after one open-handed smack that sent him reeling, sat down in a daze somewhat farther away.

Anse got the first man to his feet as if he were a sack of meal and said: "I t'ink you better go now. That steamboat—she leave soon." And I think I'll not be doubted when I say that our visitors lost no time in departure.

Back in the hills five miles from the settlement on the river's brim, were the diggings which had brought the camp into being. Honest Anse, being late in arrival, did not secure one of the choicest claims. His ground was too far up at the head



"Good Lord! Nobody but Honest Anse could do that!"

of that little stream to share in much of the gold it was to produce; but there he built his cabin, felled logs for the fires that were to melt the frozen earth and patiently plodded his way. Frequently he would pass our claims, which were more fortunately located down near the stream's mouth, bearing upon his immense shoulders packs of such magnitude as would have been impossible for any other man in that country. One night he came late to my cabin door, staggering under a load that was too heavy even for his enormous strength and said: "My friend, I rest here tonight if you let me. My pack too heavy to get through with this night."

And upon my earnest invitation and welcome he got from beneath a huge load consisting mostly of flour.

"Seems to me, Anse, you're laying in a mighty big stock of flour for one man," I remarked.

Grinning sheepishly, he explained: "She's not all mine. Too much for me; but coming up the trail I find me that poor old faller called Daddy Joyce."

He said nothing more, and I thought of Joyce, a bent, wearied and hitherto unsuccessful old prospector who had, perhaps for the first time in his seventy years of life, secured ground that promised riches.

"Played out! I find him in the snow, an' carry him to the first cabin down on Number Six below. He'll be all right by morning," Anse said. "And me—I tried to get through with his pack and mine and —by damn! I'm not so strong as when I to this country came!"

He roared with laughter as if the joke were on himself, and thus doubly appreciated. He seemed oblivious to the possibility that there was any extraordinary kindness in his own laborious efforts to save not only a man's life, but carry his burden, and made of it all a passing jest. He was more inclined to give me camp gossip.

"Lot of men in this country that have no business here," he said, as he seated himself at my table and attacked the huge skillet of baked beans I had heated for his supper. "Today there came to that cabin and cache I build myself down in the camp that man Bowensweiger—him what comes from New York, where he says his father was a commission dealer. He has no dried apricots, which he learns man must eat to keep off scurvy later in the year. By mistake that which was to come to the trading post on last trip of the steamboat before the river freezes is lost. This *chechahco,* Bowensweiger, hears I have some. He tried to buy. I tell him I am no commission dealer and have no more them dried apricots than I need; but he begs so hard, I being a fool, give him half of all I have. It is not good for us who know what we must have to have to give half of things we need ourselves to them that have no business coming to this Alaska. Huh?"

I was annoyed by his unselfishness, and said so.

"Why did you give him half of what you had?" I demanded. "There must be others in the camp who have some and could spare a little, a pound or so at least."

"He said I was the only one he could get any from. He had been to all the others. And—me—maybe I don't get scurvy anyhow. I am a strong man. He is a little feller, not used to a climate like this, huh?"

BUT a peculiar thing took place just two days later when Bowensweiger appeared at my cabin—just in time to eat lunch—and told me he had come to see if I had a few pounds of dried apricots I could spare because he was short and was afraid he would get scurvy before the winter season was over. There were two distinct reasons why he got nothing from me: first because I had nothing to spare, and second because I didn't like the man. I'm not too kindly and generous, anyhow. Yet when I heard later he had made a tour of the gulch and got a few pounds here and there, I had no regrets. It seemed to me that the inherited commercial instincts of this man Bowensweiger were finding an outlet even there in a land which had thus far been untainted. I said nothing of the visit but thought much. I feared I might hear other things later. And I did.

It was after winter had crawled through its darkest months, when all supplies at the immature and hastily stocked trading-post had been exhausted until even a sack of salt could not have been bought for its weight in gold, that I got a notice to attend a miners' meeting in the trading-post. Now, a miners' meeting in those distant days was the most serious event in our lives. We lived in a time and a land that knew no other authority and had no other laws, quite as if we who were completely out of the world and small in numbers could be left to shift for ourselves. It was the true democracy in which if a score of men signed a petition for justice, all men in the district came at the appointed hour to elect an impartial chairman and judges, and hear and decide upon the case. Always it took place in the trading-post, which was the largest building in the camp. Always it was incumbent upon all within reach to respond, for what affected one affected another, a call of duty. Again, such calls were so seldom, so remarkable, that they were heeded. Men might leave their cabins and fires reluctantly, but even the most laggard went lest he incur the scorn of his fellows.

So on the appointed day down the white trails we went, singly, or in groups, speculating upon the cause of the rare exigency, and perhaps annoyed by the waste of time in a land where even the bleakest and coldest periods of each day were precious. The meeting was called for four o'clock in the afternoon, at which hour in those drear winter latitudes it is dark, at that time of the year. It seemed to me when I entered the smoke-drenched atmosphere of the trading-post that every white man within our territory was there. True, there were not so many, possibly four score of us in all, for ours was the sole camp in the heart of a frostbound country stretching from the North Pole to some hundreds of miles south, more hundreds east, and a thousand west. A land a fifth as large as the United States of America, with a total white population of less than six hundred men. In grim patience they selected a chairman who climbed upon the wooden counter and called the meeting to order. There was silence. It seemed as if one could hear the smoke curling up beneath the tin reflector of the kerosene lamp above his head.

"Bowensweiger," he said, "is accused of having cornered the dried fruit of this camp. You men all know what this means to those who would avoid scurvy, the curse

of the North. Bowensweiger is accused by those who demanded this miners' meeting of having asked a half-ounce of gold—ten dollars per pound—from men who are suffering from scurvy, which has broken out. There are seven bad cases in the camp that are known. Will the man who headed the signers of that petition for the meeting get up now and state his facts?"

The chairman sat on the rough wooden stool that had been thrust on top of the counter, and the echoes of his voice had not ceased winding around the stock hung from the crude beams, and the half-emptied shelves, and the adzed faces of the logs, before a man had sprung up to the counter and made his arraignment.

"I'm one of those that this—" And he used a violent epithet which caused the chairman to caution him. "I'm one of those that this Bowensweiger came to last autumn, and he talked me into letting him have dried fruit I couldn't spare. I sold it to him at what it cost me, with no charge for all the work I had getting it, toting it on my back, in a canoe, and on a dog-sled. Last week my pardner's knee got stiff and then swelled up, and when I stuck my finger into the flesh it made a dent that couldn't be rubbed out, and that stayed there. And I was sorry I'd let Bowensweiger have the apricots that would have kept such a thing from coming on. True, I'd let him have the stuff before I became pardners with Bill Trumley. And Bowensweiger laughed at me when I begged for a few pounds to cure my pardner and said he had plenty he could sell at a half an ounce a pound. Half an ounce—ten dollars a pound—for what I'd let him have for half a dollar—fifty cents, four bits! To save the life of as good a pardner as any man ever had—my pardner Bill. And by God, whether this meetin' does or doesn't, I'll save my pardner if I have to kill that—"

"Steady! Steady! This is a miners' meeting, and if you've got nothing more to say that deals with facts, sit down," admonished the chairman, and called for the next complainant.

Backed up against the door to bar the opening, stood Anse. "Go slow!" he cried.

THERE was a bustle, and voices calming the first witness, and hands dragging him, excited and angry, into the background; then another man stated his case. He had to be helped forward, for he hobbled on crude crutches, and under the flare of the lamps his skin had the dried, perished, worn-out look of a corpse's. His voice was hoarse, as if roughened by a rasp, when he spoke, and he was sparing with words. He had not drawn back into the crowd, all standing, for there were no seats, before others thrust themselves forward. Their stories varied only in the degree of necessity for that which would save the lives of themselves or friends. And the tensity grew with each testimony until men found themselves unaware of their fellows, clenched, indignant, leaning forward with anger at this repetition of a tale of infamous rapacity.

The last witness had been called by the

chairman. As was the custom, Bowensweiger was called to come forward and state his side of the cause. There was a half-minute of silence, and no response.

Again his name was called, and this time it provoked a harsh, derisive laugh from some man in the forefront who said: "Mr. Chairman, you waste time. You can call till you're dumb, and get no answer. He isn't here. He aint comin', either. Knows better. A half an hour ago I passed his cabin. He was standin' behind a winder—lookin' out with a rifle or an ax in his hands. I seen him. He's goin' to fight for what he holds. He wont give in to nothin' or nobody."

It was as if that blunt evidence cast loose the last remaining strand of restraint which had flimsily held those in the post. Some of them were impulsive and unused to repression or suppression. A roar of angry voices suddenly rose in which each man, striving to speak to his nearest fellows, was compelled to shout his words if they were to be heard. There was a pandemonium of oaths, threats, suggestions, and at last a dominant cry: "A rope! A sled-line! Anything. It doesn't matter what we get. Take a gun! Kill him! Damn him! Come on, let's get it over with!"

The chairman, a cool, wise man who never lost his head, was on his feet, but his big voice failed to reach or quell the shouters. Here and there a sane man, dreading mob action, strove to influence those around him. The men beneath the tin lamps swirled like eddies in a tormented freshet, each revolving around its little whirlpool, and then suddenly as if the final restraint had been cast off, moved in a body toward the door of the great log post.

I HADN'T lost my head, but I was angry, and also I wanted to get outside into the coolness and freshness of air to think, or act. Hence I was one of those who first neared the crude plank door that afforded egress. I halted—retreated so sharply for a yard or so that those behind me seemed to shove me like a wave. There, backed up against the door, with both huge arms outstretched as if to bar the opening with his body, with huge shoulders thrust forward a trifle, and huge head bent, stood Honest Anse.

"Slow! Go slow!" he cried. "I have been no witness in this. I said nothing, not one word." And all the queer wording and discrepancies of his adopted tongue sounded magnified but were distinctly understood. He waited there for a moment as if to let his words sink in, and his brave eyes swiftly stabbed here and there as if gauging and appraising the tempers of those whom he scrutinized. "I got a raight to speak too, huh? I too bain a witness, and this bain a mainers' meetin', aint she?"

"That's right. Anse is right!" some one cried. "Sure—we all know Anse—Honest Anse! Let him talk," shouted another voice, and the crowding behind me was stopped as if the men had come to their senses.

I watched him, standing there barring the trading-post door with his powerful arms, and saw all the great spirit of him in his eyes. He waited, watchfully, as if abiding an opportune time, and then slowly his arms came down to the sides of his body, hesitated and then lifted as his hands—big, clumsy things—were spread in a sort of appeal.

"Listen," he said, "I could say what this man has done to me. I could say that I let him have stuff that I needed, too. All that. But he doesn't know, as we men of the North do, what he does."

Of course that wasn't exactly the way he said it, in that strange use of tongue that was his, but just the same it is what he said.

"Bowensweiger did nothing wrong, as he sees it. He bought all of something that he knew would be beyond price later on, and—now he believes himself right in making his profit. That is so, is it not? Many of you know me, Anse Andersen. I have been in many camps. In some of them men were hanged and—those who hanged them were sorry when they were no longer angry. Let us not be sorry when it is too late. It is bad for a man to be sorry—too late. And so, I talk."

He stood watching them, that brave defender of a principle, barring the trading-post door, until satisfied that he had their attention; then abruptly he flung one huge hand upward, looking over their heads and called: "Mr. Chairman of this mainers' meeting, I ask you to let me go first and talk with this man Bowensweiger. I give my promise that if I not come baick in ten minutes this meeting can go on."

I couldn't think of any reason why he wished to make the visit or why he wanted a ten-minute recess, unless it was simply to delay matters a little further, as he had already succeeded in doing, to give the

crowd time to cool off. He certainly would not attempt to save Bowensweiger by flight, for in that land flight was an impossibility with so many lean, hard, fit trail men to take up the pursuit. Many of them were famous mushers with records for speed and endurance; Honest Anse was anything but a fast man, and Bowensweiger about as untrained a tenderfoot as could be found.

It looked to me as if a mountain were lurching inward.

"Men, you all know Honest Anse," the chairman said. "I take it on my own head to grant him the ten minutes. During that time I wish to bring another matter before this meeting, the formation of a permanent committee on miners' meeting calls."

A SHREWD chairman, that man—and a shrewd diversion; but men stared, nevertheless, at the big old advertising clock behind the chairman's head as if to mark the time of Anse's departure until he quietly opened the door, letting in a draught of cold air that fell in tiny snow crystals, and then closed it behind him.

The selection of a permanent committee which was to decide whether a dispute was of sufficient importance to call men from their work to attend a meeting, was an important innovation, and one that had been frequently discussed; but a grimmer business seemed to have settled itself into the minds of the miners, and like most of those about me, I found myself fascinated by the long hand of the clock, striding along with jerks at regular intervals, as if remorselessly checking the duration of Anse's absence. When six minutes had elapsed, I could no longer pay full attention to the chairman's words; at seven they became confused; at eight I no longer heard them. At nine I began to turn, as did others, and watch the door as if its inward swing would prove whether Honest Anse had at last broken a distinguished record for infallible probity.

Exactly on the minute there came a thumping against the door as if some one outside impatiently kicked it with a moccasined foot demanding entrance. Being the nearest, I stepped forward and jerked it open, and it looked to me as if a mountain were lurching inward. Even that giant of a man, Anse Andersen, bent under the weight of three hundred pounds of dried fruit that loomed up in gunny-sacks over his shoulders, the back of his neck, and his leonine head! He staggered inward, bent almost double, and with a single heave of his enormous shoulders relieved himself of his burden by dumping it on the floor.

"There," said he, "been them dam' apricots!" And then with a huge puff of exhaled air and relief that sounded like the single puff of a locomotive, he straightened himself and looked at the astonished men who stood about him in a circle. From the corner of my eye I saw that even the chairman on the plank counter was on his feet and looking downward over all the heads, his mouth hanging open in astonishment.

Honest Anse also seemed to observe him, and before anyone could speak called, in his impossible dialect, "Mr. Chairman!" But a sudden explosion of voices drowned him, with questions, comments and expletives. He silenced them with a great roar: "Mr. Chairman, I would like to speak!" And when the chairman gained something like silence, Anse said: "Bowensweiger was very sorry when I explained to him all he had done. It is left to me to do what is right. And I think that any man that sold stuff to Bowensweiger should have back as much as he sold at the price he got. What is left over, which seems to be quite a lot, should be divided among the men that have scurvy. If they can pay, they should, at the price the trader says is right, and the money is all to be paid to the trader, who will then give it and his account to Bowensweiger. Is that fair?"

There were two distinct parties present: one which maintained the point that the commercially minded cornerer should be punished, and the other, less bloodthirsty, which favored a dismissal of the entire question on the terms suggested by Honest Anse. They fell into disputes that waxed from a murmur to a roar, and again it was Anse who gained control—by suddenly leaping to the counter beside the now frantic chairman and outroaring them all.

"By damn!" he cried. "Are we but a lot of boys who can't think, or reason, or are we men? Listen! I bring you back not only all the dried fruit Bowensweiger bought, but all he had of his own before he bought any. What do you want? Could any man do more? A man makes a mistake. He finds it out. He gives up more than he got. It's there—on the floor—in that pile. Does it do any good to punish a man after that? After it's more than made up? Is there any man here who has not in his life done a fool thing—and who, after all—maybe didn't make up for it? If so, he's the man to punish Bowensweiger. But I tell you this, that when he gets to Bowensweiger's cabin, he'll have to meet me at the door! And I'll be down and out before he'll get in to hurt that poor fool who thought he could make money in the same way they do where he came from. And if you men don't agree to it, I'll take that stuff back where it came from and brain the first man that tries to stop me!" And then, before anyone could reply, and with one prodigious leap over the heads of the men beneath him, he landed in the little open space around that pile of stuff that was the cause of contention, and with two huge fists doubled in readiness, and his great body crouched beneath its enormous shoulders, his pillar-like legs wide and knees bent to spring, he stood defiant, indomitable and waiting, like a grizzly bear at bay and ready to meet all comers.

THERE was a minute of tension, and it was broken by a laugh from some man in the crowd, who bawled: "Good for Anse! Honest Anse! Mr. Chairman, I move we accept his plan and call it square with the *chechahco,* Bowensweiger."

A dozen seconds were shouted. Even the most obdurate yielded to the change of atmosphere and the vote was unanimous. Not until then did the big man by the gunny-sacks relax, and then slowly his face took on a satisfied grin, as he said: "By damn! That been a good way to fix it, huh? By damn, yes!"

And then he reached out to where I stood, caught my arm and dragged me close so that he could whisper in my ear:

"You stay here and get twenty pounds of those apricots for me because mine were all used up weeks ago—and I am afraid of scurvy."

"Why not stay and get them yourself?" I demanded, and again he whispered his reply but this time with a shy grin.

"Because I t'ink I better go back to Bowensweiger's cabin and see how he been comin' along. You see I had to save his dam' neck for him, and I had to be back here in ten minutes—so I hit him over the head with the handle of the ax he tried to cut me with."

IT was not until the following forenoon, after we had trudged the homeward trail together, that I had full insight into the mind of Honest Anse. He walked heavily that morning, although unburdened save for the few pounds of dried fruit that hung like a wart between the great breadth of his shoulders. He seemed disinclined to speech, although in that there was nothing so very unusual despite the fact that our mutual liking was such that if he had a lapse to conversation and confidence, it was always with me—for whom, for some unaccountable reason, he had formed a regard.

We trudged up the miles of trail, beaten down solid until it was like a narrow irregular ribbon between high banks of snow, winding beneath the snow-laden pines, branching off to the surface of the ice-bound snow-laden stream, passing the black waste and pay-dumps of claims, the still idle windlasses above the mouths of laboriously burned shafts and pits, and toward noon reached my own claim and cabin. It was through my insistence that he halted for food. While I lit the fire in the "Yukon stove" and prepared a miner's meal, he sat hunched over, dejected, in my bunk, staring at the slab floor as if engrossed with some portentous problem. He sat at the table and sighed deeply before voicing it.

"If a man lies to save a life," asked he, "is he a liar?"

"Shouldn't think so," I replied, and then, remembering his stern code of honor, "that is, I mean to say that in rare instances a lie seems justifiable—say, if it is to save a man's life, for life is the greatest possession any man may have."

"God, here lies Honest Anse. You knew him. That is enough. Amen."

He shook his shaggy head as if still in doubt and stared in abstraction at the food which he ate automatically, avidly, quite as if the animal being that demanded food was separate from the thinking entity that pondered its problems.

Finally, pushing the empty tin plate aside, he lifted his blue eyes to mine in a fixed appeal and said: "I lied to save the life of Bowensweiger. That useless fool is out of his own kind of place. They'd have hanged him, and it would have been a shame, a pity, a mistake. He was brave, too. That is, he would have fought for what he thought was his rights. He doesn't know men like those down below, men like these on the gulch, men like we are, men of the North. Bah! What a fool! He thought he could frighten them with an ax or a gun! Why, some of them would have rushed him and wrapped a rifle-barrel around his neck before he could have fired a shot! I told him after I went back that he must go out on the first boat in the spring. And I told him that if he ever told anybody the truth, I'd kill him, and so I will, because he, and you, are the only men living that know I lied, and a man like me doesn't feel good when some one knows that he has lied."

The enormous pride of the man in his reputation for the truth was thus exposed. A wholesome vanity, with a universal spread of which this might be a better, or at least a more certain, world! I sat pondering over the complications of such universal applications of truth before the man who had no doubts whatever, and who was downcast because he had told just one lie to save a man from a noose. It dawned upon me that I was in no position to utter platitudes before the blazing light of such a white conscience, and that he must be his own judge. So I said nothing, save to assure him that from my own viewpoint he had done the right thing.

I believe he was still thinking of that admirable and praiseworthy deceit when he stood outside in bidding me good-by, with the little lump of dried fruit between his shoulders, and his blue eyes staring upward at the sky as if seeking an answer from an untroubled and judicious God in Whom he had a perfect and unfaltering faith. I watched him when he trudged out into the main trail, sturdily attacking the white chill that lay between his cabin and mine. But I didn't know it was the last time I was ever to see that great bulk of a powerful man striding along.

ANSE'S cabin, as I have said, was beyond others and was further isolated through the circumstance that the two claims below him had sold out to the owner of still another one, and were being worked solely for assessment purposes. Hence there was no near neighbor to discern the absence of smoke from a chimney. A man wishing to make some inquiries finally tramped up the gulch to Anse's cabin and —Honest Anse had died alone, evidently from pneumonia—had been dead for days.

This was not the first death in that lonely camp on the Yukon; but was the first of a man who, if not universally loved, was universally respected. Even his enemies—for no man can mercilessly, uncompromisingly and invariably utter the truth without making some enemies—were compelled to admire him. It was due to his renown that he was not merely dumped into a hole near his cabin by a few who could spare the time, and forgotten. His body was carried on the shoulders of silent and sorrowing men over the long white trails to the camp by the river, and rested in state while we laboriously made his grave in the little cemetery high up on the hill and overlooking the clustered roofs of the settlement below. A grave was a serious undertaking at that ice-blocked season of the year. Trees had to be felled, skillfully piled and burned on the pitifully small area which constitutes the final holding of any man, be he huge or small, worthless or great, unknown or renowned. The embers then had to be removed, the few inches of thawed earth dug out, and the process repeated until sufficient depth was gained. The few of us who burned a hole for the grave of Honest Anse were his friends, and when the resting place was sufficient, went below to report.

It was a morning of unforgettable severity. A rare blizzard heralding the beginning of the Arctic spring season drove tiny chunks of sleet and snow with wounding force upon any unprotected spot as the whole camp climbed speechlessly up the hill. A man who had once been a trumpeter in the army walked ahead, snuggling a battered old brass instrument underneath his fur parka to keep the mouthpiece from burning his lips with cold when it came time to use it. The pines and silver birch trees up in the woods behind moaned and rocked under the storm. Malemute dogs, with that strange animal sense of death, threw shaggy throats upward and mournfully wailed requiem. Blasts and swirls of the storm lent moans when we laid Honest Anse, wrapped in his blankets, in the ground of the last earthly claim that would ever be staked in his name. Nobody seemed to know what to do after that act, and men looked at one another in embarrassment. It didn't seem right to lay such a man away without some reference to his virtues or some petition to God Almighty to receive him into His tender guardianship. Some one mumbled a word to the trader, and he shook his head; and finally after many others had declined, the man who had been chairman of our last miners' meeting came forward, stood at the feet of Honest Anse, made a gesture, and the men bent their heads in the furious storm.

"God—God—" the chairman began, choked, and then again: "God, here lies Anse—Honest Anse. You knew him. That is enough. Amen."

THE battered old trumpet tried to play "Taps;" the trumpeter broke on the last high note and turned away. The earth fell hastily from the shovels of men who said not a word. If their hearts were as mine, and I suppose most of them were, they merely shared a common numbness of grief. That numbness and silence endured even after we regained the trading-post whose warmth was welcome after that period of storm and cold.

Without the formality of a miners' meeting it was conceded that the mining claims of Honest Anse must be turned over to the trader to administer, and men shook their heads sorrowfully, knowing that thus far they had proved unprofitable. The trader called my name, and I went up to the counter behind which he stood.

"When the boys cleaned up and fastened Anse's cabin, they found this on a stool alongside his bed under a patent-medicine bottle," he said, and handed me a soiled envelope painfully addressed with a lead pencil.

I tore it open and read:

I wayed apercots on my skails & you took twu pounds to mutch which if i keap on bein sick i wisht youd take back to Bowensweiger.

A. Andersen.

But I couldn't read it aloud, because the knowledge that this man—who by all worldly estimation was a failure, this dead man—had paid his last debt, blinded my eyes with tears.

Ike's bulk and fist came in useful to Hortet.

How the Croix Is Won

By WARREN HASTINGS MILLER

Fresh from a recent sojourn in the Sahara, Mr. Miller brings you this thrilling story of the famed Foreign Legion in a light-hearted game with death—a story you will remember for a long time.

Illustrated by William Molt

IT was in friendly country; yet the battalion adjutant had been stolen the night before—carried off in his sleeping-bag like a sack of wheat!

Hortet and his squad were discussing that indignity over the morning *petit déjeuner,* where the Légion was camped in the open on the plateau of the Tifalelt. Behind them rose the mighty range of the Grand Atlas, its snowy peaks rosy with the first rays of sunrise, its green ridges and defiles shredded with the light vapors of the night. Behind them two days' march lay the old Moroccan town of Bou Denib, military headquarters for the turbulent district of the Tifalelt and the Oued Draa. They were *en route* for the big concentration at Dar el Beïda, a concentration of the Légion, Mounted, Battalion d'Afrique, 8th and 2nd Tirailleurs, 15th Senegal, Compagnie Saharienne, and 13th Chasseurs, which had for its object the relief of Tighemart, a walled town beleaguered by thousands of enemy tribesmen.

The Légion was mounted—well mounted—and that was how they had acquired Hortet. They had met the Chasseurs, one company of them, sometime before, both commands being quartered in the same *poste* for the night. The Chasseurs were the crack cavalry of North Africa, with splendid Berber mounts, new and polished harness, each man of them smart in his red-and-blue embroidered vest, red fez, baggy trousers and shiny boots. The Légion had but sorry nags, harness in strings, boots out at the toes.

Next morning they were ten miles on their way before Commandant Knecht noticed the unusual excellence of the legionary equipment, the soundness of their horses, the gay spirits that seemed to animate his whole battalion. "Some miracle of industry?" he asked of the *maréchal des logis,* or commissary sergeant.

"But yes, *mon commandant.* It is that they have set us an example, those chasseurs-là!"

And it was not until the horses were washed that night—and color ran off in pools, and bridles turned out to have the number "13" stamped on them, and saddles with the corps-mark of the Chasseurs on them but carefully filled with pipe-clay, that Knecht comprehended the enormity of the loot. Then he roared in his beard, a berserk guffaw that told the adoring Légion that he was pleased to his toes. Also there was Hortet. There was one more man in the battalion than when they had met the esteemed Chasseurs. It seems he had borrowed a page out of the Légion's book, looted one of their uniforms and dressed himself in it, and joined a squad on his own, a squad in Sergeant Ike Smith's platoon.

"*I* aint sayin', Giner'l, that we're in dooty bound to send this hobo back!" that ex-cowboy was remarking with a leathery grin as he reported on the recruit in the commandant's tent that evening. "He's a li'l ornery string-bean of a cuss, sorter dogie-like—on'y you wouldn't know what a dogie is, sir—but he looks good to this ol' hoss-killer." Ike grinned some more and pulled foolishly at a lock of black hair that had a way of falling down slantwise across his forehead from the carefully made-up part. Knecht thought that any man with enterprise enough to steal a legionary's uniform *ought* to be looked over, and sent for Hortet. He hated to part with a good man, no matter how acquired!

AND then Ike's jaw dropped open so you could lay a ham in it as Hortet presented himself at the headquarters tent door. The commandant had said *"Ouff!"* in a sort of strangling noise, and then jumped up from the camp table; *"C'est vous, alors!"* Then he had flung himself upon the diminutive legionary standing at attention and was kissing him on both cheeks. They hugged until Ike could hear the ribs crack. They grunted and wheezed torrents of French endearments, mostly abusive, while Ike looked on, reflecting that Frogs were good *hombres,* though impulsive.

"This one," said Knecht full-throatedly as he disengaged himself and stood with Gallic tears shining in his eyes, "look you, Sergeant Smith, he bears a charmed life, this one! He was with me in the old Zouaves at the taking of the Col de Medeah. A devil of a charge, that! The Arabs were pelting us with lead slugs, two thousand against three hundred of my zouzous. And this one falls, shot through the head. But it is a good head, look you, solid, the head of a south France mountaineer. We took his rifle and his cartridge box and swept on, leaving him for the stretcher-bearers. And *presto! "Diable!* Where are my gun and my cartridges, *morbleu!"* We hear him pushing his cries through the roar of battle. And there comes, this one after us, his forehead bound with a handkerchief, the gun of a dead zouzou in the hand! He had a cracked skull, but it was a skull *bien solide;* and together we were first over the Arab breastworks. You cannot kill him, my friend! The story of his wounds alone would make an epic of the Armée d'Afrique!

"Again," Knecht went on with enthusiasm, while Ike grunted noncommittally and shifted a huge boot in the sand of the tent floor, "we take Mascara, and my zou-zous are camped in a little mud village on the outskirts. The rain, he comes down in torrents. We are *bien* cold! We make fires of the straw roofs of the *gurbis.* But they are wet, so we set them off with cartridges, which were paper, those days. This one is bending over my straw pile and throwing a cartridge-powder on it to help the flame, when—*pouf!* his whole cartridge-box of four packets of *cartouches,* she explodes, and my cabbage is jumped as the fish one turns in the fry-pan. He is *horriblement* burnt. And now he has no bowels, for the doctors they take them out. Can you kill such a one, my friend?"

"Might, if you dropped our 65 mountain-gun on him," remarked Ike dryly.

"Bah! You Americans! Listen," went on the commandant vivaciously. "We are occupied in mining for the foundations of a fort for the camp of Fondouk in the Metiajas. One explodes the mines at the hour when the *marmites* are put off the fire for supper. One misses this one, who is late for the soup and has a mine to set off. Then, *bong*—one hears an explosion

épouvantable, and all the camp runs. We find this one lying in the middle of the débris. His fuse is slow, so he has been blowing on it to make it go. . . . . *Voilà!* Three months in hospital, and he is quitted of an eye; but soon he is back in the ranks again. *Alors—"*

"I get him, then?" said Ike without emotion. "Come on, wart."

"Ouff! Pig! Chicken! Cabbage!" exploded Knecht at the imperturbable Ike. "He bears a charmed life, I tell you! Guard well my *piou-piou,* pig of a sergeant! The Légion is fortunate."

Ike saluted and went out with his recruit.

It was just that bluff democracy of Commandant Knecht's that made him adored of the whole command. The Légion had a habit of shooting its unpopular officers, at some convenient moment during battle. They would not tolerate a bully, nor one with airs, nor one with the martinet notions of man-and-officer that prevailed throughout the rest of the Army of Africa. The officer had to be better than his men, all around, to stay long in the Légion!

HORTET, as we said, was discussing with his squad the kidnaping of their adjutant. He was a little dried-up man, with one gleaming green eye and the mustached countenance of one of those old Gauls that Cæsar found when first he came into France. His reputation for bearing a charmed life had more than made good since his desertion into the Légion from the chasseurs. He was the only Frenchman in it, and was on the regimental books as a Belgian for reasons that adjutants of other commands could explain. Anything that Hortet said went, with his squad. Even Ike Smith, sergeant of the platoon, was partly convinced. The big Texan had kept a cynical eye on "the wart," being "from Missouri." One thing was certain: Hortet had a cool indifference to odds and dangers that made him get away with the most wildly impossible undertakings.

"Wuth somepin, that nerve of his'n," thought Ike. "Them sheep'll foller, whatever he does. An' that fetches the hull platoon, when I wants the buckos to go get them hosstyles! He don't ast 'em do they want ter live forever—jest starts off on his hind laigs."

"Morbleu!" Hortet was saying to an attentive squad. "Is it a friendly country when thieves creep into camp all along the march and steal even the pack-train mules? Last night an Arab sneaks past the sentries and carries off our adjutant, sleeping-bag and all! If I were Knecht I'd begin the war right here!"

He glared at them like an indignant owl. A long black-bearded Russian smiled sourly and said: *"Pouf*—and what would Belgacem do then?"

He was referring to the Sultan of all these Moroccan towns of the Tifalelt and the Draa, a wily old devil who was most cautiously on the fence, waiting to see who was the more powerful, the French or the dissident tribes being stirred to revolt by the emissaries from Abd el Krim up north. If the former won, they would soon force the rest under Belgacem to join them —also punish with fire and sword if he dared help the French now. It was Belgacem's people who had been furnishing the thieves that harassed the Légion's march, ever since Bou Denib. Yet this was perforce "friendly" country. It was necessary to keep Sultan Belgacem quiet, at all costs!

The Russian, who had been an officer in the old Czarist army, appreciated the dilemma that confronted their commandant, but it did not impress Hortet. *"Pardieu!* Two can steal, since it's all among friends!" he exclaimed sardonically. "I vote we steal back our adjutant. He was a good one, that long Norman! We might get a fussy one sent us if nothing is done."

THE squad all laughed, for they knew how Hortet hated martinet adjutants. Irregularity was his middle name, and he disliked calling in the good commandant, over the adjutant's head, into his affairs.

"How will you do it, *mon vieux?"* asked the burly German of the squad, Schwartz by name.

Hortet pointed across the dense low bushes of the plateau to where a walled town of red mud-bricks rose perched on the edge of a deep ravine. "He is there, is it not certain?" he demanded. "The Arab opens his sack, and behold, an officer in full uniform. The *Caïd* of that town knows all about it, name of a hen! He is valuable, that adjutant! No doubt the commandant is sending the *Caïd* polite messages while we camp here. But we—"

Hortet told off his fingers reflectively. "There is the American who is made of leather; there is you, Rossof, you are lazy but cool. And you, Didonc!"—pointing

at a stringy young Italian who was supposed to be a count in his own country but whose principal knowledge of French consisted of the words, "*Dites donc!*"—hence his name.

"That makes four, enough to carry him," went on Hortet. "We four thieves, look you, go to the town and visit the *Caïd's* house. If we don't get our adjutant, we get *him, morbleu!* A little present to our commandant, *mes enfants.* Then he can *talk!*"

"Viddout orders?" gasped Schwartz, to whom discipline was the alpha and omega of life.

Hortet grinned a tight smile that merely creased somewhat the dry skin on his bony skull. "Of course without orders. That American, he will love it, and is he not sergeant? So we have an officer to give us countenance. The commandant must wait and be polite. We are *not* polite, we of the Légion! We bash in the heads of those guards at the gate; we run to the *Caïd's* house—"

"When?" gasped the squad. They were ready for it, to the last man. That was Hortet; he had but to propose something idiotic, and the thing was as good as done.

"Tomorrow night. We give the commandant one day to be polite in. If he does not get back our adjutant by then—I do not like this camping in the open—and are we to be too late at Dar el Beïda to be in the scrimmage?"

That was an unanswerable argument. The Légion was always first, first in the attack, covering the rear-guard in retreat. And Dar el Beïda without the Légion Mounted—not to be thought upon! And this delay over the adjutant, caused by one of the "friendly" towns, looked rather intentional of the wily Belgacem.

BUT the Légion had more than that on their minds next morning. Twenty-six stands of rifles were missing when the camp woke up at dawn!

The whole command, officers and men alike, slept on the ground without tents, with ammunition and supply wagons parked in the center, horses in a rope corral, men in regular rows, with the *faisceaux* or stands of rifles stacked six together at intervals in a straight line. Outside, a *zariba* of thorn-bushes, and beyond that the sentries. They had been posted *en embuscade*—that is, not on regular sentry-beat, but hidden at intervals among the

bushes out on the plateau. Difficult for even a naked black Arab to wriggle through them without being seen and shot! Also the *faisceaux* were chained together where their rifle-muzzles crossed; but that had only made it easier for an Arab to carry off the lot. They could carry a whole piano with ease!

Twenty-six stand; that meant a hundred and fifty-six legionaries weaponless! And a soldier without his gun is the most forlorn object imaginable! All the evidence in sight was a number of rootless bushes scattered over the plain. Those bushes had moved in on the camp last night, each held over a naked tribesman crawling on the ground. Perhaps it had taken them all night to do it; no matter, once at the *zariba,* one could crawl under it and reach the stacks inside. Then the bushes must have moved out again, little by little, you can be sure, and arousing no suspicion in the dark of night among the thousands of them cluttering the plateau.

Of all the weaponless, Hortet was the most furious. Sergeant Ike, contemplating the demented little south of France mountaineer, now dancing with fury upon his cap and tearing open his khaki tunic as if

Hortet had thrown a grenade which crashed in the Caïd's door. It started the fireworks, all right!

it choked him, opined that the "Frawg" was A-1 brand if you only got him mad enough. At that, the green bomb and green chevrons on his collar, which are the corps insignia of the Légion, seemed in danger of being torn off altogether as Hortet clawed at them.

"*Voleurs!* Robbers! *Cambrioleurs!* Thieves of a dead widow's pennies! I suffocate!" he screamed. "Name of ten thousand devils, where are our rifles? Is it to be endured, *morbleu!* Is it that we are to be disarmed in friendly country? Is it that we submit because of the sacred diplomats in Algiers—"

"Hell!" boomed in Ike wearily, "I had a notion, leetle feller—" Hortet sailed up to him, his fist under the cow-man's nose. Ike had not learned yet that you must not interrupt a Frenchman in the full career of an oration unless looking for explosive consequences.

"Big man—I knock off your eyeballs—I break your tooth-jaws!" gritted Hortet, and went to it with a kick in the stomach, a dab at Ike's nose and a yank at his hanging forelock. Ike plucked him off and sat on him for a while. Then he said, with gentle firmness: "When you-all gits mad enough, li'l *hombre,* yo're free to eloocidate some more o' them idees of yourn inter our sufferin' years—pervided, old-timer, they means git thar with somethin'."

HE got off leisurely; and Hortet, who was quick to recognize *force majeur* and bury all animosity, got up and expounded to them a plan that was sheer madness. Ike wiggled both ears and agreed that she was shore a good one. But they could do nothing about it, just then, for the bugles were sounding the assembly. The Légion fell in, a long rank of the armed in front, a rank of the weaponless behind them, for there were too many Arabs around, driving donkeys, driving caravans of camels up from the desert, walking on foot, to let all the world know how it stood with this battalion of the Légion Mounted!

"Guardez-vous! Au drapeau!" rang down the command for attention to the Colors from the sergeants. The long khaki-clad line stood rigid, green bomb and chevrons repeated and repeated endlessly

along the line of turn-over collars on their tunics.

The Colors advanced; the Tricolor of France, and the Légion flag, with its motto *"Honor and Fidelity"* fluttering in the folds. The bugles blew a flourish; Commandant Knecht began addressing them in a broad Alsatian French. He told them of the theft of the night before and what *he* was going to do about it. It was in the main satisfactory, for he marched off half his armed men and the field-piece and sat down with them before the gate of Khabah-er-R'bia, as that Moroccan walled town was called.

Hortet "borrowed" somebody's rifle and came along. He found himself, grim, little and squint-eyed, on the right of Sergeant Ike's platoon. He would have to return that rifle when they got back, and his heart was glowering over it. His eye examined that walled town minutely, its four towers at the corners, its machiolated parapets of red mud-brick, its massive gate of old walnut studded with huge round-headed wrought-iron nails. *His* rifle, his pet Lébel and sighted to a hair, was in there! If the commandant couldn't get it back, *he* was going to, and no nonsense about it, *pardieu!*

The *Caïd* came out—a charming and polite old patriarch in a high-domed headgear wound about with brown camel's-hair cord, a flowing silver and light-blue burnous, and a white beard a yard long. Hortet estimated him at a hundred and eighty pounds and decided that that beard would make a good handle to him.

THE colloquy began. The *Caïd* was introduced by his vizier as Achmed Abd-er-Rhahman, the Slave of the Merciful, *Caïd* of Khasbah-er-R'bia, loyal subject of the Sultan Belgacem, and everlasting friend of the French. Knecht bowed stiffly. This friendship!

The *Caïd* became all bows and urbanity. He laid hand on heart and kissed the back of his own hand, signifying willingness to do that much for the commandant. His face took on an air of trouble, and his hands flew out in gestures of indignation when Knecht told him of the theft of one adjutant and a hundred and fifty-six rifles within a mile of his town. He called down the wrath of Allah on such malefactors. Might all their days come to harm! Might Allah not have mercy on their graves!

"Very well," Knecht cut him short, and Hortet could hear every word, "our friendly ally will, then, make it his business to produce those rifles and that adjutant without delay." He was gruff about it, as well he might be, for there was Dar el Beïda ahead of them, and general staffs do not tolerate commandants who are late for major actions.

The *Caïd's* face grew grave at that, then became all smiles and placation again. Most certainly! By every means in his poor power, search would be made for the missing man and the missing guns! Might Allah lend him wings! All his people, every fighting man, would be told to arm and go forth. "Not at all," interrupted Knecht brusquely. "They stay right here, within the city. And here stay *we*, our cannon planted before the gate. No caravan may come in nor go out, no donkey train, no man, woman, nor child on foot. And the gate will not be closed, lest our cannon have to batter it in."

"But this is war!" Hortet heard the *Caïd* protesting. He called on Heaven to witness the injustice. He took refuge in God—was ever a town so unreasonably besieged!

"Until tomorrow at sunrise," went on Commandant Knecht imperturbably. "By that time our adjutant and those rifles ought to be—found, my dear *Caïd!*" he purred.

Achmed Abd-er-Rhahman left him, speechless with rage—but he and his party were careful not to close the gate behind them.

Hortet was speechless with rage too.

"He lies! He lies, from the tip of his beard to the end of his toes, *mon vieux!*" he told the commandant with the familiarity of the old soldier when they were once alone. "Why waste we twenty hours good time over it?" the little man stormed. "Is it to give him the chance to sneak the rifles *and* our adjutant out over the back wall of the town? What's to prevent him? Our unarmed men and that handful of guards with rifles back at the camp? Can you post men with nothing but a bayonet around a walled Arab town? No! *Diable!* Enter and search the town *now*, while our loot is still there, *mon avis!*"

Knecht sighed. Hortet's arguments were unanswerable from a military point of view, but he couldn't do it.

"Confound those politicoes in Algiers!" he growled. "To make the polite gesture before a man's house, yes. But to enter and search, no! I have gone as far as I

dare, *mon vieux,*" he told Hortet. "Is it that we make hostile towns spring up behind us as we march for Dar el Beïda?" he asked hopelessly.

Hortet petulantly stamped a small foot that no march could weary. "Have I your permission to enter the town—*unarmed,* then?" he asked, and then added, before the commandant could get over his stupefaction at such audacity; "I know a hundred and fifty forlorn and weaponless ones who would follow, *mon commandant!*"

Knecht stood gaping at him like a fish. He had no breath to answer such heights of idiocy as this. "Have you lost your reason, Hortet?" he shouted. "*What?* One third of my whole command in *there?*" He waved a furious hand at the walled battlements. "Without a weapon?"

"Why not?" retorted Hortet placidly, and grinning upon him with a one-eyed squint. "One enters, peacefully. One traverses the streets, visits the *suks,*" (shops) "casually, *n'est-ce pas?* One comes upon the rifles—*et voilà!*"

"Mad, the old one—mad!" said Knecht solemnly and looking around for some one to unburden his feelings upon. Then he pinned Hortet with his vast bulk. "You would be knifed, to the last man, in there, idiot!" he shouted. "Will you drive back a Moorish mob with your bare hands, imbecile? With your bayonets, even?"

"No, with grenades, *mon commandant!*" purred Hortet softly. "The General Staff thinks of everything. We have a wagonload of them, for use in attacks around Dar el Beïda," he reminded Knecht. "My little rabbits will not be so harmless as they look. If the Moors mob us—"

It was the commandant's turn to experience French strangulation by one's own emotions. He tore at his tunic collar, ripped off his blue officer's *kepi* and stamped on it, then seized Hortet and embraced him fervidly.

"To my heart, *cher pot-au-croûte!* To my heart!" he wept. "But what an idea audacious! It is worthy of Napoleon himself, *mon vieux!*" he cried, while the Légion looked on wondering what was up that a commandant should thus comport himself with an old soldier of the zou-zous. But you could expect anything of Knecht when he met a veteran of the old days of baggy pants and fancy-embroidered Arab vests!

"You go in, peacefully—oh, peacefully, dear God!" gulped Knecht in sheer delight. "Just a friendly visit! Can you not see Abd-er-Rhahman licking his chops over that, my friend? And then those rifles will turn up—but certainly they will—in the hands of the good townsfolk, name of a dog!"

"And each of my desolated rabbits will go get him, so long as he can throw a grenade!" Hortet assured him. "They will be *bien* hungry for those good Lébels—"

"*Bah!* Go!" chortled Commandant Knecht. "Said I not that you bear a charmed life! They will all follow you—the sooner the better, for your little visit. Me, I hasten to post *groupes mobiles* about the walls, all the armed men we can spare. And for you I get ready the ambulances—"

"For me but a cup of coffee when we come back, *mon commandant,*" said Hortet. "I always need it, after these little affairs. My nerves—"

"*Va-t-en!* Away! There is no time to lose. You shall have your sacred coffee, name of a name of a name!" Knecht looked for an orderly or some one to lean up against, for he felt that suffocation coming on again.

"LIYAR! Where you-all goin', wart?" It was Ike, who had gotten up from where his company sat at ease in a long line behind the field-piece, facing the walls of Khasbah-er-R'bia and was pursuing Hortet across the plain in long strides.

"Shopping," the little man let drop back over his shoulder, and not halting his fast pace back toward the Légion camp.

Ike caught up some. "Shoppin'?" he demanded in amazement.

"*Oui,* shopping," Hortet confirmed. "Souvenirs, look you—maybe some good red wine. We have permission to visit the town."

Ike caught up. "Looky here, pard, you crazy?" he demanded.

"*Mais non!* We can go in. Visit all the *suks.* See the sights. Maybe Ouled Naïl girls. But no rifles, though," Hortet added, glancing at the bayoneted one Ike carried.

"Then old Knecht's crazy!" affirmed Ike with conviction. "You-all'll get knifed in thar, mighty quick—don't you know that, *hombre?*"

"*Ah, non!*" Hortet flashed the big cowman a wink which had the effect of a total eclipse of his eyesight for the moment. "Want to come—without your rifle?" he added.

Ike felt aspirations rising in him like a

fire. There was no doubt that little Hortet had that effect on people. He was a challenge, a call to all the dare-deviltry that lay in a man. And there was that legend of a charmed life of his! Men would follow *any* wild hope, so long as he led it—and they would stick by him too.

"Huh?" said Ike. "Somepin' up? Shore ye kin count *me* in! Fact, I'd bust ye if ye left me out. As fer no rifles along—smell *that!*" He stuck an iron fist at the head of an iron forearm under Hortet's nose.

"Bah!" snorted Hortet, and seized the wrist in his teeth. "She is worth *nothing,* that! I am serving out grenades."

"Huh?" said Ike with still more interest. "I get mine, li'l man! You savvy?"

He went along. He was still on the fence, but he could not help but marvel when the hundred and fifty weaponless rose up as one man to crowd around Hortet when he led the way to the ammunition wagons. They were happy once more, those bereft légionnaires who had no guns but had prospects! And there was no doubt of the invincibility of Hortet in their eyes.

"Look hyar, you-all needs a guardjeen, Hortet!" said Ike as the mob headed for Khasbah-er-R'bia across the plain again. "Which same is *me.*"

"Eh bien! Leave your rifle with the battery then." Hortet was busy and preoccupied. He formed his company before the commandant, saluted, got formal permission to visit the town.

They were a meek-looking lot, that straggling mob of unarmed légionnaires in their faded khaki blouses and dusty black puttees who made casually for the gate. Their brass-buttoned tunics were bulgy where gathered about the middle by the broad leather belt. They looked like good pickings to the Arab guard, who stopped the first-comers with long flintlock guns and threatening gestures.

Then it was that Ike's bulk and his fist came in useful to Hortet, who merely nodded to him once over shoulder.

"Permission, you black gazabo! Permission to come in! *Fane suk?"* vociferated Ike, and brushing guards out of his way like hatracks. Hortet and the Légion followed. The guards hesitated. There was no order about unarmed men—and that cannon out there was still looking at them. The thing might be loaded with a thousand slugs—who knew?

The Légion straggled into town. Under a long dark archway and out into a wide, dusty street full of camels parked in the shade, donkeys, hens, saddles, and striped date-bags. It was long and straight, that street, its inner wall forming the side of three great *fonduks,* caravansaries, each marked by a gate. The *suks* ran along the main wall of the town, built up against it, booths and booths with gay striped awnnings out over each. The *suk* men were hostile, raising disdainful eyebrows and refusing to budge when an article was pointed out. They would have nothing to do with infidels!

HORTET ruminated on whether to start something now by looting the *suks,* or to wait. He spotted the mosque, its tall square minaret and white dome rising beyond the third *fonduk* at the east end of the town. The *Caïd's* house would be there.

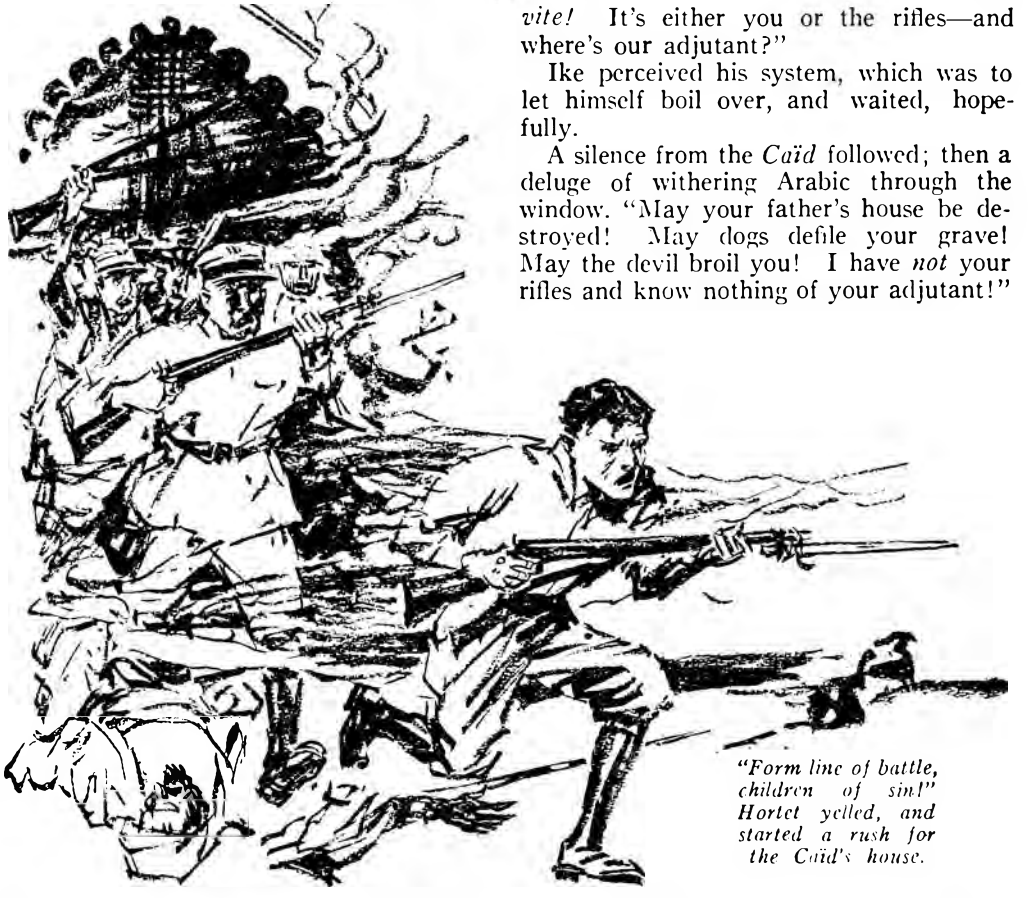
He and Ike led the way down that wide caravan street. The town had become strangely quiet after the first yells and hubbub upon their entrance. It seemed deserted now, the *suk* men sitting cross-legged in their booths like so many images, every camel-driver and black slave vanished within the *fonduk* gates.

The narrow residence street crossing the end of the town looked like death as they entered it. High mud walls, whitewashed, pierced with narrow street doors, a small window or two, harem grills perched on cedar struts hanging out from the second stories, every door and window shut.

"Hospitable guys, these!" sniffed Ike. "Don't see no glad hands nohow, nowhere!"

"It goes better when we reach the mosque square—you shall see," said Hortet confidently, and marched on with his short pins. Unconsciously the Légion closed up into a compact column. The very air of this place was hostile enough to make every straggler hunt the protection of the mass—lest a knife reach out from a doorway and get him!

They turned the corner, and the mosque square opened out before them. Ike felt a shiver of terror gripping even his sole-leather heart. Those high red walls prisoned him in, the outlandish buildings of another civilization, above all the utter blankness of the place of any living human being—this was about as far as could be imagined from anything back in little old Texas! But Hortet stood eying the court



"Form line of battle, children of sin!" Hortet yelled, and started a rush for the Caïd's house.

dispassionately. It had rows of white-washed arches surrounding it, black-shadowed white walls, closed wooden doors under the shade of its second story. The minaret rose high above them now, the white dome and its square masonry ears crowning one wall. And still the silence of death. Two thousand Arabs lived in Khasbah-er-R'bia—say, five hundred fighting men.

Hortet turned to the *Caïd's* door and knocked. It was a fine door, under an archway of twisted Moorish columns and ornamented with tile, but it did not open.

"May you depart in the peace of Allah!" The quavering voice of the *Caïd* floated out from a barred window about twenty feet up.

"We want our rifles," said Hortet. Ike should have been warned by the tone that the little man was beginning to fry and would presently explode, but he laughed: "*That* aint the way, son!"

"For why you laugh, species of a pig!" Hortet turned on him the face of death. "*Silence!*" Then, to the *Caïd*: "*Allez vite!* It's either you or the rifles—and where's our adjutant?"

Ike perceived his system, which was to let himself boil over, and waited, hopefully.

A silence from the *Caïd* followed; then a deluge of withering Arabic through the window. "May your father's house be destroyed! May dogs defile your grave! May the devil broil you! I have *not* your rifles and know nothing of your adjutant!"

Hortet tore off his cap and stamped on it, shook his fists, tore his hair. "*Moutard!*" he roared. "Species of a drowned hen! *C-r-rapule! Coquin!* Bastard of a tadpole!"

IKE sighed. He could not know that Hortet, being French, required time—and breath—to explode properly.

Bow! Hortet had thrown a grenade, and it crashed in the *Caïd's* front door and brought down those twisted columns and the arch in a ruin of masonry. It started the fireworks, all right. A shriek rang out—from a muezzin high in the cupola of the minaret above that no one had seen—and immediately heads in hundreds appeared over the rear walls of the three *fonduks,* doors slammed open all along under the mosque arches, and armed janissaries of the *Caïd* poured out.

A roar went up from the Légion as they spied their own Lébels in the hands of those gaudy warriors, then the arches rocked to the explosions of hurled grenades, and each man went for his. The court looked as if

a cyclone had camped in it! Hortet emerged out of the ruin of dust and masonry and fallen bodies, waving his rifle.

"Form line of battle, children of sin!" he yelled. *"Feu!"* They cleared the *fonduk* wall of those brave enough to remain. There were yells, shouts, explosions within the mosque, more and more of the Légion coming out each with his weapon in his hands.

Ike went to look for the adjutant as they mustered in the square, and Hortet started a rush for the *Caïd's* house. He entered the mosque. It was a wreck, in there, lamps shattered, dead janissaries lying in alcoves and corners, the *mimba* or pulpit overturned and lying awry, everything lootable carried off. The only thing valuable untouched was a large *marabout* tomb looking like pictures of Noah's ark, and the embossed brass plates of *that* had been pried at with bayonets. Ike stood and scratched his head, pulled at his long black forelock. It was a cinch that the adjutant was stowed either in the mosque or the *Caïd's* house. Hortet was 'tending to the latter. Ike went to the tomb. It had a small oval hole in one end, that the spirit of the saint inside might come and go as it willed. He put his mouth to it: *"Hé! Adjutant Duveyrier! Vous est* there?" he asked in his very best French.

A hollow groan answered him.

Ike ran to the *mimba* and ripped off a rail. With it he pried up the tomb cover, and out of it took, in his strong fatherly arms, one emaciated and thirsty adjutant —still in his sleeping-bag sack.

"Water!" whispered Duveyrier. "Those pigs—there, they give me nothing—but air!"

Ike was hasty with his canteen. The adjutant drank and revived somewhat. The twinkle that all the battalion loved came back into his blue Norman eyes. He said, looking up at Ike steadily: "My friend, if you wish one devil of a bed, just try sleeping on the bones of a saint!"

Ike carried him outside and there met Hortet with a squad of the Légion having the *Caïd* in their midst. "We found him, under six of his wives and four concubines," said the little man cheerfully. "Here! I want that!"

He grabbed for the adjutant's sleeping-bag, out of which Duveyrier had been helped. They were pathetically glad to see him again,—that old disciplinarian who played no favorites,—ministering to him with the rough tenderness of soldiers, crowding around him with murmurs of: *"Ça va, mon adjutant?* Give him some bread, you Kolinski! Who's got any wine?"

DUVEYRIER tottered to his feet. He was still every inch the soldier, though only in pajamas, and it was his duty to take command. There were some spare tunics taken off the wounded, a pair of breeches from one poor devil who had got a *yataghan* slash in his groin. Presently he was in uniform again and raised his voice for attention.

"Houp! Fall in, men! Column of fours! By the right flank, *march!"*

They headed for Main Street again, by a new road that led out past the mosque. Some one struck up the refrain of the Légion March, so poignant, so martial; and singing they paraded Khasbah-er-R'bia. They met Commandant Knecht and the rest of the battalion coming in the gate. He had heard the row and decided that etiquette was no longer *de rigeur* with this particular commandant in a friendly country. One glance at the column swinging down Main Street with the adjutant at its head was enough for him: *"Bravo la Légion!"* he yelled. *"Félicitations!"*

"Et mon café?" piped up Hortet, coming out alongside of Duveyrier. *"Voilà!* The rifles, the adjutant—and the *Caïd!* I don't know how dead he is, but he's in there—in my little sack!"

He threw down the adjutant's sleeping-bag—which he had been discreetly dragging somewhere back in the line—as Commandant Knecht came up.

They stood looking at one another for a moment, the battered little one-eyed soldier and the chief of the battalion.

"Tiens! Justice poétique, that!" Knecht grinned, looking down upon the adjutant's sleeping rig, now containing the *Caïd* Abder-Rhahman securely bagged. "It is *we* who have the hostage now! She will be *bien* friendly from now on, this country! *Et voilà!"*

He ripped off the Croix de Guerre medal from his own breast and pinned it on Hortet's while Duveyrier snapped the Légion to attention.

"A mon cœur, mon zou-zou, mon ancien! A mon cœur!" murmured Knecht huskily. And they went to it, French-fashion, while the Foreign Legion looked on with queer feels in their insides, for they were seeing how the Cross of War is won.

Illustrated by
Frank Hoban

Horse Tracks

Wherein our old friend Perkins builds a race-track out of a lake in Florida—a joyous tale by the author of "Horseshoes," "Goats That Run" and many other good ones.

By JONATHAN BROOKS

THIS is the book of Lamentation, and blame near the end of the book. But I don't deny there have been revelations in it, and mebbe you could just as well call it the book of Job, because that old boy with all his boils never had any more grief than what I have. Lum Bagley is just as bad an affliction as any boil that ever boiled.

When Tommy Tharp and I was campaigning old Lam', my blind trottin' mare, through the Middle West, Lum hooked on to us like a leech and stuck till we finally pried him loose way up in Michigan about eighteen degrees north of zero. He was our bettin' commissioner. But he tried nine times to pin the double-cross on us, and what with dodgin' the decoration and pullin' him away from nine different ladies in nine different towns with whom he got mixed up with, he give us more trouble than old Job ever dreamed of.

So we fin'ly shook him, and sold old Lam', and hit for Florida, where it is warm and a man can thaw out. Then what does he do but show up here, claimin' to represent some Michigan clients interested in real-estate promotion, and bringing a professional horseshoe pitcher with him? He hangs on to me closer'n my shadow at noon. But Tommy's some horseshoe pitcher himself, and when Lum and his buddy try to trim us for a grand, with magnetized shoes, Tommy comes through and we take Lum's jack. Same time, while Tommy shoes this Tomlinson, Lum's buddy, we're shooin' old Lum away from the wealthy Mrs. Bocaw, a widow woman here in Wassumpqua that he's givin' a run around.

"Lum didn't seem any too well pleased when we took him and Tomlinson this morning," says Tommy Tharp, after supper.

"No, nor he wasn't exactly happy when she ast me to breakfast afterward, and turned her back on him, either," I said.

"A crooked fool and his money," says Tommy.

"And his women, too, are soon parted," I said. "I'll bet Lum is sore as a ringbone.

But I should worry. If he'll clear out of here, and leave us be—"

"No such luck," groans Tommy. "That guy'll stick like a burr in a trotter's tail."

AS usual the little guy's right. I had hardly finished pickin' my teeth, out here on the front porch, when up comes this long, lean limb of trouble. I'm lookin' for stormy weather, but he don't let on to be huffy at all.

"Well, Perk, y'old hound, how are yuh?" he says, smilin' all across his hatchet face. "Sight for sore eyes."

"If yuh hadn't come around playin' me and Tommy here for a couple suckers in this horseshoe business," I said, "y'r eyes wouldn't be sore."

"That's a hot one," laughs Lum. "Yuh cert'nly slipped one over on us, Perk. And Tommy, old scout, yuh cert'nly swing a mean horseshoe, 'sall I gotta say. This Tomlinson's beat it. Need a new manager, Tommy? I'd like to take yuh under my wing—"

"Just like bein' under a buzzard's wing," snorts Tommy. He don't like Lum Bagley, and never did. "No, thanks. I got a good manager."

"I'll tella world yuh have," says Lum.

Well, Lum's so blame good-natured, and is so far from crabbin' about that thousand dollars he's dropped to me and Tommy in the morning, that I kind of forget to be on my guard. Even quit bein' sore at him. It's queer, too, because usually I would of been twice as careful with him around. But then we all like the old oil, and when some slicker comes along spreadin' it around, better men than what I am just naturally fall for it.

"What you figurin' to do now, Lum?" I said.

"I'm in the real-estate game," he said. "Represent a bunch of people up North interested in acreage down here. This horseshoe business was just small stuff. Picked up Tomlinson, who was broke, and played him along. I'm interested in bigger deals. That's the reason I've come to see you, Perk. I wanted to tell you about—"

"Never mind," I said. "I'm hard of hearin', and I've mislaid my ear trumpet. When yuh come talkin' lots or subdivisions or acreage to me, I can't hear a word. I wouldn't invest in land down here if it had a gold mine under it, and I could scrape the gold loose with this here toothpick." Tommy Tharp, he nods approval.

"Same old careful, conservative Perk, I see," Lum laughs. "But Perk, listen: this is a proposition that would appeal even to your cautious instincts—"

"I'm keepin' them instincts under lock and key," I said, "so's they can't be appealed to. So you're wastin' your time, Lum. If you have got some big deals, hunt up some big people. Anyway, you said you're interested in buyin' acreage for some Northern clients, so why you round here tryin' to sell me sumpin?"

"Always tryin' to touch bottom, Perk," laughs Lum, kind of uneasy. "No use tryin' to four-flush with you, is there? Well, I'll just give yuh the lowdown. I'm broke. That bet this morning cleaned me, and—"

"All this stuff about Northern clients is bunk, too," speaks up Tommy.

"No, it's not," Lum defends himself. "I've bought several options, and got several pieces of acreage on payments. But there's the rub. I've got a lot of syndicate money tied up, and wont have any more for several days. Meantime I've got an option on one piece of about forty acres out here that I'm in danger of losin'. It's a swell buy. Bound to treble in value by Christmas—"

"Christmas might not come," I said.

"And if it does, there aint any Santa Claus," says Tommy.

"Except me," Lum grins. "Now then, Perk, this place is only about two miles from town, at the intersection of the paved roads from Wampum and Peterville. Both of those towns are growin,' and so's Wassumpqua. This piece can't fail to treble in value."

"If all the things that can't fail, didn't," I said, "there'd be more millionaires and less poorhouses. No, Lum, I'm not interested. Peddle your papers on some other corner."

"Perk, I've got to do something," pleads Lum. "My option expires tomorrow morning, and I got to hold it—or at least, sell it. It's good. The piece is good because of the location, and the party behind it is good."

"Who's that?" I said. "One of these smart guys that looks too lazy to go in out of the sun? Or some Northern promoter?"

"Neither one—a friend of yours," he said.

"Tommy's the only friend I've got," I said. "—since we left Lamentation up North in the blizzards."

"Tommy didn't invite yuh to breakfast this morning," says Lum.

"You mean Mrs. Bocaw?" I said. "Listen, Lum, if you pull one of your phony deals on her, I'll wring your dirty neck," I said. "You leave her alone, understand? A widow woman, and you're gonna trim her, hey? Not if I know it."

"Perk, them sentiments do you credit," Lum said. "And while I have never been very particular where I've gathered moss, I cert'nly wouldn't pick her. No, the fact is on the other foot. What I'm tryin' to do now is to hold my option, and protect her. She needs the money."

"In that case," I said, "I might listen. I'm not gonna stand by and see her suffer. What you tryin' to do?"

"I want to borrow one grand, so I can hold and extend my option with her," Lum says.

"What have you paid her already?" I said.

"One grand, and the second one, tomorrow, will apply on the purchase price too," says Lum, talking as easy as if he was figurin' the price of cigars.

"What is the purchase price?" I said.

"Twelve thousand," he said.

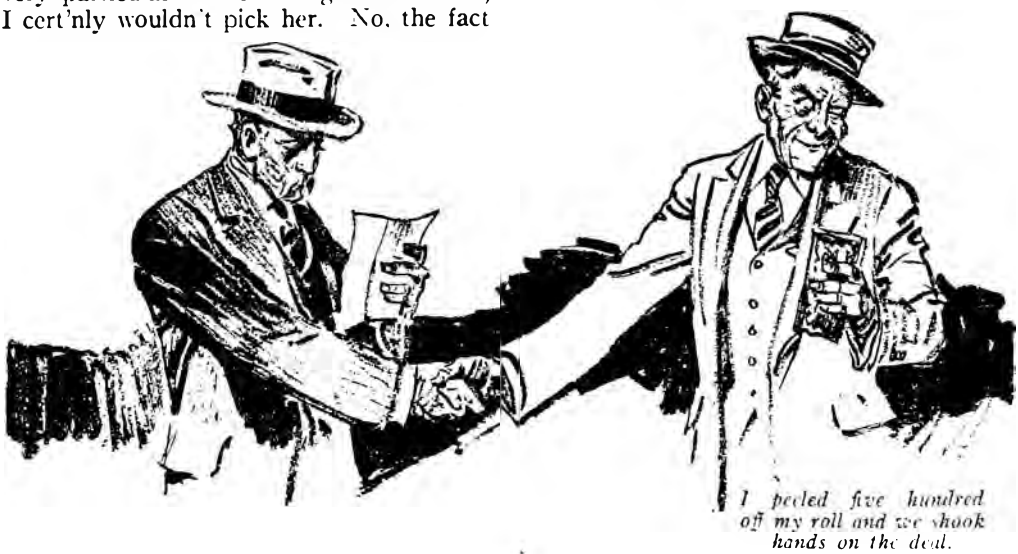
WELL, I've let a lot of this real-estate talk run in one ear and out the other since I've been down here in the sunshine, but a man can't help pickin' up a little information even if he tries to dodge it. That sounded like an awful small price for forty acres, any kind of acres. And Mrs. Bocaw was behind it. She's selling to Lum, understand. That lady wouldn't cheat or mistreat anybody, I know. You can tell by lookin' at her eyes.

I do some quick thinkin'.

"What is it you want?" I said.

When I said that, little Tommy Tharp give a kind of snort, gets up out of his rockin' chair, kicks it, and goes in the house, slammin' the screen behind him.

"I'd like to borrow one thousand dollars, Perk," says Lum.



I peeled five hundred off my roll and we shook hands on the deal.

"What security?" I said, thinkin' of the way Tommy acted.

"None, except my word," he said.

"Well, just to show you what I think of your word," I said, "I'll tell you what I'll do: You said you'd paid a thousand for your option. I'd guess you paid half of that. Also, I'll guess you gotta pay another five hundred tomorrow. So I'll do this: I'll give yuh five hundred for y'r option."

"Perk, that's good." And Lum laughs, sort of scornful. "Why, listen—"

"I've listened too long now," I said. "And I'm not gonna talk much longer."

"Aw, now, Perk," begs Lum. He really looks sort of pitiful, but gosh, you can't feel sorry for the snake that's already tried to bite you, and is gonna bite you for sure the minute you turn your head.

"Take it or leave it," I snapped.

"All right," he says, all of a sudden, "I'll take it."

"And give me your word, such as it is, that you'll never show up around here again, or mix up in any affairs in any way concernin' this piece of property," I said.

"Sure," he said. And so he got out his option, endorsed it over to me, and I peeled five hundred off my roll. We shook hands on the deal, which was the most unpleasant part of the whole transaction to me, and he went on away.

TOMMY THARP come out after a while, and he cert'nly lit on me all spraddled out. He reminded me that we were not gonna buy any real-estate, or any options or anything else. He told me I should of known Lum was a crook, and I admitted that. I admitted ever'thing, and felt purty low.

"But the least that can come of it," I said, "is this—we can keep Mrs. Bocaw from losin' anything."

"S-a-a-a-y," said Tommy, "d'yuh think she was born yesterday?"

"Listen, you little rat," I said, "I'm runnin' this thing. And one thing I wont stand, is your runnin' her down. She's not an old lady."

"She's old enough to take care of herself," he said stubborn.

"Just so you don't mean anything more'n that," I said. "Slam me all you like, but leave her out of it. I'll protect her if I can. And anyhow, if worst comes to worst, we've got rid of old Lum Bagley. And that's worth five hundred of anybody's money."

"I could get rid of him cheaper and more permanent with a quarter's worth of poison," says Tommy. "But I'm glad he's gone. The air will be fit to breathe, now."

We put in a purty miserable night, wranglin' about what I'd done. Of course I'd only gave Lum back five hundred of the thousand that we win from him in the horseshoe match in Mrs. Bocaw's yard. But on the other hand, that thousand was our money, and givin' up part of it was just like takin' off a thumb. The land prob'ly wasn't any good, and the option might be phony too, as Tommy pointed out.

But if you think we was miserable that night, you ought to of seen us the next day. It was awful. I got lower'n a leak in a cellar floor before the day ended. We went to see Mrs. Bocaw along about half-past nine, and she acted glad to see us. She invited us to set down with her on her front porch in the shade, and we talked about this and that till I couldn't stand it any longer, and had to tell her.

"Mrs. Bocaw," I said, "I've bought that option from Mr.—uh, Walton." He had told her his name was Walton, instead of Bagley.

"Oh, you have?" she said, surprised. "Now, that's too bad. Why did you do it?" she said.

"Well, he couldn't swing his deal just now," I said. "And it looked like a good one, so I stepped in. Don't mind investin' a little down here, myself." I wanted to tell her that I was lookin' after her interests, and protectin' her against the biggest crook outside the Atlanta penitentiary. But you can't get soft when Tommy Tharp is settin' around.

"It's too bad," she said again. "Too bad." And she looked real mournful.

"Why?" I said.

"Because about thirty-five of those forty acres are covered with water," she said. "It's a lake—no, a kind of sink-hole. Oh, I'm so sorry!" And blamed if tears didn't come in her eyes.

"But Lum didn't say anything—" I begun. But gosh, can you tie that? Me tryin' to protect this lady? And buyin' a sink-hole!

"No, Lum never said a word," speaks up Tommy, and gives me a dirty grin. I could kick him.

"Well, of course," says Mrs. Bocaw, all of a sudden, "I sha'n't let the transaction go through. I didn't agree that he might sell the option—"

"An option is always negotiable," I said. "And we will go through with the deal. I have not asked to be released, and for that matter, I came this morning to clinch and extend the option by making another payment."

"It's only five hundred dollars, for thirty days," she said.

"But Lum said a thousand," I said.

"Half that," she said. "And I really should not take it from you. Why did I ever let him have it?"

"He prob'ly talked you out of it," I said. "He's the talkin'est man I ever saw," I said. "Not that he talked me into this deal, you understand. I had reasons of my own for wishing to go into it."

"Have you seen the land?" she said. "Or rather, the water?"

"No," I said. "A man I met told me never to look at anything in Florida before buying it. He said if I did, I wouldn't buy it."

"Yeah, and he said not to look at it after yuh bought it, either," speaks up

Tommy. "He said you'd shoot yourself if yuh did."

"It's not that bad," Mrs. Bocaw smiled. "It's really a pretty little lake. But there are a million lakes in Florida—"

"And a million more comin' down every rainy season," says Tommy.

"But people don't pay twelve thousand for a lake. Lakes are too plentiful, and useless," says Mrs. Bocaw. "Now then, suppose we do this. You go out and look at the place, and then come back. If you wish, we'll call off the deal, then."

"No ma'am," I said. "I've gone into this thing, and I'll see it through. I'll ask you to take this five hundred, and give me a receipt. *Then* Tommy and I'll go out and look at our buy."

"Oh, is Mr. Tharp in the deal with you?" she said.

"We're pardners, all along the line," I said. But I didn't tell her I was only puttin' up, so far, the dough Tommy had win at horseshoes. She thought I was carryin' him along, and I guess she give me credit.

SO we extended my option, and after while Tommy and I went out and hired a flivver and got ourselves drove out to the place, two miles from town. We ask a lot of questions on the way. How far is this corner from Wampum? Nine miles from the city limits. From Peterville—seven miles, city limit. From a railroad? Well, mebbe a quarter of a mile, from the same railroad line that runs through Wassumpqua.

When we got out of the place, I was a whole lot sicker'n what I'd been. And who wouldn't of been? The blame place was like a saucer. Sort of a narrow rim around the edge, and then all the middle was a lake, or a sink-hole. The corner, there in between the paved roads, had mebbe five or seven acres of dry ground. We sat in the car and looked at it a long time, our daubers gettin' lower alla time. Finally, Tommy spoke up.

"Shaped like an egg," he said.

"Hate to say what kind of an egg it's shaped like," I said.

"Rotten eggs are the same shape as any other," he said. "Let's get out and walk around a little."

So we did, but we can't tell much about it. Walked clear around the thing, while the boy waited in the flivver, asleep. He should worry if a couple more Northerners get stung. We poked around. Quite a long walk, too. Not much grass on the ground, but it was fairly clear of underbrush and such. The ground was mostly sandy, with some dirt in it. Packed kinda hard, and dry. Over on the back side of the place, opposite the crossroads, a little crick flowed down out of a woods into the lake. We waded that, and figure that was where the water in the lake or sink-hole come from.

"Yes sir, shaped just like an egg, that lake," said Tommy, when we climbed back in the flivver.

"Wish it was hard-boiled, so's we could build houses or sumpin on it," I said. "But no luck. I guess I'm stung."

"Tough luck," says Tommy. And I'll say this for little bow-legged Tommy Tharp. He never crabbed our deal again, from that day to this. He knew I knew he was against it from the start, but he never rubbed it in. That's the way he is.

Well, Tommy pitched horseshoes all afternoon and he win fifteen dollars, while I took a nap in the park. I figure that even if we go broke on this here lake, we can still eat out of Tommy's horseshoe-pitchin' hand. Supper didn't appeal to us much, and I guess we didn't sleep much that night, either. Anyhow, a funny thing happened, while we were floppin' around tryin' to sleep. About four o'clock in the morning we were both awake, and all of a sudden, Tommy said:

"Perk, what else is shaped like an egg?"

"I been goin' around 'em all my life," I said. "A race-track, of course."

"Well, Perk," he said, "let's get up and mosey out to our lake. I been thinkin'," he said.

"By George, let's do," I said. "And if we just walk, nobody will know we are up to anything."

So we hiked along out there, and we walked all around it again, this time looking over everything carefully. Among other things we noticed that our rim of land around the sink-hole sorta sloped down to the water gradually. By scrapin' the edges along the sides just a little bit, we'd level the rim there, and get just the little bit of dirt we'd need to build up the turns, so they'd be banked right.

I'm gittin' excited. We go around again, each of us stepping off the distance the best he can. And by jing, if it's not just about an even mile around that little old lake of ours, I'll drink it!

"Tommy," I said, "we've got sumpin."

"We've blame near got a race-track, all laid out and graded," he said.

"With a purty little lake in the middle," I said. "Look at them water lilies, or crocuses, or whatever they are. Set a grandstand up here in the corner where the two roads cross—"

"And bettin'-sheds, and parkin'-space on one side of it," he said.

"And stables on the other," I said.

Well sir, we were the two most excited old coots in Florida at six A.M. that morning, bar none. So we shut our mouths and started to walk back in to Wassumpqua, sayin' nary a word. We're that way, Tommy and I, when we think. Can't talk. But every foot of the two mile I'm turnin' over the old brain as fast as it will step. Buildin' me up a race-track, and grandstands, and stables, and concessions, and everything—all outa this darned little lake that old Lum Bagley's shoved off on me! I'll show that guy, yet. I musta been climbin' purty high in the clouds, and we're still at breakfast, when little Tommy Tharp breaks a sad blow on my neck.

"Perk," he said, sorta mournful, "it's all off."

"Why?" I said.

"Well, there aint a trotter in fifty mile of here," he said. And there was almost tears in his eyes.

"No, nor even a pacer, I guess. Oh gosh, another dream gone blooey," I said.

What's the use of a race-track without any trotters or pacers? It'd be worth about as much as a worn-out tire without a flivver to put it on. I don't know when anything has hit me as hard as the blow-up of our scheme, and about all I felt like doin' after breakfast was the thing I did. I went to bed. Blame near sick, too, but little Tommy he took his horseshoes and went down to the park to see if he could pitch himself a few more dollars.

MEBBE it was the nap I took; mebbe it was bein' near Mrs. Bocaw that did it; but anyhow, when I woke up, about the middle of the afternoon, I went over to her house to call on her. And what do you s'pose I did—crawfish on the deal? That would be the thing to expect, seein' how low I'd been feelin' after our dream exploded. No sir, I got the bit in my teeth, and the lines under my tail, and darned if I didn't run away with the whole proposition.

You know how it is. There we were, settin' on her front porch, behind the vines. She'd brung out some ice tea. Nobody near us. She's got a lovely soft voice, and she's got lovely soft brown eyes. And then she's a kind of appealin', helpless sort of a woman. She talks a little about the trouble she's had, managin' her own affairs in this big rough world of men. I couldn't help it. A man is bound to feel masterful anyhow once in his life.

"Mrs. Bocaw," I said, "mebbe I can relieve your worries some. I'd like to change my deal on this piece of ground out here. Instead of holding the option, I'll give you five thousand dollars for a half interest in it."

"Cash?" she says. For a minute I think this stuff of hers about bein' helpless is all wrong. But then she adds: "It would be wonderful to be partners."

"It cert'nly would," I said. "That's why I'm makin' the offer. And speakin' of bein' partners in this thing—" But right there I interrupt myself. Gosh, I been a bachelor forty-seven years, and the habit don't just fall off like a snake's skin, all at once. "Speakin' of bein' partners," I said, "uh, we could both make a profit. I wouldn't feel right, swingin' another deal, to make all the profit outa this piece of ground, and leavin' you out."

"Well," she said, sorta disappointed, I thought, "if it was cash money, I'd consider the partnership."

"Ma'am, it cert'nly is cash money," I said. "I'm not one of these new-style business men. When I talk money, I mean silver and bills, not notes, nor promises."

"Then we will make the deal," she said. "And it will be lovely to be partners with you, Charley."

Yeah, that's my name. Charles E. Perkins. I liked for her to call me Charley. It was the first time. Her name is Maude, and so I tell Maude good-by, and promise to look in again that evenin', when she asks me to.

"Don't bring Tommy, though," she says. "I like him, and I think it's a beautiful thing—the way you take care of him. But if you come by yourself, we can have a nice, cozy visit by ourselves."

So I went on away, feelin' in a daze, and yet kinda masterful, the way I'd took this big piece of ground by the horns and handed her over my whole roll for it. I remember thinkin' of what she said about me takin' care of Tommy, and thinkin' that mebbe now he'll have to support us

both by pitchin' horseshoes. The more I thought, the more I kicked myself for havin' been fool enough to get so brash. Broke, flat, now, and nothin' to my name but a half-interest in a sink-hole and five acres or seven besides.

Well, I went down to the park, and bought a Peterville paper and a Wampum paper on the way, to read while I thought things over. Tommy's out there pitchin' horseshoes with the chief of police, and I feel better to realize he's close by. Watch come to the railroad track, a quarter of a mile off. There's nothin' but an old abandoned sawmill settin' there on a switch that's overgrown with weeds. I walk back, studyin' the timber along the little crick.

Now, I don't lay no claim to bein' a business man. I can handle a trotter with any man that ever lived, and people will tell yuh that nobody ever lifted and flang a trotter under the wire in the last jump better'n what I could. But just the same, I got some ideas of business, and so I

All of a sudden Tommy said: "Perk, what else is shaped like an egg?"

him awhile, and think what a fine chum he's been to me alla these years, and then I get to lookin' at the papers.

"Local men plan race-track," is a headline in the Wampum paper. Yeah, I thought, that is good, with naty a trotter or pacer in three counties around. Wish 'em joy. Then after a while I look at the Peterville paper.

"Local men plan race-track," is a headline in that one, too. Looks like everybody is goin' batty over the idea. Suppose next, the Wassumpqua people will start a race-track—and then, by jing, the idea hits me!

I get up and go in town and find the boy with the flivver. He took me out to our little old lake, and I ask him to wait for me. I walk all around that lake again, studyin' the slantin' rim of it, and noticin' how it just naturally drains down into the sink-hole. Then I walk up along the crick on the back side, through the woods, and moved. What I mean is, I moved quick. I lit into that thing like old Star Pointer hittin' the home-stretch for a mile in two minutes.

"Mrs. Bocaw," I said, quick as I could get back to her house, "I need some help. I see a big thing ahead of us, if I can swing it. And I'm goin' to swing it. That five thousand I handed you for the half interest in the ground was the last money I've got in the world. I won it with my old blind mare Lamentation, the best friend a man ever had, and as fine a trotter as ever lived. What I mean, she may not have been as speedy as some, but any time I ask her, she give me a hundred per cent of her speed and all her heart and foot. That's all any trotter, or any friend can do. But I had to sell her, up there in Michigan, in her old age. She won the money for me, and I wont feel right about her unless I hold on to it, and win some more with it."

"A man that loves animals is a real man," she sighs. "Charley, stay for supper, and let's talk things over."

So I left Tommy to eat by himself at the boardin'-house, and I told her all about the race-track possibilities, the natural banking and drainage of the rim around that lake, and everything. All I needed was some timber, and a right of way through the woods to the switch on the railroad, where the horses could be shipped.

"If I just had a slice of that woods!" I said.

"That's easy," she said.

"Can you find some way to get control of—"

"I own the woods, and the sawmill too," she answered, sorta casual-like.

MAN, I purty nigh fell off my chair, and there was some wonderful apple fritters on my plate at the time too. Helpless? Needed takin' care of, as Lum said? Bunk! Listen, this Mrs. Bocaw is a wonder.

So we swing into action. I figure the thing to do is to get the track under way, and we outline our plans right off. Next morning the local surveyor goes out to the track and measures off a line of inside fence, exactly one mile; also a line of outside fence, the width of a track from the inside. Mrs. Bocaw handles this, partly because a Northerner has to pay more for service, and partly because the Southerners get more action from their own people. That afternoon a bunch of darkies go out and tackle the woods. Next day the old sawmill is steamed up, and cuttin' fence-posts and boards. Inside of a week the inside and outside fences are done and whitewashed, and the track has been scraped and banked a little at the turns.

Beginning the second week, we get the fences along the two sides by the two paved roads under way. She pushes the gang, and I study the layout. Mark off space for a grandstand. Build a little judges' stand, and put up quarter and sixteenth posts. Meantime, I'm watchin' the Wampum and Peterville papers. Most every day they got an item about the two different movements to build a track, and I figure if they want a track so bad they'll get one, and all they'll have to do then is round up their trotters and pacers. Think I'll even send for old Lam and give her a few more races myself. It'll feel good to get back in the harness again!

So I see in the paper where the Wampum people are plannin' a meetin' to raise fifty thousand dollars to buy a site. And then the Peterville paper says they are gonna get together to raise seventy-five thousand to buy a site and build the track and stands. Mrs. Bocaw says she is well acquainted with the Wampum people, so she attends their meetin'. I go over to Peterville and set in with them. We leave little Tommy Tharp bossin' the job of work at our park.

"Tell 'em," I told Mrs. Bocaw, "that we have a race-track all ready for use, fenced in and everything, and only a grandstand left to build. Tell 'em we're only seven miles on the pavement from Peterville, nine from Wampum, and two from Wassumpqua, givin' 'em three towns to draw on. Tell 'em that where they're plannin' to raise a hundred and twenty-five thousand to buy expensive ground, we can sell 'em a plant ready to operate, except for stands and barns, at thirty-five thousand. With three towns to draw on, they'll always have crowds. Competition is cut out. Better for everybody, and cheaper, to coöperate on one good plant. Hold longer meetin's, make more money. See?"

WELL, she's a wonder. She come back that night with an agreement that a committee of three Wampum men will meet with three Peterville men to consider the proposition. But me, who do you s'pose I run into? Lum Bagley, sittin' on the job of promotin' this Peterville track, and it's just like runnin' into a stone wall. The meetin' endorses the plan of buyin' a local site, and appoints an executive committee. And adjourns. I hunt up old Lum, the blame crook.

"Lum," I said, "we've got a race-track all laid out, fences up. Cheaper for Peterville, Wampum and Wassumpqua to join hands, build one layout, hold bigger meetings, make more profit."

"Yeah, but that's not the big idea," he grins.

"If it aint, what is?" I said.

"You're slow, Perk," he said. "The big thing is that on this deal here I stand to clean up ten grand. Real-estate promotion is my game, and horse-racin' is yours."

"That's right, but there's no trotters around here," I said.

"Trotters? Yuh make me laugh," he said. "This thing is for runners, and the people that run the runners, and bet on 'em, are people with real dough. No small-

He shows up the day before the wedding, and he brung old Lamentation with him! Man, I just broke down and cried!

towners among 'em. This is *big* stuff. They wont stop at my ten thousand clean-up, if they find out about it, which they wont."

Well, sir, this thing makes me sick. Runners? I wouldn't touch one with a ten-foot pole. Any more'n I would a snake. A trotter is the only kind of horse-flesh that's fit to associate with. Oh, I know that some right respectable men handle the bangtails, but I never understood how they could do it. And on top of that, here's this crooked Lum Bagley in control of the situation.

So I go home, feelin' whipped. Mrs. Bocaw's report cheers me up some, but just the same, I'm whipped. I don't see any way to get around this Lum Bagley. Of course we might make a deal with the Wampum people alone, but then we'd not clear as much, prob'ly, and they wouldn't have the success the coöperative scheme would have.

What I'm wonderin' about now is how I ever got along as far as I did, or as well, without the inspiration of this wonderful little brown-eyed woman. She's quick. She's snappy. When I told her about Lum sittin' on the works, and said Lum Bagley was a crook, she speaks right up.

"There's a way to handle it," she says. "And we'll win out yet. You say he stands to clean up ten thousand?"

"Yes," I said.

"Then, we can add ten thousand to our price, and have him swing the whole deal our way, paying him for his trouble," she said.

"No," I said, "we wont do it. We might add ten thousand to our price, but we wont give it all to him. Will you excuse me? I've got an idea!"

SO I hustled right back over to Peterville that very evening, hunted up Lum, and believe me, I talked turkey to that baby.

"Lum," I said, "your Peterville track is out. We've got a track to sell, and we're gonna sell it, see?"

"Fat chance, Perk," he said. "For how much?"

"Forty-five thousand, to Wampum and Peterville," I said. "And cheap at the price. Only the stands and stables left to be built."

"Of course, I know what you're payin' for that ground—"

"And water," I said, scowlin' at him.

"And I wouldn't mind tellin' the world about the profit you're takin'."

"If it comes down to that," I snapped, "I wouldn't mind tellin' the world about your police record back up North. I can name about eight towns that would be glad to slip a reward to the Peterville police for information leadin' to the arrest of Lum Bagley, alias Walton," I said.

"Aw, Perk," he whined, cavin' in all at

once, "what yuh got against me? Let me alone, can't yuh? Give a man a chance. Here I'm tryin' to make a piece of change—"

"After double-crossin' me nine times up North, and then sellin' me a sink-hole," I said. "But I'm not gonna shove you, Lum. All I want you to do is to drop your Peterville deal, and swing the Peterville people in with the Wampum people to buy our place. Tell 'em to form a Tri-City Jockey Club, coöperate, and put over a big successful track, see? And I'll not squawk to the police."

"But Perk," he begged, like a baby, "I stand to make some money on this other deal. I need a stake—"

"Well, just to show you I got no hard feelings," I said, "I'll slip you twenty-five hundred if you swing this thing our way, and drop the Peterville plan."

"But look, I can clean up ten thou—"

BUT details don't matter. We finally compromised on five thousand for Lum. Yes, and by jing, he swung it the way we wanted it. The Wampum and Peterville committees agreed, called in some Wassumpqua men, who Mrs. Bocaw managed like a general, or mebbe I should say like a purty widow. And the whole thing went through like clockwork. My split of the profit ran about sixteen thousand—but then, we didn't split.

"It's been a wonderful partnership," Mrs. Bocaw whispered one night on her front porch behind the vines. We was settin' in a porch swing.

"Been?" I said, feelin' myself slippin'. "Is."

"Oh, Charley, do you mean—" she begun.

"Yes, Maude, I do," I said. "I'm gonna quit bein' a fool bachelor, and you're gonna quit bein' a widow. You need protection and—"

"You need a home," she said, scroogin' over to meet me halfway.

"A heaven," I said, "and I've found it." But don't expect me to tell any more of the intimate details. A man keeps some things to himself, if he has any self-respect.

But while I almost lost my nerve, and only went through with it at the cost of a lot of mental strain, still I almost spilled the beans. That was when I missed little Tommy Tharp. He showed up absent one day. That is, I noticed he was gone. I don't know how long he'd been away, for I'd been walkin' around in a sort of a mist or a cloud, or sumpin—thinkin' about Maude's eyes and apple fritters. I asked the boardin'-house woman, and she didn't remember how long he'd been gone. I asked the police chief, and he sidestepped. Fin'ly I got mad. Maude never seemed to want him around, so one day I jumped her about it.

"Here, Maude," I said, "did you give Tommy the 'go' sign?"

"Why, Charley," she said, "what do you mean?" She acted kinda queer, and I was sorta suspicious—although a man hates to suspect his wife-to-be.

"Little Tommy Tharp's gone," I said. "The best friend a man ever had! If he's not welcome where I am, this race is off. We wont trot a heat," I said.

She looked at me real hurt.

"Why, Charley, listen," she said. "Don't be so excited. Don't be angry with me. I don't know where Tommy is. Of course he's welcome. Your friendship for him was one of the things that I liked about you. He'll come back, surely."

Well, I couldn't quarrel with her, after what she'd said, but the way I felt, I'd have backed out on this wedding if he hadn't of shown up. What? Yeah. The day before the wedding, and he brung old Lamentation with him! Maude had sent him all the way to Michigan to get her, and bring her back, as a wedding present to me! Man, I just naturally broke down and cried.

THAT'S Tommy, goin' there, and that nice fat old blind mare is Lamentation, though you wouldn't think it. Nary a rib showin'. And she don't look near as sad as she used to when she was helpin' me take money away from the smart guys up North.

Yes, she does hang her head a little, I'll admit—because Tommy drives her out to the track every day to look after his hay-and-feed concession, and she, bein' an honest trotter, is sort of ashamed to be associatin' with the runners.

Me? No, I never go out, except on business. We're cuttin' and sellin' timber out of our woods for the new stands and stables. Keeps me busy, but not too busy. What? No, I wouldn't be a bachelor again, or track a trotter across the country, for—oh, well, write your own ticket. And cancel it!

Illustrated by
Paul Lehman

Particeps Criminis

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

The distinguished author of "The Trail of Death," "The Second Life of Monsieur the Devil" and many other well-liked Blue Book Magazine stories returns to America in this tremendously exciting story.

"JAMES GRAY—that man again!"

A startled light shot into the blue eyes of Diana Corinth, as she looked at the card her maid handed her. Then she nodded.

"Have him wait; I'll be down in a moment. No, I'll not need you."

The maid departed. Diana laid the card on her dressing-table and examined her fresh, trim beauty in the mirror; then her eyes flitted back to the card, with a glance of mingled apprehension and uneasiness and curiosity. They were not ordinary blue eyes. They were quite dark blue, under level black brows, and they were very capable, direct and uncompromising, as good Irish eyes should be.

The card bore the simple words: "James Gray—Agent." Nothing to cause any fear; for that matter, any resident of Detroit would have laughed at the idea of anything causing fear to Diana Corinth—heiress, sportswoman, social favorite, beauty. If she flouted conventions, she could well afford to do so. To her had fallen Huron Manor, the big house on Jefferson Avenue; the yachts, the motors, the properties, the money, and above all the character of her father, Michael Corinth. There had been a brother, but he was forgotten now—a scapegrace, disinherited, blown by the winds of folly into the limbo of lost things. More than one hungry gentleman had tried to trim the Corinth roll when it fell into the hands of a girl, and had learned a lesson. Diana could take care of herself and her own.

Into the solemn reception-parlor of the mansion she swept, and came smiling, with extended hand, to the man who waited. He was a large young man, but one forgot the square shoulders and rather heavy build in the still squarer and heavier face above; despite its twinkling smile that face conveyed an impression of grim and stubborn determination which lingered long.

"So you haven't forgotten me?" he asked, laughing a little.

"Not likely!" she returned, and settled herself in a chair, facing him. "What's this agent business? You were the star reporter on the *News* when the fat Mrs. Morris lost her string of beads and we worked out the society thief stuff between us."

HE nodded. It was only six weeks previously that a social affair had shaken Detroit and had landed a rather distinguished gentleman in the penitentiary—thanks to a diamond necklace and Jimmy Gray of the *News*, and other factors.

"If it hadn't been for you, I'd never have pulled off that affair," he said. "I haven't forgotten how you helped me, Miss Corinth; I don't know much about women, and—"

"All the wise ones say that," she said, laughing. "Besides, you don't need much help!"

"I do, though," he returned gravely. "And just now I'm in over my ears. I've quit the paper and gone into more lucrative if more chancy work—it was John May, the diamond importer, who tipped me off to taking advantage of that Morris affair and doing it. In plain words, detecting. Otherwise, as an agent to investigate things that don't want publicity."

"So," she observed, "you are now a detective, to put it bluntly?"

"Yes. And first crack out of the box, I've run into a snarl and got tangled up. I've called to ask whether you'd consider a loud and plaintive holler for help, or whether you'd rather not get mixed up in such lowlife doings."

His eyes were twinkling now; like his name, they were gray—a warm and lively gray. His brown, red-shot hair waved back from his forehead crisply, and much of a man can be told from his hair, as movie actors will some day discover to their embarrassment.

She considered him gravely, concealing the abrupt flood of relief which had come over her at his words.

"Hm!" she said. "I suppose John May has quietly spread the word that you're reliable, clever, resourceful and have some pull in some quarters, and that any of our idle rich who put a foot into the mud might do worse than call you into wipe it clean! Eh?"

He nodded.

"Well," she said, "set that cigarette-stand between us and we'll talk business."

RATHER bewildered, Jimmy Gray rose, brought over a little smoking-stand from the wall, and lighted a match for her cigarette and his own. He sat down again, and waited. She studied him for a minute, then smiled.

"I like you," she said frankly. "You and I are brutally blunt in our words, and positive in our reactions, and we regard each other and the world around us with some common sense—which is devilish rare these days. Am I right?"

"You are right," he said. "We're not hypocrites."

"Then I'll make you a proposition," she said. "Partnership. You take the money and credit, and I take the fun. I thought I'd go to Europe for the summer and raise a little havoc among the lounge lizards and fortune-hunters—but if you agree, I stay here and go to work. But, Jimmy, I don't mean any halfway, namby-pamby partnership! I mean full fifty-fifty on the dirty stuff and clean, murder and robbery, bootleggers and morgues. If you feel how terrible it would be to shock a poor woman, then lay off."

JIMMY GRAY laughed. "You think I am going in for unadulterated crime, do you? Not much. No telling where it'll come to, of course, but what I'm engaged in right now has none of the shock stuff."

"Well, what about it?" she demanded. "No evasion, now. I can be of use to you; I have cars, boats, Lord knows what. If you need a helper as chauffeur or brain-worker, I'm here. If you're in need of information, or want to pull the wool over the ears of some silly male, I'm your party. Do you want me for a partner, or not?"

"Done," said Gray promptly.

"Then we'll need an office—"

"I have one. Not a very fine one—"

"We'll take one in the Corinth building; I'll contribute the rent as my share of the firm's expenses," she said calmly. "There's a fine one on the second floor, vacant—"

"Look here!" said Gray. "Rents in that building are enormous! I don't intend that you shall patronize—"

"Will you keep quiet?" she broke in icily. "We move in tomorrow morning. You're putting a good deal into the partnership, and I intend to put something. The class of people we shall deal with need to be impressed by our offices. Now, no more discussion. It's agreed. Plump out your problem, Jimmy!"

"I had never dreamed of all this," he said. "But I'm glad, more than glad! Well, I suppose you never chanced to hear of anyone called Speed Martin?"

The girl tensed slightly in her chair. She leaned forward to knock the ash from her cigarette, not daring to trust her voice

at once. Then, when she answered, it was negligently. "I think so—can't just this moment say where. Who is he?"

"I wish I knew," and Gray frowned slightly. "However, I mean to find out. Now I'll come to the present difficulty."

She looked at him wide-eyed, curious, interested. Those deep blue eyes gave no hint of the startled alarm that had shot through her at Gray's words. If he meant to find out—he would do it, sooner or later. He was that sort. And if he did—

"You know Mrs. Hanson, the elderly widow who lives up the street?" Gray was saying. "You do, of course—everyone does. A philanthropist. She engaged a maid two weeks ago, apparently a very good sort. The maid had an afternoon off yesterday. She came home late in the evening, was ill, and died before a doctor could arrive. Ptomaine poisoning, by all indications, but she was in great fright. She would not talk at all, but cried and carried on until she sank and then went out. Mrs. Hanson was with her, and said that just before she died, the girl uttered the name of Speed Martin."

Diana Corinth folded her hands in her lap—she had laid aside her cigarette—and sat very still, deliberately so. Gray was paying no great heed to her, but went on with his story.

"That's all—no indication she was murdered, nothing else whatever; just the name. I've been unable to trace it. Mrs. Hanson has engaged me to run down the matter, for she believes the girl met with foul play. The police laugh at her. I thought of getting some suggestion from you."

Diana smiled, rather faintly. "The girl's name?"

"Mary Simpson. Twenty-two. Rather quiet—comes from upstate somewhere. No relatives."

"Very well." She glanced at her watch. "Hm—two o'clock! Meet me at our office in the Corinth building at nine in the morning, Jimmy. You'll find it under your own name on the hall index, and the office ready. May have some news then, or some suggestion."

His leave-taking was awkward, joyous, embarrassed—a curious commingling of emotions. When he had departed, Diana Corinth went back to her boudoir and for some time talked with the manager of the Corinth Building. Then she called another number, and gained response.

"I want to speak with Speed Martin," she said. "Call him. I'll wait."

She waited, tense, anxious. Presently a voice answered.

"Diana speaking," she said. "Tell me what you know about a girl named Mary Simpson."

"Huh?" came the response. "Not a thing!"

"You're lying," she replied evenly. "Tell the truth."

"Honest!" responded the man at the other end of the wire. "Never heard of her—"

"All right. That ends everything between us," said the girl, and in her voice was a cold finality that spoke of intense anger. "No—none of that! You've lied to me, and now you can take the consequences. I'm through with you. Goodby."

She rang off, and sat for a while motionless, a queer hint of tragedy in her immobile face.

AT nine in the morning, Diana shook hands with her partner, and displayed the new offices of the firm. The two rooms were simply but handsomely furnished. She pointed to the inner room.

"That's yours. I'll be office girl for visitors. There are cigarettes on your desk—all complete. Make yourself at home."

"It's magic!" declared Jimmy Gray, staring around. He went to his desk, saw everything there from pad to ash-tray, and dropped into the chair. She laughed at his helpless air.

"Not magic, but quick work! There's a filing cabinet—all story detectives have them. Now, what about our case? Discovered anything?"

Gray smiled. "No. The man isn't known here by police or others."

"He makes it his business not to be."

"Eh?" Gray looked at her, found her serious, came to the alert. "You haven't discovered who he is, surely?"

"Why not?"

Gray met her steady gaze, relaxed in his chair, reached for a cigarette.

"Go ahead, enchantress! I'm dust before your feet."

At this instant the door of the outer office opened and a woman entered, looking around irresolutely. She was Diana's maid.

"Here I am, Alice," called the girl. "Come in."

"This came for you five minutes after you left, Miss Diana," said the maid, and extended a special delivery envelope. "I thought it might be important and brought it downtown."

"Right. Thank you."

THE maid departed. Diana Corinth tore open the envelope, glanced at a card it had enclosed, and turned deathly white. Gray sprang to his feet, but she gestured him back and laid down the letter. It bore a Canadian stamp, with an American special delivery stamp.

"We were speaking of Martin," she said quietly. "He's a very clever man, Jimmy, and very powerful in his own way. He stays out of Detroit, and lives over the line in Windsor most of the time. He has a good many men working for him—bootlegging and other things. Nobody knows his real name or his appearance."

Surprise grew in Gray's eyes as he listened.

"You're amazing!" he commented. "Where's the point of contact?"

She had dreaded this question. "The engineer of my yacht last summer told me about the man—had been a criminal but was reformed, and saw Martin at Harbor Point one day. Shortly after, there was a sensational robbery there at the clubhouse."

"I remember it," said Gray thoughtfully. "The man is at the head of a gang, then?"

"More than that," returned the girl. "And this letter would prove it."

She pushed the letter across the desk and watched Gray's face as he drew out the card and perused it. Upon it were written—by typewriter—the words:

If it's war, then—væ victis!

SPEED.

There was a long silence. She felt his eyes lift, felt their fixed and penetrating gaze upon her face, wondered if he read aught amiss there. Then she was reassured.

"Looks plain enough, Diana," he said, with a worried air. "If he was concerned in the death of that girl, he watched the Hanson house, knew I was called in, watched me and knew I visited you. But why not send his threat to me? Woe to the conquered—hm! The fellow gives himself away there. Must be some reason to be afraid of us. See here, you'd better stay out of this partnership—"

"Silly!" she smiled, a little scornfully, in her relief. "If the dead girl had gone across the river to see Martin—ah! You said she was a good sort?"

"Very. Mrs. Hanson was fond of her."

"Good!" Her blue eyes blazed with sudden eagerness. "Call her up, ask if a new maid has been employed. If so, tell Mrs. Hanson to send her here at once with a note for you. Quick, now!"

A desk telephone, already connected, was at Gray's elbow. He obeyed Diana's command without question, and a moment later had Mrs. Hanson on the line. He asked about a new maid.

"Yes? Sent by a friend—very fortunate, eh? I'd like to see her, Mrs. Hanson. If you can spare her for the morning, will you be good enough to send her here at once? Give her a note for me. No, I've discovered very little—just enough to make me want to look into it more deeply. Thank you. Good-by."

HE hung up and nodded. "She'll be here in twenty minutes. May I ask why?"

"I'm not sure—just an idea. This Mrs. Hanson is a peculiar woman, you know. She has money galore, a house filled with costly things, and is noted for the jewelry she used to wear in younger days and still keeps by her. Now, if this maid of hers had been worked on or tricked by Speed Martin, had been made use of, had finally caught on to the game and rebelled—she would be got rid of in a hurry. Another one would be supplied—"

Gray whistled. "Great is Diana of the Detroiters! You've hit the nail on the head—but what about the girl who's coming here?"

"Leave her to me," said Diana confidently.

When the girl appeared, some little while later, Diana Corinth had made preparations. She knew the fallacy of Gray's theory; Speed Martin had no idea that Gray was seeking him, and this message referred simply to her own telephone conversation with Martin. So she could speak as she wished to the young woman before her—a pert, self-confident, entirely sophisticated young woman who asked for Mr. Gray. Diana laughed softly, and pointed to the chair beside her desk. Behind it, the door of Gray's office was closed.

"Sit down, sit down—throw that note into the waste-basket," she directed calm-

—this is Mr. Gray's office—the name on the door—"

"Speed could use that name as well as any other, couldn't he?" snapped Diana.

"Speed!" The name came in a gasp. "What do you mean? Who are you?"

"None of your business." Diana regarded her victim with assurance, and smiled to herself at the girl's startled air.

Diana made her way to the rear of the cabaret room.

ly. "You've certainly bungled matters nicely!"

Open-mouthed, the girl stared at her, but beneath the amazement was sudden swift alarm, and Diana did not miss it. At her gesture, the girl took the chair.

"What do you mean?" she ventured. "I "Haven't you discovered that the old lady suspects something wrong with this Mary Simpson business?"

"No." The girl assumed a wooden mask. "I don't know what you're talking about anyhow."

"Want me to call up Windsor 7711—"

Mention of this telephone number, which was Speed Martin's own, brought another gasp from the girl—this time of surrender.

"Oh! Then you know!"

"Of course I do," said Diana, and laughed. "The game's been called off for a few days—why haven't you communicated with Speed?"

"Aint had a chance," said the girl sulkily. "Off, is it? And me wasting my time working around that fool woman? That's a hell of a note! I know where the things are, and everything's in shape for tonight—and now it's off!"

"Only for a couple of days," said Diana, reassuringly. "But you're wrong in the day—Speed told me himself it was tomorrow night."

"I'd ought to know, hadn't I?" came the retort. "Bill and Frisco were to show up at eleven sharp, take the big car back to Daly's, and wait for orders. Tonight, see?"

"Hold on a minute; I'll find out."

SHE rose, passed into the adjoining office, and left the door ajar. She gave the waiting and listening Jimmy Gray a wink, then stooped over the telephone, held down the hook with one hand, and lifted off the receiver and called the Windsor number.

"Call Speed to the 'phone, and quick about it—oh, he is? All right. Hello, Speed! You know who this is—I've just been giving your message to that girl, and there's a mixup—you what? Without letting me know?" The rising anger and amazement of her voice were excellently simulated. "After this, you let me know when you switch plans, see? All right, I'll tell her; good-by."

Diana returned to the outer office.

"Speed says it was a mistake all around," she announced to the waiting girl. "The plan goes through for tonight, and you're to go to Daly's with Bill and Frisco. What about Mrs. Hanson?"

"She's safe," said the girl, rising. "Deaf as a post anyhow, and everything we want is downstairs. The safe's a joke—Frisco can go through it in five minutes. Well, is that all?" Diana nodded, and the girl departed in obvious relief. When the door had closed behind her, Gray appeared. Diana looked up at him brightly.

"Well, does the new assistant satisfy you?"

"No—she amazes me!" Gray laughed, and then sobered quickly. "What was that Windsor number you called—"

"An imaginary number!" Diana broke into quick laughter, and the magic of it swept aside the swift touch of danger. She had risked this. "When the girl knew I knew Martin was in Windsor, that settled everything. She's a fool. Well, now what's your program?"

"Simple." Gray spoke swiftly, decisively. "I'll see Mrs. Hanson at once and have her arrange to be out of the house tonight—tell her a robbery's planned. That will simplify the thing for Bill and Frisco. Then we'll let 'em go through the place—"

"Let them rob it?"

"Sure. We'll follow them to Daly's and nab the whole gang with the goods. Be right back of them in our own car, and a police car following us. Then we may get hold of Martin. Of course, we've no evidence against him regarding that poor girl's death, but somebody may squeal when we pinch 'em. I'd better get right up and see Mrs. Hanson this morning."

"You know where Daly's is?"

"Yes—a rather disreputable roadhouse twenty miles north of town. You'll be here when I get back?"

"Probably not. I've a luncheon engagement." Diana passed over a key. "There's the office key. I'll call up and have my roadster here for you at noon—you can use it in running around this afternoon, and we'll have it ready for tonight. Good-by, and good luck!"

Gray caught up his key, seized his hat, and was gone.

When she had arranged by telephone for the delivery of the car to Gray at noon, Diana regarded herself in a hand-mirror, settled hair and lips to her own satisfaction, and went forth to do some shopping. Her Ford coupe was parked near by. Obtaining it, she drove to the Campus Martius, parked the car again in a ground up Michigan Avenue, and spent half an hour shopping.

When she returned to her car, she found a man sitting in it. He nodded to her, and threw back his coat to show a police star.

"Miss Corinth? Get right in, miss, and drive up to the Fort Street station."

"I'll do nothing of the sort," said Diana briefly. "Get out—"

"Unless you want me to call the wagon and take you along on a murder charge, you will," said the other coldly. "Take your choice, miss."

"A murder charge?" repeated Diana, aghast. "Are you crazy?"

"No more'n most," and the officer chuckled. "Come along, now, without any fuss, and tell the cap'n all about it."

Furious, Diana obeyed, and the memory of that card from Speed Martin struck into her ominously.

CONTRARY to her expectations, Diana found herself very courteously received by a grizzled police captain, who bade her be seated, then swung his chair toward her and picked up a paper.

"You're not under arrest, Miss Corinth," he said, in reply to her first question, "and I hope you'll not be—it's a matter for questions. A man was killed this morning on the Ecorse Road just within the city limits; he was struck by a Ford coupe, which drove on without halting. The number of the license-plate was reported by two witnesses, and is your number. Now, what can you tell about it?"

"None too certain, are you?" said Diana coolly. "I can tell you just this—it all depends on the time. When did the accident occur?"

"At eight-ten."

Diana settled herself in her chair, and smiled slightly.

"I was at home until eight-forty this morning—my home's in the other end of town, as you probably know. My servants can vouch for this, also that the Ford coupe was being cleaned by my chauffeur. At eight-fifteen the manager of the Corinth Building called me on the telephone and talked with me. You can verify these facts in five minutes by telephoning."

The captain gestured to the listening sergeant, who took up his telephone. Diana's alibi was established in less than five minutes.

"Sorry to have bothered you, Miss Corinth," said the captain. "As you said, I was none too sure—the reports of witnesses usually don't stand the test. I'm mighty glad we don't have to go any farther with this; you've been pinched twice for speeding—it might have been a bad business."

Diana took her departure pleasantly and without comment. She knew, however, it was not by chance that the witnesses had made a mistake, or that the detective had been sitting in her car at the parking ground. This had been a gentle hint from Speed Martin—a threat, nothing more, of what might easily come to pass in dead earnest. The threat, however, only served to rouse Diana's anger.

Thus when, in the middle of an animated luncheon which was to be followed by a throat-cutting game of bridge, she was summoned to the telephone, Diana was in a mood to be anything but meek when Speed Martin's voice came to her.

"Hullo there, Di!" he greeted. "Heard you'd be around to the Perkins hut today—want a few words with you. Have a good time with the cops this morning? Well, you and I must have a showdown, old girl."

"The quicker the better," she snapped. "I suppose you think I'd hand you over?"

"I take no chances on you or anyone else, Di." And he laughed softly. "You can tell all you know, and welcome—it can't hurt me a mite. But I want a word with you personally. Will you drive out and see me sometime today? After all, old girl, you know what's between us; you may wash your hands of me for good, but you can't kill the past. Say the word, and we'll have a last meeting, find out just where each other stands, and have things settled."

"All right," she flashed. "And I intend to find out one or two other matters, too! Where are you?"

"Just now, at police headquarters." And he laughed again. "I'll send a man around to the Perkins mansion to guide you, at any time you say. You needn't be afraid of him—"

"Don't worry, I'm not," snapped the girl. "Nor of you either. Have him here at three sharp, and I'll be along."

"Thanks, Di. Have a cop follow your car if you like—"

"Don't be a fool," she retorted. "You know I'll not turn you in to the cops. Good-by."

DIANA knew that she stood in no danger. Martin had tried to show her his power, to intimidate her if possible—perhaps to anger her and force this interview. That he must desire it fervently, she was well aware; he would need to have a clear understanding with her as to the future, since all relations between them were ended. He would not fear anything from her, nor did she particularly have any fear of him—the past assured this much. And his murder of Mary Simpson, which she no longer doubted, had ended everything between them for ever.

It was no wonder that with such thoughts at the back of her head, Diana's bridge was not brilliant that afternoon. Promptly

at three, a maid announced that a caller was waiting for her, and she rose, explaining that she had to try out a new chauffeur, and so departed.

Amos Brown, as the visitor announced his name, was a smallish man with sharp nose, sharp eyes, sharp face in general; he was very merry, and the girl set him down as an absolutely cold-blooded rascal—a human viper, capable of anything. He accompanied her out to the car and got in beside her.

"Which way?"

"Fordson," said Amos Brown, and grinned. "We'll go roundabout."

The little man waxed garrulous. He talked of the weather, of the city, of things in general, but said never a word about himself or his associates. She understood that he was staving off questions, and herself kept silent.

After half an hour's driving they had swung around to the north of the city and now kept straight ahead. Realizing that she might well be delayed by this errand, Diana halted at a small town and telephoned back to the office. Gray answered.

"If I don't show up by six," she said, "go ahead without me, Jimmy, and I'll meet you at Daly's. I can find where it is. I'll be there around twelve or before."

"Right," he said. "Better not go there alone, though—"

"I'm safe, thanks. Good-by."

She returned to the car, and met a suspicious look from Amos Brown.

"Telephoning?" he asked caustically.

"Yes, to say I'd not be back until late. Shut up and don't be so suspicious," she snapped angrily. "If I wanted to double-cross Speed, I'd have done it before this. Where's Daly's?"

He made no response, at once, then spoke slowly.

"Daly's is about four mile ahead, but we aint stopping there. I'll tell you when we pass."

He was as good as his word. Daly's proved to be a pleasant-looking place set back from the road amid the trees; its appearance held nothing sinister whatever. They were quickly past, and drove on toward the north. Amos Brown had fallen silent, now.

Fifteen minutes afterward, as they approached the outskirts of a small town, he motioned to a house ahead on the right—a tiny box of a place.

"Turn in there."

DIANA obeyed. A car stood before the house door, and she swung her coupe in and halted beside it. Brown hopped out nimbly, but the girl waited.

"Tell Speed to open up and show himself," she said. The little man grinned, comprehending her suspicion, and ascended the steps of the small veranda. He entered the house. A moment later the door opened again, and Speed Martin appeared in the opening.

"Come along, Di!" he exclaimed, smiling. "All safe."

She hesitated no longer, but climbed out of the car, and Martin held open the door as she entered and stepped into a plainly furnished room. Martin turned to Amos Brown.

"Get into my car and have the engine running," he said. "If anything looks wrong up the road, or a car stops, honk the horn and I'll be out."

Amos Brown nodded and left the room. Martin pulled out a chair from the wall.

"Sit down, Di—we're alone, and should be quite comfortable. Sorry you had to come so far, but I'm taking no chances; and as you see, must keep ready to run. Good of you to come."

Diana sat down, refused his offered cigarette case, and produced her own. She accepted a light, then sat back and eyed him steadily.

"You put yourself in a hole when you lied to me about that Simpson girl, Speed," she opened fire, without preliminary.

"Why interest yourself in the matter of a servant girl, Di?" he asked, smiling a little.

"No evasions, please."

There was a pause—a silence, a feeling of gathering forces, of an impending clash and conflict, like the dead hush that comes before a hurricane.

MARTIN was an unusual man—certainly no criminal to all appearance; rather a prosperous business man. His face was strong, whimsical, yet its humor was sardonic, and his thin lips held a firmness that went into ruthless cruelty. Black brows met in a straight bar above his direct and very sharp eyes. His hands were large, powerful, well-kept. He conveyed an impression of latent force, of poise, of thorough competence. Women like such men.

"Enjoy your trip to the station?" he asked, with his grim smile.

"A threat?" she demanded quietly.

"A warning," he said. "You frightened me, breaking everything off as you did—"

"Bah!" She made a gesture of contempt. "When you lie to me, when you murder a poor girl to cover up—then I'm through with you. We become strangers, even enemies."

"You're the only person alive who knows all about me, Di," he said reflectively.

"I've forgotten it," she flashed out. "If—"

"You needn't," he said. "Nothing you knew of me would be of use to anyone. You'll never telephone me again, old girl—at that number! I've broken clean away from Windsor, and that business this morning was just a little joke to impress myself on you. I wanted to see you and reach a clear understanding. Is it war between us?"

"Yes," she said promptly, her gaze challenging him.

"Then don't get in my way." His face tightened, drew into hard lines. "Throw me off if you like, but—don't get in my way. Not even what lies between us in the past, Di, would hold me back in such case."

"War is war," she said negligently. "I've shielded you until now; and I'm through. I'm asking nothing from you, and I'm promising nothing. That's the status from now on."

He looked at her, admiration in his eyes.

"No compromise—gad, but you're a fine one! I'm grateful to you for the past, Diana; I don't want to hurt you. If we—"

She stood up, and broke in crisply.

"Let the dead bury their dead, Speed. You're a thief, a liar, a murderer—Lord knows what else! From now on, we're strangers. Follow your road, I'll go mine; if we clash, it's no quarter. If we don't clash, well and good. Good-by."

Daly halted sharply. "Where's Martin?" said Connor. "Come across and save yourself trouble."

She turned to the door, and did not look at him again. The man rose, and a touch of fury rose and died in his eyes, and in its place came quick pain.

"Good-by, Diana," he said thickly.

She made no response, but opened the door and stepped outside, and closed the door behind her. In the strong light of afternoon, her face showed sternly set, as though the interview had cost her dear; but she nodded brightly to Amos Brown, got into her own car, started it. She turned out to the road, then went on to the town ahead.

"It had to be done, I suppose," she said, and dabbed her eyes swiftly. "And it's done. I'll take in a movie, get supper, drive back slowly—rest my nerves. I'm pretty ragged."

To return to Detroit, meet Jimmy Gray, and come back along the same road would be sheer waste of time. She might better wait here, and then meet Gray at Daly's place; and so she decided.

DALY'S was not a bad sort, as such places went. Downstairs, the front of the barn-like place was given over to the big room for eating, drinking, dancing; two smaller private rooms behind, and the kitchens. Upstairs might be a bit of gambling and other things, but these did not obtrude on the ostensible roadhouse features below.

The place was not crowded that night, for it was mid-week, but there was a comfortable assemblage, and the negro jazz band whooped things up to fill the gap. It was hard upon eleven when Diana entered, and the spectacle of a woman coming in alone—and such a woman—was enough to draw a gasp from the youngest habitué.

Having learned a bit about the place, and being quite able to use her eyes, Diana unconcernedly made her way toward the rear of the cabaret room, merely giving a smiling shake of the head to the beckoning head-waiter. Ahead, to the left, was the partition cutting off the two private rooms, the waiters going past the two doors to gain the kitchens beyond, through a small passage. At a table in the rear, which was empty, the girl paused, and a waiter came swiftly.

"Bring Daly here," she said, and sat down.

It had been a long chance, of course—Speed Martin's car was outside there, so he and Amos Brown must be here. Not in the main room, though; and as she waited for Daly, she caught the clear, hard tones of a voice from one of the private rooms. Speed was here on the ground floor, then—close to a getaway in event of trouble! She had figured him right; the luck was breaking her way.

With relief, Diana settled back in her chair and looked up at the approaching Daly. He was a dewlapped, suave, blue-jowled man, and one appraising glance from his bold eyes told him exactly what Diana was. He bowed slightly.

"Good evening, Miss. You wanted me?"

"Yes. I am Miss Corinth, and I'm expecting a gentleman later on. Can you give me a private room where I can wait for him?"

With the air of knowing a lady when he saw one, Mr. Daly said he certainly could do that little thing. He escorted Diana to the second of the private rooms—a large chamber, with a double window masked by flowers and bushes, overlooking the side yard where the cars of guests were parked. Diana ordered a club sandwich and a pot of tea. Daly instructed the waiter to see that she was left in peace unless she rang for anything, and he assured her that he would watch out for her gentleman friend. Then he departed, smirking.

LEFT alone with her late supper, Diana switched off the lights, settled herself by the window, and nibbled comfortably. In between the blare of music from the cabaret room, she caught low voices from the adjoining chamber, but made no effort to listen—she knew Amos Brown was there with Speed Martin. Eleven-thirty, she figured, would see the game at its end.

There were no doors to the private rooms—merely heavy curtains. She remained unmolested. Her tea and sandwich finished, she lighted a cigarette—placed her small automatic pistol in her lap, and glanced at her watch. Eleven-twenty. They should be along now at any moment, provided nothing had gone wrong in town.

Car lights swept the poorly lighted enclosure, glimmered across trees and shrubs and parked cars, vanished. Then they came again, powerfully, and the grind of a car. A heavy closed machine showed up, came past the line of parked cars, and drew to rest just beyond them—almost opposite the window where Diana sat. She extinguished her cigarette, waited. From the adjoining window came a low whistle. It was answered from the car, then by a low voice. "All right. We'll be right in."

She saw two men leave the car and vanish toward the rear of the place—dim figures in the obscurity outside. Then, almost at once, other car lights swept the trees as another car entered the enclosure. Diana knew that all was well. She left the window and darted to the curtained doorway, pistol in hand, and waited against the wall to one side of it, fingers on the electric switch. No telling what might happen now—

For an instant they stared at each other; the snarl died from his face. "So you've got me, Di!" he said.

Feet sounded outside—not the soft, quick tread of the waiters, but heavy solid steps. They paused at the girl's doorway; a hand gripped the curtain aside; she gripped the pistol, fingered off the safety catch.

"Not there, you fools!" came the voice of Speed Martin from the next doorway. "Here!"

They passed on. The girl sank against the wall in relief.

Outside, an expensive roadster with another car following had come into the enclosure and rolled to a halt before the entrance. The doorkeeper came out, and Jimmy Gray, leaning over the side, told him to send Daly out. He assented and went into the building. From the following car came a number of men who spread out about the grounds. One man sat beside Gray.

Daly emerged, suavely expectant at sight of the expensive car. He descended the steps and came up to it; then he halted sharply as the man beside Gray leaned out, and the lights fell on the police uniform and star.

"Hello, Daly! Cap'n Connor—know me?"

"Hello, Cap," said Daly. "What's up?"

"Speed Martin and the two men who just drove in to join him," said Connor crisply, and the gun in his hand covered Daly. "My men are all around here, and you can take your choice—either an open, public raid and you held with the rest, or a quiet tip and no publicity. Where's Martin? Come across and save yourself trouble."

Daly was no fool. He knew he was trapped, and taken beyond escape or any warning to Martin. One of the men came up from the other car and was standing at his elbow.

"You're on, Cap," he said without hesitation. "Martin's in one of the private rooms on the ground floor. A lady's in the other. I don't know if the two men have come in or not."

"All right." Connor climbed out. "Which room is Martin in?"

Daly told him, and the man beside them was sent to wait outside the window of the room.

"Who's the lady in the other room?" demanded Gray. "Miss Corinth?"

"That's her," said Daly disgustedly. "She in on this stuff? Good gosh! Well, gents, the house is yours—but have a heart, that's all I ask!"

THE doorman stood on the steps, wondering. Gray and the chauffeur of the second car, who showed no police uniform, strode into the place and made their way across the floor, skirting the edge of the dancers. Their progress was not rapid. As they neared the far side of the room, they saw Captain Connor appear in the kitchen doorway. The curtained doorways of the two private rooms were to their left.

From one of those doorways a man darted, rabbit-like. Even as he emerged, he saw the police uniform at the end of the passage, saw the two men approaching, and swift as a flash darted into the other doorway.

"Get him, Gray!" said the chauffeur, darting forward. "I'll hold the others."

Gray went forward on the jump, knowing the man had sensed something wrong and had slipped into the room where Diana Corinth waited.

She, standing beside the doorway, jerked up her pistol as the man flitted in, and her fingers switched on the light. In the electric glare he turned, snarling—he had already gone to the window. It was Speed Martin. For an instant they stared at each other. The snarl died from his face.

"So you've got me, Di!" he said. "War, eh? I didn't know—"

She switched off the light, plunged the room into darkness again.

"I can't, Speed, I can't!" she exclaimed, and heard a step pause outside. "Not this time—I'll cover you once more! Go ahead—the window—"

"Thanks, old girl!" he said huskily—and was gone.

Men were running, feet were pounding, voices rising. Outside the doorway Jimmy Gray dropped the curtain he had seized. He waited a moment, then called.

"Diana!"

"Here," she said, and switched the lights on again. No sound of alarm, no shot, came from outside. Speed Martin had vanished like a shadow among the bushes.

WHEN Diana entered the office of Jimmy Gray, on the following morning, he was awaiting her. She saw at a glance that he knew everything, that is, everything he could know.

"Will you come in here, please?" he said, replying to her cheerful greeting. She went into his office, and he faced her frankly, indicating the open newspaper on his desk.

"I'm sorry about last night," he said. "You've read all this, of course—full confessions and so forth, yet all knowledge of Speed Martin resolutely denied. Just a fellow they had met, they said. Well, what do you know about him?"

"Haven't I told you already?"

"I don't know what to think, Diana," and his cold reserve broke. "I was outside that door last night, heard what you said, knew you wanted to let him go. Why? What's that criminal to you? If our partnership is to endure on a business basis, it must be founded on trust."

HERE was crisis, and Diana was very pale as she met his level eyes.

"You're right, Jimmy," she said gravely. "What Martin and I have been to each other in the past, is ended. We met yesterday afternoon—it was a declaration of enmity, of war without quarter—"

"You've known him in the past!" exclaimed Gray, and his voice showed how he was hurt.

"Yes. I was weak last night, and spared him; I'd not do it again. I spoiled a big coup for you last night, and I'm sorry. If you want to dissolve this partnership here and now, you have every right to do so—"

"I don't," broke out Gray abruptly. "Diana, we're partners. I'll ask no questions; I'll take you on perfect trust."

"You blessed Jimmy!" she said, and her eyes were misty. "That makes me tell you. Speed Martin is my brother—my scapegrace, castoff, disinherited brother. I've stuck by him until now, but now it's ended. Now you know, Jimmy Gray."

For a moment Jimmy Gray met her challenging, level, yet pleading gaze—and then his hand went out to hers.

"Shake," he said, simply.

Hands gripped, eyes held, and suddenly they smiled one at another in understanding.

THIN ICE

By CHARLES H. SNOW

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

We have here a deeply interesting story of the Far North—of a race with death, of a desperate dilemma, and of a gallant dog who knew what to do and when to do it.

"SO you don't believe dogs have reasonin' powers?"

There was tolerance and resignation in the tone of the little old man, as if he took due account of the youth and inexperience of his companion. "White Horse" McCusker had come in with the rush of '98, and had been in Alaska ever since. Thrifty by instinct, he had acquired enough wealth to set up a trading-post on the lower river, and here he lived winter and summer. White Horse had gained his nickname by being almost drowned in the rapids of that name on his first trip to Dawson. But that was long ago; it was different now. He knew the North, and knowing the North, knew much about dogs, which were an integral part of the Northland.

"I do not," was Pelman's reply. "What they know, they know by instinct, or from learning it by heart. Pouf! Of course they can't reason."

Pelman was from the lower provinces. In various government jobs, with a fling at the Mounted Police, he had drifted up through the Northwest, thence across the Rat River Portage and down the Yukon. He was trapping this winter, and had his cabin near McCusker's post.

"Weel," said McCusker, lapsing into his native dialect, "ye have seen my Bobby Burns at work, lad, and do ye call that real reasonin'—or what?"

"Learned it by heart, same as a circus dog learns tricks. Before I believe a dog can reason, I'll have to be shown. I'm from Missouri, Mac."

"In a way ye are, lad," remarked the older man, "for mules come from Missoury, I have heard, and they are proverbial bullheaded; but from history the same State had also produced men wi' brains. No, lad, ye are just young, and wise wi' the way of the young. I can recall the day when I thought bein' a human bein' was a reemarkable privilege."

There was nothing ill-natured in the many arguments between these two. Throughout the long winter they had read and re-read everything readable, and had to talk. Their only visitors were occasional Eskimos or Siwashes who came in to trade furs at the post.

White Horse took out his watch and regarded it. It was five minutes to four. Outside, where the mercury hovered around forty below, deep twilight hung over the icy landscape. When the hands of the watch pointed to one minute of four, there

came a scratching and whining at the door. McCusker chuckled, got up, and opened the door.

WITH the inrush of freezing air came a sable-and-white collie. The dog twisted and wriggled. He sneezed, and snarled his upper lip back in a "smile."

"Ay, laddie," said White Horse, patting the long, finely molded head and running his fingers through the ruff, now doubly thick from the wintry cold, "ye're on time as usual."

Again the dog wrinkled his upper lip and sneezed. Then he trotted to a corner of the shack, and raising himself on his hind feet, placed his forepaws against the wall and grasped a set of harness with his teeth. The harness was hitched over a nail, but the collie removed it carefully, and carried it to McCusker. He dropped it at the feet of the old man, and stood waiting.

"Thank ye, Bobby."

The old man caressed the collie as he fitted and adjusted the harness. When this was finished, the dog pulled a light sled from beneath the bunk, and waited to be hitched to it. This McCusker did, and the dog stood whining and looking at the door.

"And seein' that for the fortieth time, Pelman, are ye still of the opinion that the dog shows no brain-power?"

"Learned it by heart," replied the younger man with a superior smile. "You took the trouble to teach him that it was his job to draw in a sled-load of firewood every afternoon. There's nothin' so mysterious about that."

"And how does he know to show up exactly at four every afternoon?"

"Can't answer you that precisely," retorted Pelman with a shrug. "Dogs have a sense of telling time, almost to the second. It merely bears out what I have said about most of their actions being instinctive."

"And have ye ever stopped to think how many of your own actions are instinctive, lad? If ye have not, do it, and ye will find out ye give little thought to most of them, and yet ye credit yourself with bein' a reasonin' animal. Open the door, lad, and we'll be on our way."

FOR all his cynicism Pelman enjoyed their daily jaunts into the jack pines after firewood, and keenly admired the sagacity of the collie for the part he played. McCusker's other seven dogs, malemutes and huskies, manifested no such interest or intelligence, though they were average team dogs. Pelman's dogs, too, were ordinary, in so far as Pelman knew dogs. When his daily task had been done, the collie invariably disdained to remain in the warmth of the cabin, but prowled around outside until night came, then curled up in his snow-burrow, no matter how low the mercury dropped.

Pelman flung open the door, and the collie trotted briskly out, paused beyond the doorway, and looked back to see if the men were following. McCusker and Pelman came out, and with the dog leading the way, they set out for the fringe of pines a half-mile back from the river. They had rounded the corner of the storehouse and started across the intervening stretch of snow when White Horse called "Whoa!"

Halfway to the pines was an oncoming dog-team, with a man hanging to the gee-pole of the sled. They waited till the man drew up his huskies in front of where Bobby Burns stood, ears pricked forward, sniffing. Both men saw before the team had stopped that the driver was an Eskimo, whom they had seen occasionally when he came down from the mission, a hundred miles inland, for supplies. Without acknowledging their salutations with more than a tired grunt, the native drew off his mitten and fumbled inside his reindeer-hide parka. He drew out a letter, which he handed to McCusker.

"Hell's Mariar!" exclaimed White Horse when he had caught the import of the message. "Smallpox's broke out at the mission, and the Reverend wants me to bring in vaccine and grub. It's damned lucky I got 'em both. The vaccine was left here by one of the department doctors last fall in case it should be needed, and I got grub."

The Eskimo must have made a hard drive, for his dogs had dropped in their traces and lay spent and panting, the breaths from their pink mouths forming white vapor in the cold air. The Eskimo, too, was all in.

Pelman took the letter and read it. "Damn these outfits!" he growled. "They ought to stock up with enough grub to last the winter, and keep medicines on hand. Here!" he said to the Eskimo, "How'd the bloomin' malady get among you?"

The native, educated at the mission, explained that a man had come down over the Tanana trail and brought the disease with him. Half the population of the mission were down, and the other half were afraid of getting it. They depended mostly upon reindeer meat for food, and there was no one to do the slaughtering. There was no vaccine, and little other medicine; and the people there, all except the missionary, were in a panic. There had already been five deaths.

"It'll take two sleds to carry grub enough," declared Pelman, "and this fellow can't make the trip back for two or three days. He and his team are shot."

"And so you'll go along?" asked White Horse hopefully.

"Sure, I'll go. It wont hurt the traplines to wait a few days. First thing we've got to do is to isolate this beggar—make him a camp outside. We can't afford to take any chances by letting him bunk in one of the shacks."

THE trail that McCusker and Pelman were to follow led for five miles across the flat tundra, then rose to the crest of a range of hills and dipped down to the shore of a lake which extended in either direction for twenty miles. The distance from the post to the lake shore was about thirty miles, and McCusker, realizing the necessity for haste, decided to drive this far before making camp. They could be up and off early the next morning, and easily make the mission before the end of the day.

The sled of the Eskimo had broken the trail, and the going was fairly good, so that they arrived at the edge of the lake about ten o'clock. Camp was made in a thicket of scrub timber. With the night the thermometer had dropped, and during the first few hours the men lay in their sleeping-bags they heard noises like the crashing and reverberations of mighty cannon. Both men knew this was the splitting of the ice on the lake, and were disappointed. The Eskimo had told them that he had come straight across the lake on his trip to the post, and that the ice was firm. Now, with the certainty of strips of thin ice, they would have to make a twenty-mile detour and skirt the southern shore.

Sometime between midnight and morning the mercury suddenly jumped upward thirty degrees, and there came a flurry of powdery snow that blanketed the ice with an inch-deep covering. McCusker and Pelman were ready for the start at the first sign of day.

"We've got to swing round the shore to the south," announced White Horse as they stood looking across the smooth, snowy lake to the distant mountains whose summits were lit by the sun that would not rise above them. "Wi' the boomin' of them guns durin' the night it'll not be safe takin' the ice far off shore."

"I think I'll try it straight across," said Pelman. "It was cold enough after the split for the lake to scum over hard again. Why, damn it, Mac, it's cold enough still to make good ice."

"Ye cannot always tell how much cold it takes to make good ice," replied McCusker. "Sometimes ten below will do it, and other times forty below will not, and there's the snow, which makes it all look alike. If it was not for the snow, lad, ye could locate the cracks, but not now. Come along, lad; it'll only take a couple of hours more travel, and a live tired man is worth three drowned dead ones when there's sickness and misery for others at the end of the trail."

"I'm going straight across," declared Pelman. "I'll take the risk."

"Then ye'll take it alone, lad," White Horse replied calmly, but with finality. "Ye are free, white and twenty-one, and so am I. I have lived long enough to see that a couple of hours more or less is of little consequence one way or the other. Ye have not lived long enough, but that ye think ye have no time to lose out of your precious young life. I wish ye luck, lad, and if ye get into thin ice, ye'll have to figure your own way how to get out. I will be too far off to come to your aid. From the boomin' of the great ice-guns, the splits are well out, and they are long, lad. Will ye be careful?"

The men had finished hitching their dogs as they talked, and McCusker gave his team the word to mush on. Bobby Burns, proud and dignified in his leadership, struck off at a pace that caused White Horse to leap to the sled and hang onto the gee-pole as it swept over the ice. As the team rounded the first scrub-timbered point, he looked back. Pelman and his team were a quarter of a mile out upon the ice, going fast.

It was not until they were around the point that McCusker's leader, the big collie, discovered that the other team was not

following. Then he kept turning his head, looking away toward the other team on the ice, and whining.

"Ye are a wise dog, Bobby Burns," said McCusker, who often held long one-sided conversations with his dogs, especially his leader. "Ye have heard the boomin' of the great ice-guns too many times, Bobby, and it is too many times ye and the other dogs have lain and whined as ye did last night in your snow-burrows when the heavens echoed with the crashin', not to know what it means. Mush along, laddie, and let the damned fool go his way. Likely he'll come to no harm, for the same God that freezes us here in winter, and causes us to be eat alive with the mosquitoes and black flies in the summer, seems to look after them of His that are weak in the head."

McCusker had traveled for an hour when a stiff off-shore wind swept out of the cañons that emptied into the lake from southward. The wind was so strong and the snow so powdery that within half an hour the ice at the southern portion of the lake was swept clean, and the snow sent swirling and drifting to northward. McCusker was thus able to locate the ice cracks, and to cross some of them where he found they would bear the weight of himself and his team, and to swing around the others. Miles to northward, when the flying snow occasionally thinned, he caught glimpses of the dark dot that was Pelman and his team well out in mid-lake.

IT was different with Pelman, for all about him the snow swirled and piled up. The ice itself seemed to vibrate.

Pelman drove ten dogs, nine of which were mediocre malemutes and huskies. The tenth dog, the leader, was a large and striking beast. "Canuck," Pelman called him. He had bought him across the mountains near where the Peace joins the Mackenzie. Canuck was a mixed breed of St. Bernard, husky and Irish setter, a musher if there ever was one. He might have made a remarkable dog if he had been owned by a man who understood dogs and took the trouble to study them, to commune with them in a silent language they could both understand.

They were a third of the distance across the lake when out of the past when he ran with the wolf pack there presumably came to Canuck the memory of other such days when there had been thin ice, when members of the pack in pursuit of their quarry, had sunk, to be seen no more, and of other members of that same pack who had looked back and whined with fear as the air-bubbles came up through the water that rose and froze over the ice.

Canuck balked, and sat down in his traces, stopping the team behind him. Pelman lashed him up and on with whip and curses. To him had come the spirit of the race. He must beat McCusker to the opposite shore, and to their common goal. Whining, reluctant, Canuck swerved to the left and tried to turn back. Again he was whipped and cursed into line, only to swerve the other way a few minutes later. By this time Pelman was frantic. He must beat McCusker. Again he straightened out his team until he could look past the lead dog to the shore he must make.

The wind bit like cutting steel, and the snow swirled about man and dogs. Pelman cursed as his whip rose and fell. His dogs whimpered as they felt the sting of the lash, and though the nine mediocre dogs would have gone on, they could not. Canuck had rebelled. He squatted upon his haunches and looked back entreatingly amidst the volley of lashings at the man who would force him onward. It was an act unforgivable to a man who did not understand dogs.

"Damn you!" swore Pelman. "When any dog gets so he thinks he knows more about ice than I do! This lake isn't big enough for a crack to be more than a few feet wide. With such cold it would be solid in two hours."

Despairing, at last, of forcing the team, he took the light testing-pole from the sled and strode forward. Canuck welcomed his master with whines, and twisting of his big body, and straightened out the team. Then Pelman, more impatient than ever, started forward, tapping the ice ahead of him every yard or so. Canuck led the team along two rods behind.

It was at the point where Pelman started to turn back, to try to drive the team before him, that he felt the ice give way. He struggled, flung out his arms to prevent his sinking into the icy flood that swept upward; but all in vain. He hung for just the briefest second with the water at his armpits, and then went under.

Struggling with what he knew was cold, implacable death, he fought his way to the surface. He managed to keep his head above water, and could feel the toes of his moccasins vainly trying to dig a hold in

As it swept past, Pelman's hand found a hold. The dogs dug in their claws and pulled.

the five-foot wall of ice. In his struggles he touched the opposite side of the crevasse, and found it was not more than five feet wide. In spite of the cold, the ice above the crack had not frozen to an inch in thickness.

If only he had the pole! But he had flung it wide in his first efforts to keep from sinking. It lay twenty feet away. If he could get it, he could rest it across the crack, and manage to draw himself to safety. Already the cold was numbing his flesh. Five minutes here, even if his strength would hold him above water, and he would be dead.

The prospect was not encouraging, but it made Pelman fight the harder. In his frenzy he shouted for McCusker—but what chance was there against such a wind? McCusker was miles off there to the south.

"Canuck! Canuck! Come here, come here!" Pelman managed to hook his elbows over the ice wall as he called, but he could not hold against the cold and the grease-like smoothness of the ice.

The big dog stood stiff, trembling, whimpering, twenty feet away. If Pelman could only coax him within reach! The team could pull him to safety. Slowly, yet with the swiftness of mercury itself, his hold slipped. Down, down, inch by inch Pelman sank once more, though he fought with all his might to keep up. The cold was getting him. He could feel it deadening his nerves, his muscles, even his bones. He must act, or die.

It was not until Pelman had fought his way up again that he thought of the light ax he carried at his belt. By desperate effort he hooked his left elbow over the ice rim, and managed to get hold of the ax with his right hand. It would be a simple matter to hack a notch in the ice, and get a firm hold by which he could draw himself out. He hacked frenziedly, for he felt the fingers of cold death clutching at him; then the handle of the little ax slipped from his numb fingers, and it went skidding across the ice.

"My God!" he moaned. "My God!"

With his last strength he managed to hook his other elbow over the slippery rim. His hold was better this time, and he hung for a few seconds. He looked for the team. It was not where he had last seen it. No, Canuck had the other dogs under way and

was leading the team off to the left. The big dog broke into a run; the others kept pace. It was with a cold, sinking heart that Pelman saw the team turn under Canuck's leadership, and head off toward shore. He was lost.

He might as well let go, and sink now. He could not hold on for another half minute. It would not be so hard dying, now that he was half dead from the cold. But no, he must beat McCusker. Then as quickly as he had lost hope, he found it. The team was not deserting him. No, by the Lord, it was not!

Like a wily old captain leading reluctant troops, Canuck was turning the team. He was running now with all his heavy, lumbering speed, dragging half the weight of the load behind him. He was traveling southward, then southeastward, then eastward, changing direction with each split second. Now he was heading the team straight up along the edge of the ice crack.

As the sled swept past, Pelman grabbed for a runner, but missed by a foot. The effort cost him his hold, and as he sank he saw the sled and racing team sweeping away. There was hope now, and hope resurrected the power to fight for life. But in spite of the renewed hope, the fight could not last many minutes longer. The cold was too intense. Pelman's brain was the only part of him that was not numbed. As he fought his way up again, and finally managed to hook his elbows over the ice rim, he looked and marveled at the strategy and sagacity of the dog, this dog who among all others he had secretly despised because he was not endowed with reasoning power. Through Pelman's brain a swift thought ran, and held:

"Where back among the ancestors of this mongrel dog had there been an ancestor who had rescued a master like this?"

Canuck was circling again. Amazed, revivified with hope, Pelman kept his hold. This time Canuck brought the sled closer to the thin ice and as it swept past Pelman's hand found a hold on the runner. It was the grasp of life.

The suddenly added weight yanked the dogs back to their haunches. The sled almost came to a stop. When Canuck felt the added load behind him he somehow managed to convey the significance of it to the other dogs. They dug in their claws and pulled.

Pelman held to the runner till he was twenty feet from the treacherous spot that had so nearly claimed him, then let go his hold. The knowledge that he was safe dazed him for a few moments. He lay spent and panting. Then with sudden realization that he was not yet safe, he got to his feet. His clothing was already freezing; he must get out of it, or perish.

Canuck had brought the team in a short circle, and stood twisting his body and whimpering with joy. The instinct of self-preservation was uppermost in Pelman's thoughts. He had not time to marvel, as he did in later days, that this same desire to survive had been handed down to him through distant forbears who had fought elementals for life, that this instinct made him think of himself first.

Securing the ax, for his fingers were too numb to fumble with the knots, and time too precious, he cut the sled lashings.

Then he half cut himself out of his freezing clothing and crawled into the fur-lined sleeping bag. Fumbling about until he found a flask of whisky meant for the stricken Eskimos, he took a stiff drink, and pulled the flap of the bag over his head. He would not freeze here.

TWO hours later McCusker found them, man and dogs huddled about the sled. "I got to worryin' about ye, lad," said the old man when he had got Pelman into dry clothing. McCusker had been in the North too long to start out on a trip like this without a change of clothes. "So I took my back trail, and picked up yours. I have learned, lad, that it is never safe to venture on open ice when the great ice-guns have boomed the night before."

"And I have learned, Mac," Pelman declared through chattering teeth, "that dogs can reason like humans—a damned sight better than most humans. From Klondike to Nome there aint gold enough to buy that Canuck from me, Mac. Sometime, when I get thawed out, I'll tell you about it; I'm too damned cold now. Here, give me another snort of that whisky."

"And that I'll not," replied McCusker. "Ye have had enough now to do the very devil of damage to ye in this cold. Ye will mush wi' me round the south end, lad. That will start the blood flowin' warm in your veins. I am that damned glad that ye have ceased bein' the sole sooperior animal wi' reasonin' powers that I will lead ye and your dogs across good ice five miles to south'ard, where the wind has swept it clean. Will ye be mushin'?"

Devil's Cargo

Illustrated by William Molt

By STEPHEN HOPKINS ORCUTT

Of all the many exciting adventures which befell the good ship Argentine Liberator and her gallant officers, this experience with a treacherous cargo and its owners is the most interesting.

THE streets of Sourabaya in eastern Java, with their overarching trees, are nearly always comfortable even under a blazing tropic sun—and the town is considered healthier for residential purposes than Batavia. But Sourabaya Road, where the large steamers anchor, or moor alongside the stone quays of the river-mouth to discharge cargo, is one of the hottest areas of flat, oily water on the face of the globe. The big white Brock liner, having no cargo to discharge and as yet none "fixed" to take aboard, was anchored on the edge of the fairway half a mile inside from the hospital on the end of the jetty—her decks and bridge sheltered by khaki awnings, the air in her mess-saloon and inside gangways kept stirring by electric fans. At the starboard end of the bridge her mate and doctor, in spotless white uniforms with nothing underneath, leaned upon the rail, smoking their pipes and watching a launch which was coming down-river between the stone quays from the business and residential quarters of the city a mile or so farther up. Coffin focused his glasses upon a group under the launch's awning.

"Looks like the old man, up there in the bow. I don't think he'll have any news about cargo, or Jack Fowler would have gotten it by radio—the operators at the Government station are pretty decent about switching on the agents' telephone-wire if they've anything important to say, but we'd have gotten it ourselves from Hongkong direct if Eversley Brock had fixed anything for us. From the gang aboard that launch, I'd say we're picking up a few passengers, anyhow."

"When we've no idea where we're going next? Guess not!"

"M-well—that's not as definite a conclusion as you think, Bob. There are two sorts of people who take passage on a limited accommodation cargo-boat like the *Argentine Liberator*—partly for the sake of the lower fare on first-class accommodation, partly because such boats may be the only ones available for two or three weeks. Where the destination is known, any tourists or commercials would book with us for

those two reasons; on the other hand, when we *don't* know where we're going, there's a class of tourists with independent means who'll often take a chance because they like a comfortable cruise most anywhere on a good-sized, well-found ship and know they can make steamer-connections wherever we happen to take them. Some of the most delightful acquaintances we ever make come in that class."

"Yes, we've got a couple of girls aboard now who rate pretty high. They'll stick with us until we make London again—mebbe longer—money to burn and nothing to hinder. At least, Katharine Lee has—since she inherited that uncle's fortune in Rio. Marjorie Banton has the best head of the two—from what Katharine hinted, she's been drawing a six-thousand-dollar salary from a big engineering concern and saving more than half of it for years. If she takes nine or ten months off to rest up, her job will be waiting for her when she gets back. I'd like to make myself as indispensable as that. *Psst!* Get onto the dame with the Pekingese and the lorgnette! Somehow she doesn't look so good to me—seems to be doing most of the talking, down there in the launch. Hope she's not going to wish herself on us in the saloon!"

"By Jove—she *is*, though! Look at the mess of hand-luggage stacked around her—even to that yaller-green parrot in the big cage! Fortunately Connyngsby isn't the sort of an ass that Ludd was when he left that Bradley-Fyssher dame pretty nearly run the ship—but the old man is always courteous—he'll let a bossy woman-passenger go pretty far before he sits on her. Hmph! Looks like it wont be altogether a dull voyage, no matter where we go! Here's hoping we get a few level-headed ones like the Cartersons to even up. Eh?"

AS the launch approached the grating at the foot of the accommodation-ladder, they leaned a little farther over the bridge-rail to watch the people coming aboard—hearing quite distinctly the complimentary remarks which were being passed upon the steamer's clean and shipshape appearance.

Stepping out of the launch first, Connyngsby gave a hand to each of the others. Mrs. Bollingford went a little too far in attempting to hand him the Pekingese and the parrot—probably failing to realize the quiet snub when he said that one of the stewards would come down after them, presently. As she came puffing up the steamer's side, stepping aboard into the main-deck gangway, her manner was proprietory—it was to be seen that she approved of the ship, with perhaps a few minor alterations which would occur to her later. Coming up to the boat-deck upon which her room was situated, she stepped out through the companion for a look along the deck-space abaft the "house," and wished to know which side she was on. Connyngsby pointed to her two gangway-ports and was about to look after some of the other passengers, but she detained him.

"Why—that is on the sunny side, Captain! I distinctly stipulated, when I booked at the agents', that my room must be on the shady side! The sun would be intolerable in this frightful heat, and Toto's eyes are very sensitive!"

"You have stateroom B, madam—one of our two best cabins, with private bath adjoining—but I fear you'll not be able to keep Toto or the bird in it. Possibly we might let him stay with your maid in one of the smaller rooms, right-away aft—"

"Toto is a lady-dog, Captain, and it is quite necessary that she have the best of care. I'm not sure it would be wise to permit Celeste—"

"Oh, we must give Celeste a chance, you know. The parrot, of course, will have to go for'ard with the Lascars. As for your room bein' on the sunny side, the tide will change that in a few hours, temporarily—though the deck-awnings will keep it as cool as any of the rooms while we're in tropic waters. Of course the agents couldn't possibly book you upon any shady side, d'ye see, because it's not known as yet which way the boat is goin' from here. If we get cargo for one of the American ports, to be sure, you'd be on the shady side all the way across the Pacific—but if she's fixed for London or Liverpool, you know, the sun would be on your side all the way."

"I think it's very poor management—not knowing where you expect to go from here, when they said you might leave at any hour!"

"Faith, we'd not object to knowin' that ourselves, Mrs. Bollingford—upon that point, we're quite in accord with you. But, d'ye see, a boat must pay her way—she must go where cargo is moving an' ocean freights are sufficient to cover her expenses. Now—if you'll permit me—I'll show you into your room an' then take your maid along to hers with the beastie. I dare say

we can make them quite comfortable. What?"

Giving her no time to insist upon accompanying them to satisfy herself upon this point, he beckoned the silent maid after him, and when she was in the room assigned to her, explained in very good French how she could arrange a nest for the Pekingese upon the transom, with a bunkboard to keep her from sliding to the floor in heavy weather. Celeste didn't say much, but what there was of it savored more of the Place de la Bastile than of the Faubourg St. Germain—with just a hint of vaguely familiar accent in it.

"My word, Celeste! Have they raised the Tricolor over Limerick?"

"Faith, an' they've not, Cap'n dear—but I do be gettin' a hoondr' an' twinty goold dollars the month f'r bein' Frinch! Oi'm not lettin' a matther of changin' me name stand in the way of me job. There'll be what I could say in Gaelic, ye moind—about that little baste—as would blisther the hair off her head. But 'twould be too ixpensive ontil Oi've saved a bit!"

Connyngsby shook with silent laughter. "I fancy we understand each other perfectly, Celeste. Er—you might caution the lady if you can do it safely, against getting the impression that she's the guest of honor aboard. The average passenger doesn't fancy that attitude greatly, you know—an' we much prefer a harmonious saloon."

SAILING regulations being partly suspended in port, Miss Lee and Miss Banton had climbed to the bridge to chat with the two officers—giving them an account of their doings ashore—regretting that it had been necessary for the mate and doctor to remain aboard.

"What price this Mrs. Bollingford, Neddie?"

"Not even a lead florin! We've got our fingers crossed! She may be amusing enough, Marjorie—but that sort of passenger is likely to be annoying at just the wrong time. No real trouble in smooth weather, you understand—when she's fair game to be guyed a bit. But in heavy going—or any sort of emergency—good *night!* Any more like her booked with us?"

"I think not. Guess it's too much of a gamble for the average passenger—who wants to know exactly where he's going and in exactly how many hours. But there are four or five who look as though they may turn out rather nice. Mr. and Mrs. Evanston seem to be real folks, from the little I talked with them in the launch. He made a fortune in rubber and has practically retired at forty—both well educated and well-liked in the Government set at Singapore. Doctor said she ought to keep at sea for three or four months to rest up from the Peninsula—they're both crazy about the water. Miss Graham and Miss Farwell are school-teachers—on the sort of vacation they've been several years planning and saving for. They get farther for their money on the *Argentine,* first-class, than they can on any of the liners. Then there's a Mr. Hoesen—Dutch, I suppose, though he speaks very good English. Dark enough to have a tinge of Malay blood in him, if it's not tan. Quite civil and all that—but his eyes are too near together to suit me. He looks around out of the corners, sometimes, the way a stray cur does just before he bites."

"Old man say anything about cargo?"

"Not a word. I don't think he's heard anything. Here he comes now! Want us off the bridge, Captain?"

"My word—no! Not until the anchor's up, at all events! It's a relief to let down a bit with you ladies after what I've had the last hour or so."

"Any word about cargo, Captain? I told Ned I thought not—or you'd have dropped a hint to me."

"Nothin' definite, Miss Marjorie. We can get full up in Frisco any time the next sixty days—but that's much too long a trip in ballast. The coals would more than eat up all the profit we got there. The agents had word of a native sultan in Celebes who'll load us with coir an' copra if we'll take it across the Pacific—payin' a bit over what the coal would cost us—aye, a possible thousand to the good. One of their Dutch clerks—tryin' to be a bit overofficious, d'ye see—cabled Eversley Brock, in Hongkong, about it. I told him Brock wouldn't consider the stuff unless at rates considerably more than it's worth. Copra's not so bad unless the oil oozes out of it from the heat of the hold—an' coir's well enough if ye can dampen it a bit—but put 'em together, an' I don't fancy 'em as cargo. Peculiar stuff—coir. It rots in fresh water an' snaps short when frozen with it—but the more it soaks in salt water, the tougher the fiber gets, an' it makes a hawser that'll always float. The Yankees have put it to other uses, recently

—some sort of cold-storage insulation, I believe. Likely enough this Celebes sultan has sold a few small lots that he sent across to Frisco in Island schooners—an' now has been strippin' an' stackin' it until there's a few thousand tons to ship."

"Who is representing him here? Dutch Government?"

"Rather not! They've no boats of their own runnin' across to Frisco—an' they'll not encourage outsiders gettin' any of the native trade if they can help it. But, d'ye see, the Malay sultans in the interior of all these islands are independent rulers, with merely a Dutch resident stayin' with 'em officially to look out for Governm'nt int'rests—an' if they interfere too much with a sultan's private business, they're likely to have an uprisin' on their hands. Much better to look the other way in a case of this sort. This chap Hoesen, who came aboard with us, is representin' the sultan, an' he's asked the agents to treat the matter confidentially. Can't say I'm strong for him on his general appearance—I fancy he'll not be Dutch, either—but his passage-money is good as the next one's, an' he'll go as far as Celebes at least if the owners take him up—which isn't likely. Though, as a matter of fact—if we're to lie about these waters runnin' up port charges—it might save money to do it."

NEITHER Connyngsby nor his officers had any idea that Mr. Eversley Brock would accept that sort of cargo for one of the finest boats in his fleet, but it just so happened that one of those occasional combinations of circumstances which it is always difficult to guard against settled the matter before the chief owners had an opportunity to pass upon it. The agent's clerk in Sourabaya was an ambitious young chap, anxious to demonstrate his value, and consequently showing initiative where the machinery would have been better for his not meddling with it. He had cabled the Hongkong office in sufficient detail to make the proposition appear better than it actually was. Eversley Brock, at the time, was elephant-hunting in Siam as a guest of the King—where he couldn't be reached for a week or more. In his absence the assistant manager—always looking for business—received the proposition, and had to pass upon it. From an all-round point of view, as Connyngsby had said, it was possibly better than having a big cargo-boat eating up her profits in port-charges while waiting for something better. He talked it over with the port captain—who damned that sort of cargo, but admitted that it might be good business to take it. So Connyngsby got this radio in the morning:

> CONNYNGSBY, MASTER.
> Str. *Argentine Liberator.*
> Sourabaya, N. I.
> Think advisable accept Celebes cargo, Frisco—full load waiting there.
> BROCK & CO., Hongkong.

Not knowing of Eversley Brock's absence, the Captain was considerably surprised at the message—but never dreamed of going over his head with a cable to the head office in Liverpool. He cleared his boat in three hours, and went steaming off down the Java Sea for Macassar at a comfortable fourteen knots, to save coal. That afternoon the passenger Hoesen—in a private interview—told him the sultan had arranged to ship the cargo in a way that would avoid friction all round. The boat was to anchor for an hour or two in Macassar Road "for orders," which would be fetched aboard by a local agent who would proceed with them. Then they were to go around the Minahassa into the Gulf of Tomini to a point twenty miles west of Gorontalo, where there was a narrow fiord three miles in length with precipitous mountains on both sides. At the inner end of this the sultan's coir and copra were stacked under a long nipa shed waiting for them—and unless a Dutch survey-boat happened along unexpectedly, the Government would know nothing at all about the shipment, as none of the Koninklijke packets go into the western half of the Gulf, anywhere.

Hoesen also mentioned a couple of Australian miners who had struck a rich vein of platinum-matrix and by rudimentary methods of reduction, on the spot, had obtained half a dozen cases of crude platinum which they were anxious to have assayed in San Francisco, rather than send it down to Sydney and risk a "rush" of prospectors coming up to make trouble. If Connyngsby would deliver the stuff in San Francisco without permitting any talk concerning it, the miners were willing to pay a freight-rate in proportion to the value—and Hoesen pointed out that this should be a welcome boost over the other freights. On the face of it, the Captain agreed with him—said he would take the cases and stow them carefully with the bales of coir. He was no miner, himself.

The story seemed plausible enough to make any suspicion ridiculous.

While Connyngsby was clearing the ship at Sourabaya after showing Coffin and Fowler the message from the Hongkong office—it struck the mate as plain horse-sense to risk a little of his own money against a contingency which seemed very remote at the time. Getting the agents to cash his draft on the owners, he purchased from a chemical house twenty small casks of soda-bicarbonate and had them delivered on board before the anchor was up—stowing the casks in a 'tween-deck space over the Number One Hold used upon occasions for

*He saw two rows of candles packed in sawdust—on the wrappings: "*DYNAMITE 80%*."*

Asiatic steerage. He told the Captain it was a little private venture of his own—but said nothing about what he proposed doing with it.

While they were shipping the coir in the little landlocked fiord, hidden from any passing boat outside, the two mining engineers came down from their mountain camp on burros and showed the mate where half a dozen teakwood cases were hidden in the jungle growth under nipa thatch—cautioning him about handling them as carefully as possible to prevent the crude residuum from crumbling in transit. Coffin was no mineralogist, either. In a general way he knew that platinum was one of the heavy metals, but had no idea *how* heavy. In lifting one of the cases, it felt weighty enough to prevent his giving that point another thought. They told him that with a second-hand dynamo, an old petrol-motor and some blue clay—with plenty of rusty barbed-wire—they had constructed a rudimentary electric furnace in which they had reduced the matrix until there was little remaining but the platinum, with small percentages of iron, copper, osmium and iridium which the assayers would easily separate, and send them a report on the stuff. It sounded all right enough. He told the Malays who were putting the cases aboard to be careful about not dropping or jarring any of them and had his own Lascars stow them temporarily in the 'tween-deck space—telling the miners that before putting on the hatches he would stow the cases with the upper tier of coir-bales in order that they might have something to cushion against in heavy weather. This seemed entirely satisfactory to the shippers and to Hoesen, who went back up into the mountains with them until a launch from Gorontalo came after him to catch the next Koninklijke boat. An hour later the big freighter slipped quietly out of the little fiord and headed out toward the end of the Minahassa.

BEFORE they were clear of the land, the hatches were on and everything safely stowed for the long reach across to San Francisco. The course lay directly through the Caroline Islands, which they

would reach in about three days—then the Marshall and Hawaiian groups. Of the ship's officers, Coffin was the only one who now gave another thought to the cargo—to the rest of them the shipment was safely on board and the course laid for their destination, and so they turned their attention to other matters. About the time they were clearing the easterly point of the Minahassa, however, the second mate—who also acted as radio-operator—came to Ned Coffin with a message relayed from the Lloyd's office in London.

COFFIN, MATE.
Str. *Argentine Liberator.*
Molucca Sea.
Insurance Frisco cargo £90,000. Chiefly on six cases platinum. If metal 70% pure, not excessive with full load coir and copra. Otherwise—overinsured. What information have you? FERNSHAW.

AFTER handing the mate his message and leaving him reading it on the bridge, Fowler had gone back to his radio-cabin at the after end of the boat-deck. The more Coffin reread the radiogram and thought it over, the more he didn't like several things it might suggest under varying conditions. Philip Fernshaw—a confidential agent for Lloyd's—had made the round trip with them on the previous voyage out from London and back again—and had won the liking of everyone on board, finding Ned Coffin the most congenial of the lot.

Later, in the matter of Katharine Lee's Rio inheritance, the mate had put Fernshaw under considerable personal obligation in addition to what they had assisted each other to do for Lloyd's. So this message from him was both a cautious inquiry concerning the business of the greatest underwriting concern in the world, and a friendly tip that Coffin would do well not to accept too much for granted. Calling Dunham, a quartermaster who was boning up on navigation for a third mate's ticket, he turned over the bridge to him and stepped along to the master's cabin abaft the wheelhouse—where he showed Connyngsby the radiogram.

"Well—you examined those cases, didn't you, Ned? I looked at the coir an' copra rather closely as it came aboard. Copra a bit greasy, but not more than it usually is in the Island schooners—"

"In more or less open holds, sir—little but matting over it—less chance to get worse from heat in a confined place. I lifted one of those cases a few inches—seemed about as heavy as it should be for half-reduced platinum, from what I've heard of the stuff—it took a couple of husky Malays to get each case aboard. Of course I didn't open any of them. No excuse for it—might have caused the crumbling those mining engineers were anxious to avoid. Now I think of it, 'crumbling' seems a bit queer in reference to any solid metal—but I suppose it might have been reduced far enough to be in somewhat loose crystalline form, though I don't know the first thing about the chemistry of such minerals."

"Oh—aye! Fancy I'd not question the statem'nts of scientific Johnnies like those two, you know. Well—then—you'd say to Fernshaw that everything appears to be quite right, would ye not?"

"Until I got this message, I would—probably. But now—I'm not so sure."

"Why—what d'ye mean, Ned? What could be wrong about any of the stuff—that'll not show as it comes aboard?"

"Well—those are pretty strong teak cases, securely nailed up—or—no, by Jove! —screwed fast. They could be filled with scrap-iron or stones and still be about the right weight for platinum."

"Aye—quite so. They could. But ye'll not be forgettin' the stiff freights they paid over to me in drafts on the Hongkong & Shanghai Bank at the same time Hoesen gave me similar drafts for the coir. Orders were, ye know, that we'd not load the stuff without freights in advance. Well, d'ye see—they'd pay no such amount on stones an' scrap-iron!"

"Not with any certainty of the stuff reaching destination—no."

"An' what bee have ye in your head about that? Why shouldn't they reach destination? It's not hurricane season in the Pacific."

"H-m-m—if it just happened that the *Argentine* turned up missing, those stiff freights on the platinum wouldn't be a flea-bite on the ninety thousand pounds they're carrying on the cargo—would they? If I could make ninety thousand, sterling, on a net investment of six or eight thousand, I'd call it a fairly good business proposition."

"Oh, nons'nse, man—nons'nse! Ye'll be gettin' on my nerves, presently, with that sort of talk—an' that's no proper condition for a shipmaster to be in!"

"Well—I'd rather make you nervous now, sir, than risk seeing you lose life or

ticket between here and Frisco. Just humor me a bit, will you, until I put the case as it easily might be—and see how it looks? Eh? Within the next twenty-four hours we'll be within short steaming distance of Banda Neira or Zamboanga, on Mindanao. In sixty hours we'll be not so far from Yap in the Carolines. But afterward there'll be a week during which we'll be pretty far from any sort of assistance until we reach Hawaiian waters. We've fourteen passengers, with eight women, and a pretty good-sized crew—that's a lot of folks to be adrift on the Pacific in open boats even if they all get safely into them. Now, if those platinum-cases are fakes, the whole cargo is a fake—because Hoesen was managing the whole shipment. If the cargo is a fake, the consignees in Frisco are fakes—we'll have the stuff on our hands and all sorts of complications with it before we can load and get away again. If we find out any actual facts of that sort, I'm betting that Eversley Brock will order us up to Hongkong or Manila, auction off this stuff we're carrying, for anything it'll fetch—and pick up a better cargo for us with some other destination. What I'm getting at is this: It seems to me that we can't know what is actually in those platinum-cases any too soon!"

"My word! There'll be a good deal in what ye say, Coffin. But we can't be meddlin' with shippers' property, ye know—committin' what amounts to breakin' an' enterin' on it, especially when we've been warned to handle with extra care to avoid lessenin' its value. Eh?"

"According to maritime law, sir, a shipmaster may jettison his entire cargo if he finds it dangerous to the ship—or if he has proof it was shipped with intent to defraud."

"Aye—an' risk havin' his ship libeled in a civil suit by the shippers at the first port, for the full value of what he's jettisoned!"

"But—isn't he frequently obliged to take that risk, sir, to save life and owners' property?"

"Aye—he is so. But he's to be sure of what he's about, first."

"Well—it's a fairly dark night, just drizzle enough to keep the passengers below. Nobody'll see what's going on in the for'ard well. Will you let me have up one of those cases and overhaul it—very carefully?"

"H-m-m—I fancy ye'll not do so much damage to anything in the way o' metal by havin' a look-see at it. Aye—go ahead! I'll take the responsibility."

THE more Coffin thought of the supposed miners' anxiety about having the cases handled without jolting or dropping them, the more apprehensive he became over what might prove to be inside of them. Having the covers of the fore-hatch quietly taken off, and tackle from one of the sampson-posts lowered into the hold, he first shifted half a dozen bales of coir which had been stowed on top of the teak cases and then had one of them hauled very carefully up to the deck. Laying his ear flat upon the top planking, he could detect no sound whatever inside. With a brace and screw-driver bit, he took out enough of the screws to remove the top planks. Inside, the contents were wrapped in two thicknesses of sheet-lead which just about doubled the weight of the case—and when the flaps of this lead were slowly pulled up, he saw two rows of long candles with dark paper wrapped around two-thirds of their length—packed in sawdust. On some of these paper wrappings were printed: "DYNAMITE 80%." Sending for Connyngsby and MacTavish, the chief engineer, Coffin showed them what the case contained. Then—swinging the thing over the side with a tripblock—he lowered it into the water and tripped the hook so that it freed itself from the sling and let the cask sink.

There was no further argument about meddling with the shipment. Each case was carefully hoisted out of the hold, opened—and dropped overboard. Three of them contained sand inside the sheet-lead instead of dynamite—and when Coffin laid his ear upon the outside of the last one, he heard a faint clicking as if from clockwork of some sort. Without opening this one, he had it lowered overboard as quickly as possible—much to the master's and chief's astonishment.

"An' for why did ye no' open yon box, mon—tae see what micht be inside?"

Coffin held up his hand with a warning gesture of a person listening for something—and in a few seconds it came. A mound of water higher than the rail boiled up alongside, drenching the deck and everything on it, while a perceptible jar shook the ship. As they were wringing the water out of their clothes, he said:

"That case must have been fifty or sixty

fathoms down before it let go—air-compression, inside, set it off when the teak and lead split from the pressure. They expected the clockwork in that one case to explode it and set the others off at the same time—but they probably figured it for our third or fourth day at sea, when we'd have been pretty well out into the Pacific. Get those hatch-covers on and the tarpaulins lashed over 'em, men! The bilge-pumps will take out the water that went down into the hold. We don't give a damn whether it injures the coir or not! Gad! There was about a minute, there, when I felt as if something was crawling down my back! No certainty as to what second that infernal stuff was going off! Well—we're rid of *that* danger, sir!"

"My word! I'm a bit in doubt as to how we'd best proceed! This puts a diff'rent complexion upon the whole cargo—not? What would ye suggest, Coffin?"

"Radio Fernshaw to cancel the cargo-insurance. Report to Eversley Brock, in Hongkong, and ask for instructions. Meanwhile slow down to half-speed. Those are merely suggestions, sir. You'll have your own ideas about proceeding to Frisco in the circumstances—of course."

"Tell Fernshaw—aye. Report to Brock? That'll take more consideration. Looks like I might be incompetent to handle my ship an' went runnin' to owners with every problem comin' up! Why not proceed Frisco an' say nothin'? We know we'll get full cargo, there. I fancy there'll be no question as to our returnin' any of the freights—those bounders would never dare ask it! We have the freights—enough to more than cover expenses across—"

"In drafts signed by Hoesen and those fake miners on the Hongkong and Shanghai after the stuff was all aboard and we were just leaving. Suppose they have no accounts with that bank? Suppose they were devilish enough to conceal a clockwork fuse in one of those coir-bales—just to make sure? Firing them when we're halfway across the Pacific?"

"Oh—I *say!* Those points had not occurred to me! At least, not yet. Fancy that settles it! Eh, Mac?"

"Coffin's recht. Ye'd best radio Hongkong, sir, I'm thinkin'," agreed MacTavish.

IT was now nine days since they had left Sourabaya. Eversley Brock had returned to Bangkok and then come down the Peninsula by rail to Singapore, where the message was relayed to him. He was very much exasperated at the order which had been sent from Hongkong to accept that class of cargo for one of their finest ships—but sent no orders until he had inquired about the drafts upon the Hongkong & Shanghai Banking Corporation. This took another day, inasmuch as the head office in Hongkong had to request information from its Batavia and Sourabaya branches. They reported that while the sultan in question had an account with them, the man Hoesen was merely an overseer and selling-agent with no authority whatever for signing bank-drafts. As for the two miners, the branches had never even heard of them. The Brocks, of course, would have been legally justified in selling the cargo at auction to cover the freights they had been swindled out of—provided that cargo had been the property of the swindlers. If, as now seemed likely, it had belonged to the sultan or some one else, and had been shipped without his knowledge, there was a perfectly valid claim against the ship for the stolen goods—though any Admiralty court probably would have ordered sale by auction to defray the freights and turned over the balance, if any, to the original owner. Taken all around, it was a most annoying situation—one which Brock decided had best be untangled under his personal supervision. So, thirty-six hours after Connyngsby's message reached him, he ordered the course changed for Hongkong. The *Argentine* was then N.E. of Gilolo, just leaving East Indian waters—so that the Captain put her about almost due N.W., heading across Celebes Sea for the Sulu Passage off Zamboanga in the Philippines.

The course was changed about the middle of the afternoon. Mrs. Bollingford presently noticed that the sun's reflection from the water was throwing a few dazzling beams through the ports upon the ceiling of her stateroom, though the awnings kept the temperature from being noticeably higher—and she hunted up the Captain with an emphatic protest.

"You will please remember, Captain, that I insisted upon the shady side when booking my cabin. So far, it has been as satisfactory as one could expect upon a boat of this type—but you've now turned your ship around until I'm getting that frightfully hot sun through my little windows. I simply wont stand it. Why was it done?"

"Because we would lose too much time

running the boat stern-first, madam—that's the only way I could keep you on the shady side. Owners' orders, you know. You might take it up with them if you wish. Send a radio that you object to the change of course. I fancy it'll be doubtful as to their considerin' it—but no other way occurs to me just now. It's like this, d'ye see: Every passenger aboard of us booked as far as the next port or beyond at a flat passage-rate per day—wherever the boat went. They'd no more knowledge of where that might be than yourself. We *were* starting for San Francisco—but we're now ordered up to Hongkong.

"And may be ordered elsewhere before you reach it, I suppose! Your ship reminds me very much of the Flying Dutchman! It doesn't seem to be getting anywhere! And I'm very much disgusted with such a lack of system! I've social engagements at home which can't be postponed indefinitely! So you will please go into the nearest port where there are civilized hotels, and leave me there!"

"H-m-m—that would be either Manila or Hongkong, madam. We may be ordered into Manila for another cargo, on the way up, though I fancy that's doubtful. Otherwise it'll be Hongkong. So possibly you'd best forget the matter for the present."

"And if I refuse? If I insist?"

"I should regret it, madam—because we prefer having our passengers comfortable and do our best to make them so. Primarily, of course, the business of a cargo-boat is ocean-freights—not passengers."

"But—but—my poor little Toto! She's so sensitive to the heat!"

"You may have as many electric fans as you wish to blow on her, madam. If she succumbs to the climate, we'll bury her very decently over the side. But—I fancy you're unnecessarily apprehensive. Celeste will do everything that is humanly possible—I am certain of that."

This blaze proved stubborn—the engine-room gang fought it all day.

COFFIN had been chatting with Katharine Lee, Marjorie Banton and the Cartersons, near enough to catch every word—and the five of them were convulsed. When the lady had gone below and the Captain had disappeared upon his own affairs, they fairly shouted.

"What price Connyngsby, girls! Isn't he a bird! Not a single uncivil word, you noticed! *Solicitous*—that's what he was! And that dame never tumbled to his guying the life out of her! I've known P. & O. masters who'd have told her to go to hell, after she'd rubbed it in about so long. But not the old man—oh, no! He's a gentleman!"

Coffin had said nothing to anybody about his subconscious impression that the dynamite wasn't, possibly, the end of their troubles—but he couldn't shake off the vague apprehension. Presently he went below to the Doctor's room on the main-deck gangway. Closing the door, he asked

Thayer's opinion concerning the way the fourteen passengers would stack up in an emergency.

"I don't know just why you're asking that at this moment, Ned—but I've been thinking over the point myself. The girls, we know, are pretty good sports who wont get dangerously rattled over anything. The Cartersons and the Evanstons are much the same type—in good physical condition—not overstimulated. Celeste, as you may have noticed, is a diplomat—that Limerick girl has herself pretty well in hand all the time. Porthick and his wife are the young married type—about thirty, I'd say—who have no mental equipment whatever. He knows enough to get along in his business and keep track of cricket scores. Both of them would probably go to pieces under pressure. The school-teachers might stand up pretty well—probably would. Mrs. Bollingford, I suppose, would have to be locked into her room or go in the brig. What's on your mind, Ned?"

"Well—those skunks didn't intend to have this boat reach port. What precautions in that line they may have taken besides the dynamite, I don't know—but they seemed to be a fairly thorough bunch. They had the copra stacked at the edge of the beach under a nipa shed which let the sun get in on it all the afternoon, so that it was unusually dry and oily. Part of the long heap was against the coir-bales—on top of a dozen or more which had absorbed a good deal of the coconut-oil. I stowed the copra in the lower holds with green palm-fronds over it, and the coir on top—but the coir is drier than any I ever saw before. Were it not for possible complications about the ownership, I'd jettison the whole cargo as fast as I could get it out. In fact, I think it would be money in the owners' pockets if I did it anyway. Of course we've ventilators from all the holds and bunkers—but conditions in the tropics are considerably different from the hold of an Island schooner, which that sort of stuff is usually shipped in. Do you know, I believe I'll go down through the man-hole in the tool-closet on the other side of the gangway, with a flashlight—and see if I can smell anything out of the way in the Number Two Hold."

GOING around to his own room at the end of the port gangway, Coffin changed to a pair of denim trousers and an undershirt—then went down into the hold with an electric torch, followed by the doctor. Climbing over the bales of coir in the 'tween-deck space, they got under the hatch where the teak-cases had been taken out—and down on the bales under the 'tween-deck. In spite of the ventilators the air was frightfully close, with a temperature over 100°—the musty smell of the coir blending with the strong, rancid odor from the copra underneath. They could detect nothing that indicated smoke, and were about to return when Thayer, who had worked his way over against the side-plating of the ship, called to his companion. When Coffin joined him and sniffed for a minute, they were both quite sure they detected a smell of something smoldering—not the smell of active flame, but that of glowing sparks, eating into something. With the torch shut off, they could see no particle of reflection anywhere, but the scorching odor was there unmistakably—and they made their way back to the main-deck, making sure that the cover was fast over the man-hole in the tool-closet.

In Thayer's room they talked a moment.

"We'll get a length of hose along this gangway—down through that man-hole, with a tarpaulin over it—and then over against the port side where we smelled those sparks! By thoroughly soaking the coir for ten feet away from the plates, the water will drip through and get at the fire, wherever it is."

"Think it's too much of a risk to have a section of the hatch-cover off and go down direct?"

"You'd have flame down there in a few minutes if you did—from the draught. Can't open the hatch except as a last resort!"

"I say, Ned! It's just a fool coincidence, of course—but before we left Tilbury, this trip, I'd been reading up on asphyxiation of all sorts—ammonia-fumes, smoke, carbon monoxide—all that sort of thing. Struck me that a physician might save lives occasionally if he were equipped to go into any space filled with such stuff and fetch out anyone he found there. More I thought of it, the more it seemed that even a ship's doctor ought to have some such equipment—so I bought a couple of the latest gas-masks on the market. They're much better than what we had in France—I tested 'em thoroughly. So—just bear 'em in mind if we've any serious fire ahead of us. May come in handy!"

"By thunder, Bob! Those things may

be a lot of help in the next day or two. But just now, we want that hose down there as soon as we can lay it!"

None of the passengers—even Connyngsby himself—dreamed that night of what was going on below them. After soaking the coir with water on that side for two hours, Coffin and MacTavish could detect no more of the burning smell and were satisfied that the immediate danger was over. But one of the officers went down into the hold every hour until after daylight to see if the smoldering had started again. During the morning there was no indication of anything wrong. But after tiffin one of the passengers jokingly asked the assistant engineer, who happened to be on deck if the engine-room gang were inveterate smokers—pointing to a ventilator just aft of where the boat-deck stopped, and supposing that it came up from the engine-room. Jennings cocked an eye upon it, noticed an occasional wisp of smoke rather darker than tobacco makes—and grinned in an unconcerned way.

"Sometimes a bunch of oily cotton-waste gets to burning in one of the refuse-cans, Mr. Porthick. In fact, we get rid of it that way, occasionally—and of course the ventilators suck it up."

IN a moment or two, when Jennings had refilled his pipe and lighted it, he strolled along forward and went up on the bridge, where the mate was on duty—saying, in a low tone:

"Don't look aft, sir. There's fire in the Number Three Hold. Not so much, yet—but she's beginning to blaze a bit."

"Get below as quick as you can—but quietly. Tell Mac! Turn out all of the engine-room crew! Get two lengths of hose through the man-hole in the engine-room bulkhead, packed with tarpaulin to stop any draft and soak any blaze or smoke you see with water! I'll send below for Fowler to relieve me, and come down as soon as I can!"

The ventilator cowls had been turned forward to catch all the breeze there was stirring with the ship's motion, but Coffin sent a Lascar aft to turn two of them the other way and stuff them with anything handy. He knew there would be echoes of voices coming up both ventilators from the Number Three in a few minutes—knew they would make passengers on deck uneasy, if they weren't actually scared into panic.

This little blaze proved considerably more stubborn than the former smoldering. The engine-room gang and several of the Lascars fought it all day in a suffocating atmosphere, somewhat relieved from time to time as the stuffing was removed from the ventilators and the men cautioned to keep from shouting. At dinner-time, when all of them were pretty well exhausted, the fire appeared to be out, and the coir thoroughly soaked. But Coffin and MacTavish knew what they were up against by this time—and went up to the Captain's room for a conference.

"That stuff has got to come out, sir! As far as we can tell, there's no fire in the Number Two and Number Three just now. As soon as the passengers have gone below for the night, we can drop a tarpaulin over the stateroom ports looking down into the for'ard well—get the hatches off, and jettison that stuff as fast as we can. Once out, we've got the engine and boiler compartments protected even if fire starts in Number One and Number Four—as it undoubtedly will. And we'll then be in better shape to handle it."

"I'd agree to that at once, Ned, but, d'ye see, there'll be complications if an innocent owner, like the sultan, for example, libels the boat for value of cargo destroyed!"

"He couldn't, now, if he wanted to, sir! It's a fire loss—and you're protected by the standard clause on all bills-of-lading—'subject to peril by fire, perils of the sea, and acts of Providence.' The stuff has been on fire—is damaged by water in consequence—must be jettisoned to save the ship and the human lives on board. If the underwriters couldn't prove a charge of criminal conspiracy on our testimony, they'd have to pay on the coir and copra at least. It seems to me, sir, that jettisoning is much the easiest solution for the owners. The cargo will be gone—nobody can sue them, or libel the *Argentine* for unquestionable fire-loss!"

"Faith—I believe ye're right! If I know anything of maritime law—they really can't. So ye'll just get at it as soon as may be done quietly, Coffin. Aye!"

BY daylight every scrap of the copra and coir was out of the holds adjoining the boiler and engine compartments—but the crew were nearly done up. In the middle of the afternoon, after most of them had gotten a few hours' sleep, the ventilators on the No. 1 began to spit occasional wisps

of smoke. This was gotten at through the 'tween-deck space reserved for Asiatic steerage—two lines of hose being led down through the fo'c'stle from the pumps in the for'ard well-deck. The blaze had gotten more headway than in the other two holds, however—before they could make much impression upon it, the atmosphere below was so suffocating that the four men with the hose-lines had to be dragged out, leaving the streams of water still soaking down the bales, but not at the points where they were the most needed. Just then Coffin remembered the Doctor's gas-masks and ran up to get them. With these adjusted, he and Thayer went into the hold and remained there for two hours—getting the fire under control, but by no means putting it out. Jennings and Fowler took their places—the assistant engineer having used similar masks in France and knowing how to adjust them—while the mate and doctor dropped on their bunks for a few hours of sleep. After dinner Fowler reported that the fire seemed to be out. Connyngsby sent for the mate and told him to clear out that hold after the passengers had gone below for the night—but Coffin shook his head.

"We don't dare wait that long, sir! There's smoldering fire, yet, down there in the copra—if it once spreads far enough up into the coir, we may have to beach the boat and flood the holds before we can get it out. Only thing I see to do is open that hatch and get the stuff overboard while we can!"

"There'll be draft enough to start up the blaze again if you do!"

"No question about it! But if most of the coir is over the side before the fire's very bad, we can then get water directly on the copra—and I've another remedy I can try besides. Mac has shut his bilge-cocks for that hold—what we pump down is sloshing around in the bilges. If it puts the boat down by the head a little, so much the better—then we can siphon water in as well as squirt it through the hose."

"But—with the passengers on deck, this evening, you'll not be able to keep it from them any longer! We'll have panic on our hands as well as the fire!"

"Well—we can handle fourteen passengers—can't we?"

"Oh—aye. But panic spreads, d'ye see. We'll have stewards an' stokers goin' crazy in a little while, besides!"

"Shucks! We're up against it anyway—no matter what we do! And the fire is the worst problem, aint it?"

"Faith—you're right as to that, Ned! Very well—you handle the fire an' I'll look after the deck!"

COFFIN and his Lascars worked fast, desperately fast, up to just about the limit of their strength—with the tackle from two sampson-posts hoisting out the bales at the same time. When all but half a dozen of them were over the side, flames began to lick up through the copra—in five minutes, there was a roaring column of it shooting up through the hatch. But Coffin had anticipated this and ordered half of the soda-bicarbonate casks broached in the 'tween-deck. As the flame roared up, he had four Lascars shoveling the soda down into the lower hold so that it scattered pretty evenly over the copra. In three minutes the flames choked down and were succeeded by a dense column of oily smoke—there still being perhaps a quarter of the loose soda in reserve.

On the boat-deck the column of fire paralyzed the passengers into stunned silence for a few seconds, then there were screams of alarm—several of them began running aft and started climbing down into the after well-deck. But Connyngsby was in their way—smoking his pipe—apparently unconcerned.

"Back! All of you! There's nothing to be alarmed over, as yet! When there's any real danger, I'll let you know! We've had fire aboard for the last forty-eight hours and have managed to keep it under control. We can make Zamboanga if necess'ry—or beach the boat on the Mindanao coast. Now get hold of yourselves an' stop this nons'nse—at once!"

This was satisfactory enough to half of them—the cooler half, who had kept control of themselves—but it didn't make much impression upon Mrs. Bollingford, Porthick or some of the others. There were panicky exclamations about "the boats!"—the lady leading.

"I should have been told about this at once, Captain! It's perfectly inexcusable! Why—why—I might have been burned to death in my berth!"

"Not unless I happened to be roasted first, madam. I'm supposed to be looking after the safety of all my passengers."

"Then why don't you do it? Why don't you do something—instead of standing there like a grinning fool!"

They started to rush her, but she dropped one man with a ball through the leg.

"Oh, come, madam—come! That's not clubby, you know! I really didn't expect it of you—rotten bad form!"

"Lower the boats at once and get us into them, you crazy idiot! Can't you feel the heat from that fire? We'll be roasted where we stand in a minute or two!" Her voice had risen to a shrill scream—and there were frightened shouts of agreement with her. "My poor Toto—she'll be scared to death!" she cried.

Connyngsby deliberately filled his pipe and lighted it, as the flames began to be choked down.

"Do you know—I was just thinking about Toto, madam. The native medicine-men in these waters have a ceremony of offering burnt sacrifices to their big idols, you know. An' I was wondering if, possibly, anything of this sort happened to Toto, it might be considered atonement for the rest of us—eh? What? Now, mark me, Mrs. Bollingford! We've the bad luck to be in tempor'ry diffic'lties just at the moment—an' must all make the best of whatever inconvenience it may cause us. The sort of talk you've been indulgin' yourself in is dangerous—can't be permitted. If you'll not control yourself an' your nerves, I'll be obliged most regretfully to lock you in your stateroom or the brig—whichever you prefer. An' then, d'ye see—should it become necess'ry to leave in the boats—you might be forgotten—which would be still more regrettable. I trust I make myself quite clear? What?"

The touch of comedy—with Connyngsby's sudden change from good-humored banter to cold, deadly seriousness—did more to calm the apprehensiveness than anything else which might have happened, especially as he went on with a quiet explanation of the situation.

"We've had fire in three of the four holds, but have managed to get all of the cargo out of those next the engines an' boilers—jettisoning it over the side—a big loss to somebody, but unavoidable. I've not the slightest doubt that we'll be able to handle this blaze in the forehold and anything which may start in the after one. But if it gets out of control an' there's any real danger, you'll all be carefully looked after. Make up bundles of your most necess'ry belongings—no larger than you can handle without assistance. Then—if you hear a long blast on the siren—come up here, an' we'll lower you away in the boats. Unless you hear that whistle, you may eat an' sleep with no anxiety whatever—an' if you keep your heads, there'll be no danger then. You can tear yourselves to pieces from panic in an open field, if you give way to it—or you can get out of most any bad mess by keepin' your heads. Don't forget that!"

WHEN the steamer's bow was four feet down below the load-line—with water sloshing over the top of the copra—MacTavish started his bilge-pumps and began sucking it out through the limbers, taking with it a good deal of the oil which had oozed from the dried coconut-meat. Then

the Lascars went down into the hold and shoveled the copra into a big crate which was hoisted up through the hatch and dumped over the side. After the hold was entirely empty and all the water pumped out of it, they took the remaining ten casks of soda aft and started jettisoning the coir in the Number Four Hold—getting a flare-up from the copra as the last bale was removed from the tier over it.

This was at four in the morning—bringing several terrified passengers and stewards on deck in their pajamas. But it also fetched Marjorie Banton with an automatic in her hand—having an uneasy hunch that some of the nervous ones might go to pieces. In a moment, five of the panicky stewards broke for one of the boats and began frenziedly casting loose the tackle—but the girl beat them to it—stood leaning against the boat with leveled pistol.

Thinking she wouldn't dare to shoot, they started to rush her, but she dropped one man with a ball through his leg—took a finger off the hand of another one—and shot a third through the arm—all before they had gotten within six feet of her. They broke—slunk below shouting for the doctor—the nervous passengers after them, feeling that they were between a she-devil and the deep sea. As Marjorie sank back against the boat, weak from the reaction of what she had been forced to do, Ned Coffin came up over the after rail to see what the shooting was about—his face blackened, his undershirt and trousers scorched through in spots—and took her in his arms.

"Good girl! I'll see that the Brocks hear about this! That gang were not as amenable to reason as the old man's party last night—and they were getting out of hand. Nothing else to do but shoot! I—I guess—we're almost out—of the woods—now. I'm just about—all in! Kiss me, and I'll—go to sleep right here—on the deck! Hello! Here's Celeste—and the pup! How's Toto, Celeste? Too warm—or too cold—or just nervous? Eh?"

"Faith, she do be feelin' foine, sorr—an' that hoongry she could ate the hand off me—the little baste! Yappin' ontil Oi had to fetch her on deck so's she'd not be kapin' anybody awake! *Vraiment!*"

"And what'll you be—doing with her, now—Celeste?"

"What would Oi be doin', d'ye s'pose? Walkin' the dog—av coorse!"

TOD SARA

A brief but vivid drama wherein a gambler invades a mining-camp, and a bit of sudden gun-play ensues.

By ROBERT VAN DORN

LONG FLATS was a piker, as a gold-camp. Its population never numbered over three hundred, and half of that was "Chinee." Peons, *cholos,* three Kanakas, Spaniards, Swedes, and white men made up the rest.

The town of Long Flats lived just three years. It bloomed like a gorgeous, flamboyant yucca blossoms on the hillsides about it. It flowered overnight—and died in the heat of the next day. . . . .

It seemed on the face of it a bit strange that Tod Sara should have left that luxurious, ornate palace of his in San Francisco and come to Long Flats. Still he was there, despite the fact that his San Francisco gambling-hall had a floor paved with 'dobe dollars rimmed with a fresco of gold-pieces.

He stalked along the tiny street of pine-board fronts and canvas roofs, and buildings thatched with sagebrush stems. His step was mincing; his clothes were gorgeous, the vests pearl-buttoned mauves, fawns, and checked whites. Two pearl-handled six-guns sat at his two hips, covered by the two tails of his coat, yet ready, conspicuously ready, only half concealed. And he could use these guns—Tod Sara was known, by reputation, throughout the length of California.

The town, such as Long Flats was, was his.

"Tod Sara's game is always on the square," said the stranger. "Don't forget that!"

The second day after his arrival, Sara approached Hong Lu.

"I was thinking," he said, "of starting a gambling-hall here in Long Flats. For that purpose I wish your store."

Hong Lu, who had once struck a pocket that had netted him five thousand dollars, and who had realized his ambition then of becoming a merchant, raised his yellow hands in horror. He began to jabber wildly in his native tongue.

Sara's right hand moved back a bit, toward that conspicuously concealed pearl handle of his right gun. The Chinese was too shrewd not to note the gesture.

"Yes?" asked Sara, in mock surprise.

"How much you payee?" ended the Chinese, in resignation.

"Ten percent of the profits. Clean your dirty sowbelly and beans out of the room by dark. The game'll open tonight."

The words were true. By midnight the Long Flats house of Sara had won profits in dust amounting to a thousand dollars. The game continued until daylight.

In the thin chill of the California dawn, the harassed Hong Lu, who had watched all night, waddled down the street after Tod Sara, gesticulating, and holding out a fat yellow palm for the ten percent. Sara did not take the trouble to speak. He merely spat a slender brown stream of tobacco-juice down at the pleading hand, and replaced between his lips the cigar he habitually chewed.

Hong Lu was silent after that. With the strange fatalism of his race, he stolidly accepted his fate, bowing his queued head to the inevitable.

This was not the case with the Mexican, José Vincente. At the passing of a week, he chose a lonely spot, and there told Sara that Sara cheated with the cards. He got as far with his speech as to the demanding of a certain refund.

Then Sara shot him down with a single, perfectly placed bullet.

The shooting was justified. No one in Long Flats claimed that Tod Sara was not in the right. The name of Tod Sara and his reputation, was known throughout the length of California. A story had it that he had once met and killed one of his own San Francisco dealers in a formal duel, because the dealer had been known to cheat in favor of the house.

There were certain men, it is true, who decided against Sara's Long Flats game at the end of ten days, but they were in the minority.

Tod Sara's name was too well known. There were too many men who had played in his San Francisco house. His game stood for a square deal—any of these men, winners and losers alike, vouched for that.

The bulk of the town considered it an honor to sit across the table from Tod Sara.

Look at the slender white hands; look at the diamond—a hen's egg, almost—on his

shirt-front; look at the clothes of the man; look at his face—impartial, square. A great man! A man who had made a million by square deals, and because he was the better man. A fast man with those two pearl-handled guns, yet a man who never took advantage. That was Tod Sara. Although none in Long Flats had ever met him personally in San Francisco, they said to one another that even if he had never mentioned his name they still would have known him. There could only be one like him—one such Tod Sara.

NEWS began to seep out into the surrounding country by riders, pack-trains, drifters and wanderers—Tod Sara was in Long Flats. Something must be doing there. Something must be in the wind—to bring Tod Sara personally from San Francisco. People began to converge toward the town, and these entered Sara's nightly games, merely to play at the same table with the great man.

It was perhaps a week later that a skinny, hard-ridden cayuse brought, among the day's usual nondescripts, a man from the south. He was dressed in a shabby, gray homespun suit. He had evidently slept in that suit, for it hung in bags and pouches about his figure. The seat of the trousers was slick and a bit greasy from the saddle.

The man himself was slight in figure. He might have been a bank clerk come West, a few years back. He had that look. He was possibly a few years over thirty in age. His eyes were a weak, watery blue; his hair needed cutting. And he was very tired.

After trying to find a bed in the town, he at last gave up and taking his saddle-blanket for a pillow, went to the afternoon's shady side of Sara's gambling-hall. He promptly went to sleep, and was only awakened at dusk by the toe of Sara's boot.

"Get away from here," said Sara, "before I shoot a lung out of you. This aint a hotel."

The man arose.

"Ah," he said, in evident embarrassment, "ah—I beg your pardon. I'd be glad to pay a hotel rate for my afternoon. I was very tired."

To suit his words, he drew up his vest, disclosing a money-belt, and snapped open one of its pockets. It was still light enough for Sara to see plainly. That pocket of the money-belt held a sheaf of thousand-dollar bills, and from among them the man drew out a small gold coin.

"Here," he said. "Thank you."

Sara drew back with the Tod Sara gesture. "This time," said he, accenting each word, "and in view of the fact that you possibly do not know who I am, I will overlook the insult of your action. I am *Tod Sara*. I do not take any man's money except by the cards. Now get out!"

As the stranger was moving away, Sara called after him: "If you have the nerve to risk your money also, you can see me within this building tonight."

The stranger did not answer.

By midnight, when the crowd was thickest, Tod Sara called out a drink for the house. He had added a bar to the place. It was an hour of triumph, almost. One thing marred it for Tod Sara: that stoop-shouldered, chastened stranger had had a great deal of money—and he had not yet appeared.

Then, within the moment, Sara saw the slight figure, in the pouchy gray suit, pause at the doorway.

"A drink for the house," he repeated. Then, "You, stranger, step inside. A drink all around before the game continues!"

A moment later he stood at the stranger's side.

"You *have* the nerve, then, to risk money?" he said softly.

The stranger appeared undecided.

"What do you say to a game just between ourselves?" asked Sara. "Something to keep the pikers out."

The stranger did not answer.

"I take it you're afraid to risk very much?" said Sara. His voice ended in a short throaty laugh.

The stranger suddenly looked full into his eyes. "No," he said. "No, I'm not."

Sara was already mincing back to the table.

"Friends," he called to the room in general, "this stranger by the doorway has just requested a solitary game with Tod Sara. Will this meet your approval, friends? The stakes will be high, I take it—higher than the usual, here in Long Flats. Your approval, friends? Tod Sara aims to please his patrons. Is it your pleasure to witness such a game?"

The speech was like Tod Sara, given with a Tod Sara gesture. The room filled with a sudden voicing of approval. Attention was riveted on the stranger.

"Yes," said the latter, "the ante will be one-thousand-dollar bills."

The room was in an uproar. And, for the first time, Tod Sara looked searchingly into the stranger's face. The eyes reassured him, and also something in the slightness of the stooped figure. There was no bulge of a gun at either hip of the gray suit.

It was something too good to be true. The grandeur of Tod Sara's manner returned, and fairly outdid itself as he sat down to the table.

The crowd pushed down until it stood lining the big table, watching, with staring faces, the cards move in the white light.

Tod Sara dealt the first hand. Slowly, carefully, he dealt it—after his fingers had shuffled the deck with a lightning rapidity, and the stranger had clumsily cut the cards.

Tod Sara was no novice with the cards. He knew that he had put two aces into the stranger's hand, and he gave him a third in the draw. To himself he gave a low flush, good enough to beat the three aces.

Tod Sara had expected the game to last for some time, and he had no intention of overdoing things at the start. Just to be on the safe side was enough. . . . .

The stranger placed ten thousand dollars on the table, looking at Sara with a half-smile. The line of faces gasped.

"Yes?" the stranger asked.

"And five thousand more!" Sara bit the words off short, accenting each, as befitted the occasion.

The room was tense. The breathing of one old man wheezed nasally. There was no other sound.

"Yes?" asked the stranger. "Mr.—ah—Sara, isn't it? Mr. Sara, would it be within your means to meet fifty thousand dollars? I do not wish to push things too heavily."

The blood mounted to Sara's face.

"Put it out," he said thickly.

The stranger had no need to go to his money-belt. The remainder of the sum he drew, with a single careless thrust, from a pocket of his gray suit.

It was necessary for Sara to call his barkeep', and send the man to a safe, down-street, to meet the sum. And it was during this wait that a terrible fear first struck Sara. Across the table the slight, stoop-shouldered figure smiled at him, with a twinkle of blue eyes.

The barkeep' returned, and whispered into Sara's ear.

"Is there difficulty?" asked the stranger.

Sara glared at him.

"I regret," he said, "that I can only meet forty-eight thousand."

"Oh, is that the trouble? Forgive me." And the stranger drew two bills from the pot.

"Called!" said Sara heavily.

The stranger smiled again. Then he spread four aces out across the table.

Four aces!

Something had happened—when the stranger had cut the cards!

Tod Sara went for that pearl-handled right gun. His fingers just touched the cool stock, no more—

"Your hands on the table!" said the stranger curtly.

The stranger's own gun had come from a shoulder-holster. That was the reason there was no bulge of the baggy, gray suit at the hip. The gun's little blue muzzle looked at Tod Sara, leveled coolly, carelessly in manner, automatically. It had happened with a swiftness no eye could follow.

"Tod Sara's game is always on the square," said the stranger. "Don't forget that! That is Tod Sara's reputation, and it is known through all California."

The stranger paused, smiling.

THE next morning he went on, mounting the skinny, hard-ridden cayuse. But before he left, he gave ten percent of forty-eight thousand dollars into Hong Lu's yellow hands, while a gathering of Long Flat citizens looked on.

"It's yours," he said. "Tod Sara's game is always on the square."

Hong Lu tried to express his thanks and gratitude. Curiously, in his Oriental, roundabout way of things, he said no more than this:

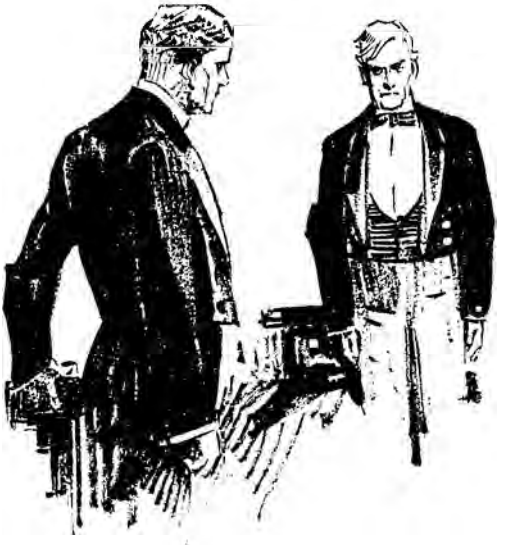
"Mlister," he whispered brokenly in the stranger's ear, "Hong Lu see—th' clard you palmee, what you call 'im? Hong Lu no tellee."

The stranger smiled.

"Sure, you're a smart Chink," he whispered in return. "So you saw that ace I palmed in the cut? Well, don't tell it. Tod Sara's game is always square—just remember that. . . . .

"You see, Chinky," said the stranger aloud, *"I'm* Tod Sara. The Tod Sara of San Francisco, I mean."

We All Live Through It



This fascinating novel of wild youth well sustains the high reputation won by the author of "The Man on the Box," "Drums of Jeopardy," "The Man with Three Names" and other famous novels.

By HAROLD MACGRATH

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

The Story So Far:

FINE fellows, all three of them, but wild as hawks because of the pace they had learned during the war, and hunting trouble—which, as you shall see, they garnered in generous measure.

MacGregor met Hazelton in the lowly dungeon cell of a New York police station, whither they had been severally conducted, the one following an inebriate brawl with a taxi-driver and the other after a similar tipsy shindig with a waiter. MacGregor recognized a kindred spirit in Hazelton, and finding him broke, hired him as secretary.

Wiltbank and MacGregor had been wealthy neighbors on Long Island, buddies overseas and companions in devilment afterward until Wiltbank exhausted the half-million his father had left him— and found himself in the office of his father's lawyer Silas Fordham, listening to amazing news: according to Fordham, the elder Wiltbank had left a double will.

By the unusual provisions of this supplementary document, which Fordham declined to show, another half-million was bequeathed to Wiltbank, provided he lived for an entire year at the ancestral Long Island house, the Oaks, conducting himself circumspectly and drinking no alcoholic liquor during the period. If he failed to observe these conditions to the letter,—and he would be watched,—the money would revert to his father's pet charity, the Wiltbank Orphanage.

At length Wiltbank accepted the astonishing offer and left. When the door had closed behind him, the portières parted and a quaint old man whom Fordham addressed as Harrison entered the room. The whole fantastic arrangement, it seemed, had been made by Harrison—who had been a circus clown, whose wife had left him and their little daughter for another man, and who later had bought out the circus and made a fortune.

Right here the eternal feminine comes tripping into the plot on dancing feet. For Harrison's now-grown daughter Kitty had been forbidden the stage or the circus, and in consequence had longed for both. Recently she had disappeared, and almost coincidentally, a masked dancer known as *"L'Inconnue"* had made a great success in New York. And—among the many admirers who had in vain sought the acquaintance of *L'Inconnue* by means of love-letters and stage-door assiduities, was none other than young Captain Wiltbank.

He made her acquaintance soon afterward, none the less, though he didn't know it. For on the train bearing him to his

The bell rang and a troop of young men and women took the house by storm.

twelvemonth of monastic retirement at the Oaks was this same Kitty Harrison. And as she passed down the aisle a sudden lurch of the car catapulted the lady more or less into his lap. . . . . So we find the Captain and his friend MacGregor at the Oaks, and the lady, for reasons of her own, at the so-called hotel in the little neighboring town of Hakett. *(The story continues in detail:)*

THERE may be something in mental telegraphy. At any rate Wiltbank was thinking now of those letters which he had written to *L'Inconnue,* as he rolled toward the Oaks with MacGregor at his side. Letters, full of gush and mush; epistolic asininities which he would not have been guilty of in his schooldays. If he had been in love with the girl there would have been some excuse; the act would have been forgivable. It all went to prove what a frightful bog of mental depression he was in.

He was improving; it was possible for him to analyze his condition—which was astonishing, since twenty-four hours gone he had walked in darkness. He was beginning to see things naturally; his vision was no longer distorted by the ironic; or if he was still ironic, there was now a normal lens before his mental eye. Striving to *feel,* he had thrown away a fortune, drunk heavily, written love-letters to a puff of smoke, watched his comrade gallop toward the devil and had offered no restraining touch. Without one sentimental sigh he had let his home go. Quite mad, and neither he nor his friends had been aware of it!

Trying to get out of the world because it no longer interested him, because there was no anchor to windward, because everybody's purpose seemed identical with his. If he could but pin it down to the war, it would have afforded him some mental relief. But he could not honestly say to himself that his difficulties lay in the aftermath of the war.

That girl on the train—

"I'm thirsty," said MacGregor.

"You can have all the water in the world. The old well is still on the job."

"But I don't want a bath," MacGregor protested. "I want a drink. I can get it home, you know!"—truculently.

"Couple of cocktails, then. But you drink alone."

MACGREGOR was one of those tipplers who are comedians in their cups. He burned to commit idiocies which would be recounted at the clubs, at the golf-course, around the card-tables: for in the beginning his companions, lacking his initiative, had laughed at his antics. He was now one of the chief contributors to the Fool-killer's Almanac: having established a reputation, he had to live up to it. Without applause he would have subsided quickly, and the Fool-killer would have known him no more. Remember, he was without family ties, he had plenty of money, his bread-and-butter future was assured. He

had no ambition, no goal, no craft for his hands. There are men who drink deliberately—to forget. MacGregor belonged to that class who haven't much to remember. He pretended that he was on the way to the devil because a girl had jilted him, when, of a truth, he was glad that he had escaped the manacles of matrimony. But he found a poetic glamour in the part he was playing, that of the jilted soldier: it excused his idiocies. Without applause, however, he would have been like "Hamlet" without a ghost.

Behind this comic mask was a loyal and lovable man—a man of strength and character too. But no one had taken the trouble to develop this vein of gold. He drank when others drank, rarely alone for the love of drinking.

Let us come to the essence with regard to MacGregor: loneliness—the following shadow. He was but running and twisting and dodging to escape the shadow. He was not conscious of the truth; he knew, merely, that he was oppressed by something. He wasn't hunting trouble; he was trying to avoid it, as a lost dog blunders from one bunch of burdocks to another.

"YOU are really climbing on the wagon?" Johnny asked.

"I know I'm not going to drink tonight," said Wiltbank. "There's a new butler to break in; and I don't want him to get the notion that the Oaks is a speak-easy. Johnny—I don't know, but I believe that I've just waked up."

"Half a million makes a fine alarm-clock."

"I don't believe that's it."

"No, of course not!" jeered MacGregor. "Your conscience is gurgling."

"Maybe it is. I haven't played the game with you, Johnny."

"How come?"

"Well, whenever you made a fool of yourself, I patted you on the back. And I'm not going to do it any more."

MacGregor sat erectly. "You're going to play the terms of that fake will, then?"

"Yes."

"For how long?"—cynically.

"I don't know. As long as I can. I may need help. When I say I've waked up, perhaps I mean I've got only one eye open."

"You wait. You can't tell me your father left that kind of a will. Some one's making a jackass of you."

"You can't get by a distinguished man like Fordham."

"I've told you what I think of lawyers."

"This thing is genuine, even though it looks cock-eyed. Anyhow, I'm going to play out the hand."

L'Inconnue had said: "Prove it." She would have an observation post somewhere and would be watching him. He felt assured of that. Was this really the basic cause of his change of front? Hadn't he resolved to play the game before the return of his war-cross? Or had the return of the cross shored up his wabbling spine?

"No more poker-games!" sighed MacGregor.

"No."

"No more studio nights, cabaret nights, no more musical comedies, no more hootch. Are you aiming to reform me?" demanded MacGregor belligerently. "I know you reformed beggars. You aren't satisfied to reform yourselves; you've got to have a finger in everybody else's pie. Nobody's going to tell me what I shall or sha'n't do."

"I'm not going to meddle, Johnny. What I want to point out is that I'm through abetting your stunts. I haven't played square with you. I haven't been the right sort of companion."

"Aw, dry up!" returned MacGregor inelegantly. "In a week or two you'll be wandering around with a silk hat and a pair of black cotton gloves out at the fingers, and a bundle of tracts under your arm."

"And some pants," suggested Wiltbank.

"And a few kicks there from all the boys who once knew you."

Both laughed, but immediately relapsed into moody silence.

Wiltbank went back musingly over the trail to France. He had sailed from Bordeaux, and all the way across the Atlantic he had thought of home. It had sung in his blood, in his heart, in his mind; it had been upon his lips. Home, home, home! And when he landed in New York, he hadn't wanted to go home; and when at length he got there, it hadn't looked like home; and so he had run away from it, times without number. Nor had he returned to the people he had known in the old days.

Magically, as a hand sweeps mist from a mirror, the thing became clear to him. Nostalgia—driving him away from home rather than to it! This odd twist would never submit to analysis; he would have

to be satisfied with sudden knowledge that there was a twist.

On his left was the sea, the hard glitter of it blinding in the cold October light; but it was again a familiar picture. Over there was the bench he and Johnny had frolicked on as youngsters; and there was the same old rotting keel they two had rested upon while swapping piratical ambitions: familiar objects which yesterday would have been without significance. To the right, in the heart of a mixed grove of pine and oak, he could see the Oaks, a rambling house of red brick, patterned after some old English country-house.

How his father used to love to putter about the hedge, always trimming it! A tall, silent, handsome man—silent, not moody, as if communing always with some inner vision; kindly and generous, but absent-minded. They had been good friends, but never comrades. When the news had come in France that his father was dead, he hadn't been particularly touched. He had seen so many dead that horror and grief as senses had gone out of him. And now he could put his father back into the garden again—sadly and tenderly!

He could not remember his mother; too far back.

Suddenly the phenomenon broke and became explicable. Somewhere in his soul sensations had been dammed up, and now the dam had broken. The promise of a second fortune and the knowledge that an unknown young woman considered him an object for contempt had crumbled the mysterious barrier. He was coming home at last! The thrill that had not struck his vitals four years ago now struck him intensely, poignantly. Home! And legally it was no longer his. Home!

EVIDENTLY the new butler had been watching from one of the side windows of the door; for as Wiltbank and MacGregor alighted from the car, he appeared upon the door-step: a dapper little man with white hair and ruddy complexion and bright blue eyes—a middle-aged Pan.

"You are Hammond?" said Wiltbank.

"Yes sir."

"Is there anything definite about the return of Charles?"

"He will return just as soon as he can, sir. He dared not wait till you came back. Have you any orders to give, sir?"

"Mr. MacGregor would like a cocktail for dinner."

"Two," said MacGregor, moodily.

"One for you, sir?" asked the butler.

"Two for Mr. MacGregor; nothing for me."

"Yes sir. There's a fire in the library."

"Mr. MacGregor will stay for dinner."

The butler seized the luggage and disappeared.

"Humph." This from MacGregor.

"What do you think of him?"

"Well," said MacGregor, "he doesn't act as though he had lived at the movies. Looks as if he might be cheerful. But I wont pass judgment till I've tested his cocktails. Charles was a wonder. When he shook the stuff, he always made me think of Whatshisname in the Bible, eating the sacrificial lamb: as if he were doing something for which he must be struck dead in his tracks after the thing was done."

Ordinarily Wiltbank would have laughed at this portrait of Charles, who was a strict teetotaler; but the confused pain in him was not yet gone.

"Johnny," he said, "a strange thing has happened to me. I've just come home."

"Huh? What's that?"

"I mean, I've just come home from France, Johnny. But it's taken me four years."

"Say, your bean has fallen in. Home? Where do you get this stuff?"

Wiltbank seized his friend by the shoulders. "I mean what I say. Dear God, I've just come home—to find I've probably thrown it away without caring. And now I care so that it's tearing the insides of me!" He released MacGregor and entered the library, where he sat down, holding his head in his hands.

MacGregor stared at him in bewildered amazement, for he saw that Wiltbank was not offering a jest. The grouch, the rancor, or whatever it was that had embittered him the day, evaporated. He sat down and threw an arm across the bent shoulders.

"I don't quite get you, Jimmy, but I guess you know. All right. From now on you're home; and I'll do the celebrating. The thought of you cutting out everything all at once soured me. I'll be so damn' lonesome without you!"

"Can't you come home too, Johnny?"

"I'm home. It's no different to me now than it was when I left it. Walls, pictures, rugs, furniture, some beds and some good plumbing. To feel that I'm home I have to

have a mob; and they burn holes in the carpets, spill hootch on the varnish, and break half the crockery. Half a million; that's what has happened to you, old scout."

"But why did I boot the other into limbo?"

"Search me. You can't say I never warned you to pipe low when you were slinging it around. You wouldn't let me halve the bills. It was always your treat. All right. *Toot sweet!* A year isn't much. I'll keep out of your way as much as I can. But sooner or later you'll find there's a queer-looking nigger in the woodpile."

"You're not going to leave me in the lurch, Johnny. I'm going to need you. It's going to be a whale of a fight to stick it out. Somewhere along the line a wave of recklessness will roll over me."

"That's just the point. If I'm around, I'll roll over with you. You see, I may queer you. One of my fool stunts, and everything goes blah. You've got a halter on, and I'm still running wild. Play it out. But I'm skeptical. Your father had no reason to keep back half a million. Before we went over you didn't collect three headaches a year. I was the lad who ran with Clarence and the Malmsey. The old boy knew me; so I can't go broke if I try. All right. Maybe in your place I'd do the same thing. If you'd met that mysterious skirt, I'd say you'd fallen hard. But she's off the map. So we'll put it down that your bean has taken a flop."

WILTBANK nodded, and took out the war-cross which he had been carrying in his vest pocket. "Queer thing, but I can't get back to that."

"I know what you mean. It's just metal now. Doesn't mean any more than the bangle on a hotel key. When Papa Whatshisname kissed us on both cheeks, you were going to be president of these here United States and I was going to be King of the Drys."

MacGregor got out his pipe, filled and fired it, and stared moodily at the bright flames among the logs. Wiltbank's pipe, however, never got any farther than his hand. Both welcomed the silence which followed, and which lasted nearly half an hour. Outside there was a glimmering dusk.

"Ha!" bellowed MacGregor. "Welcome to our fireside, Hammond. What's the handle to Hammond?"

"George, sir." The butler set the tray on a taboret. There was gin, orange-juice, lemon-juice, sugar, ice, spoons, glasses and silver shaker. "I thought that you might like the pleasure of mixing it yourself."

"George, you're a jewel!" MacGregor rose and began measuring out the gin, liberally. "You got out of a desperate situation. If you'd mixed them and they hadn't been top-hole, you'd have got the gate."

"I say, Hammond," said Wiltbank, "I have some orders to give you. These orders will become active at midnight, Friday. Frankly, it is a matter to me of a half million that you obey these orders absolutely."

The butler bent his head to signify that he understood.

"For a long time to come I'm not at home, figuratively. You will be given the keys to the wine-cellar, and unless some one points a pistol at you, you will not surrender them, even to me."

"Yes sir."

MacGregor, grinning, began to manipulate the shaker.

"No young women shall enter the house," went on Wiltbank. "No man whose breath smells of alcohol, excepting Mr. MacGregor. He will have the *entrée* at all times. I am not at home to any call from New York except it comes from a lawyer named Fordham. No liquor shall be served in the house to anyone. This order includes Mr. MacGregor."

"I'll bring it on the hip," said MacGregor, pouring out a drink.

Wiltbank ignored the interruption. "And if any man or woman tries to quiz you regarding my conduct—"

"Lie like the devil!" interjected MacGregor.

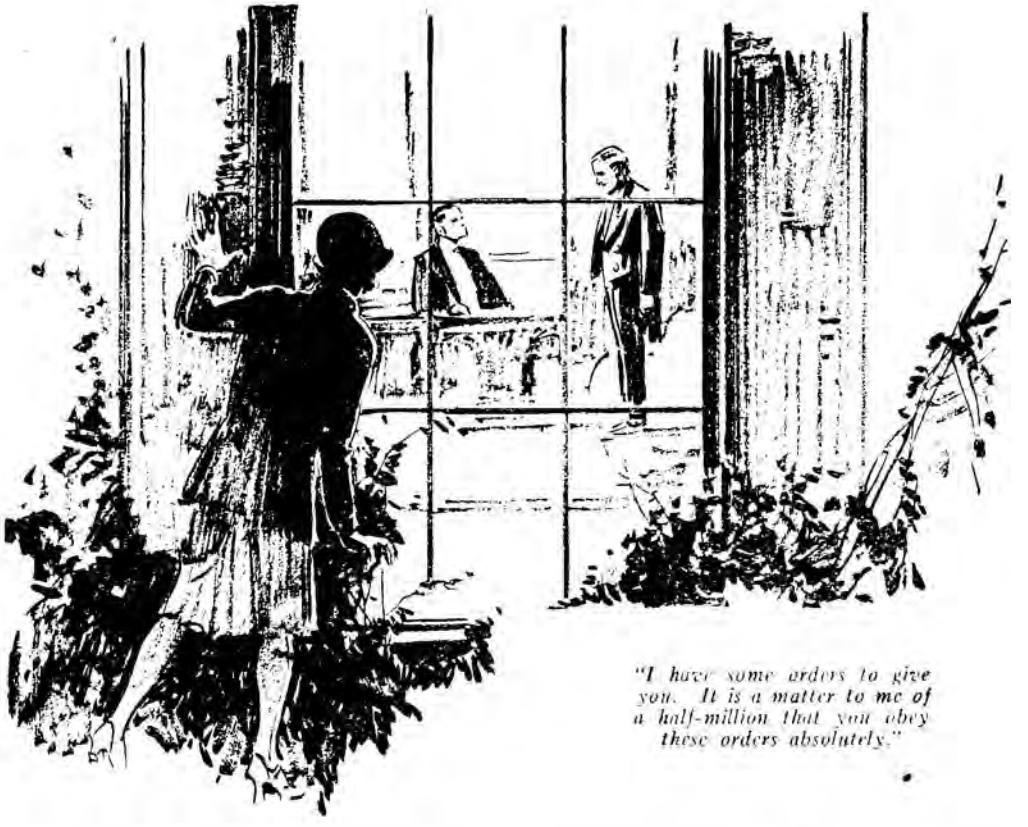
"No—tell the truth."

"Yes sir."

"That will be all for the present," said the master of the house, with a friendly wave of dismissal.

"He's all right, Jimmy," said MacGregor, after the butler was gone. "I'll bet any amount that he can laugh all around Charles. Hang it, he *was* laughing, at the corners of his eyes and with his ears."

His hand went out to grasp the stem of the glass—and paused midway. He straightened, turned and dashed toward one of the windows through which he peered. Against the sapphire sky of evening earthly objects were *en silhouette.*



"I have some orders to give you. It is a matter to me of a half-million that you obey these orders absolutely."

"What's the matter?" asked Wiltbank, rising.

"I saw some one looking into the window," MacGregor declared.

"What?" Wiltbank hurried to his comrade's side. "A man or a woman?"

"Got away too quick. I tell you there's something crooked going on. Dirty work at the crossroads."

"One of Fordham's spies, or one of the orphanage's. Fordham warned me. Well, it's of no importance."

"Just as you say, old scout. But I'm coming over some morning to find you murdered in bed."

MacGregor returned to his cocktail, while Wiltbank remained staring into the enveloping night.

A woman had looked into the window. She had been thus occupied for three or four minutes. Once she had almost cried out aloud. At the swift and surprising approach of MacGregor, she stooped and ran like a hare to the main highway. Here she dropped behind the stone wall to get her breath. She began to laugh—hysterically. She covered her mouth with her hands, but the laughter was not to be stifled. At length she leaned back against the wall, exhausted. "As a butler!" she whispered to the stars. "As a butler!"

Dinner proved a dull affair. Neither Wiltbank nor his moody guest cared to talk, but courtesy demanded some verbal expression, which consisted of broken thoughts in broken sentences. MacGregor imagined he saw a life-long friendship ruined irretrievably, with a suddenness that was confounding. He saw himself confronted by real loneliness. There wouldn't be any fun in the world unless Jimmy jogged along beside him. As for Wiltbank, he was still in the middle of his astonishment: he had come home!

The dinner itself was good and admirably served. The new butler apparently understood his job, for he moved silently and skilfully.

"Why don't you rechristen this the Morgue instead of the Oaks?" asked MacGregor. "We might be a couple of stiffs on the banks of the Styx. It wouldn't have killed you to split a bottle of that old Clicquot."

"We've gone all over that, Johnny."

"You've got until Friday night."

"George, bring Mr. MacGregor a pint of Clicquot."

"Will you split it, Jimmy?"

"No."

"Then don't bother, George. I'm going to call my chauffeur and go home."

"You'll have coffee in the library first?"

"Well, all right. There's a lot of good old scouts there, in calf. *Athos* the princely souse— Jimmy, I'm a mean cuss; but I guess something has happened inside of me too. Maybe it's part of last night's hang-over. George, were you ever in the hoosegow?"

"The what, sir?"

"Clink —jail."

"No sir."

"It's a great experience in democratizing the highbrow. Come on, old stick-in-the-mud!" MacGregor began to sing:

"There was an old ruby-nosed rip
Who carried the stuff for a nip;
He preached prohibition
And also perdition—
So they wouldn't get wise to his hip!
Oo—la—umpity—ay!"

Wiltbank threw his arm across the singer's shoulders, and the two of them marched into the library, singing the chorus.

This bibulous chanty was the comedian's song out of "The Oleander," the musical comedy Wiltbank had "butter-and-egged." A silly thing, but it served to dissipate some of MacGregor's grouch and some of Wiltbank's heartache.

"Hurrah!" cried MacGregor, as he later set down his coffee-cup. "Just happened to think. I sha'n't be lonesome at all. My private secretary's coming Monday." He patted his pockets for his pipe. "Left my pipe in the dining-room," he explained, as he started to leave the room. "Back in a minute."

He did not enter the dining-room, however—that is, not at once. He was, as the ancient figure of speech has it, nailed to the threshold by what he saw. His jaws loosened and his eyes bulged.

There was the new butler, juggling half a dozen plates. They rose and fell with beautiful precision. There was on the butler's face the suavity, and in his hands the dexterity, of a Joe Cook!

CHAPTER XI

BATTLE, murder and sudden death—our usual formula—lie on our literary shelf, filmed with the dust of months of forgetfulness. Of course we expect to take them down again in some future day and rattle them furiously. But for the present we wash our hands of the blood of many an ingenious rogue and proceed to lift Mr. MacGregor off the dining-room threshold, to which in the preceding chapter we left him rhetorically nailed.

"What's the big idea?" he asked interestedly.

The six plates, which the butler was juggling, came down out of the air and became half a dozen on the table. The butler turned. "Sir?"

"Haven't you wandered into the wrong theater alley? Keith's is seventy miles northwest of here. Or is this a new way of covering up St. Vitus' dance?"

"I'm sorry, sir, that you caught me at it. Years ago I was a circus clown," confessed Hammond. "The smell of sawdust gets into my nose sometimes."

"I see. Just as the smell of the juice gets into mine. You're a teetotaler?"

"No. In the circus days I used to take a drink once in a while—*one* drink once in a while."

"Conservative. I see. You couldn't juggle six plates with Jawn Barleycorn weaving in and out between 'em."

"No sir."

"How did you come to know Charles?"

"I was out of a job, and we were friends."

"Where was your last job?"

"I was a floor waiter in the Knickerbocker. I lost my job when they closed the hotel. I wanted to get into a private family. Suddenly I received a call from Charles."

"What was the matter with the show business?"

"Oh, in private I'm fairly good; but on the stage I'd stumble. My eyes are getting old, and now the lights rather blind me. I shall tell Mr. Wiltbank all about it when he asks me."

LET us explain MacGregor. The whole affair was at odds with his process of reasoning. He had known Wiltbank Senior. At the time of his death, when his son was bravely fighting in France, he had had no earthly cause to doubt his son, nor had there been any possibility of anticipating his son's conduct in later years. Therefore something sinister lurked in the background; and this queer juggling butler had a finger in it somewhere. But MacGregor's agile mind could not get further than this supposition. He would have to wait and watch.

His comrade in arms had come home; he could understand that. But what he could not understand was Wiltbank's leaning toward orientalism—the fatalism of the East. What will be will be, and all that. In a like circumstance he himself would have demanded a showdown or forced Fordham by haling him into court, win or lose. Wiltbank was determined to play the hand as it lay, Mustapha Pasha style.

"Well, remember," MacGregor warned, "he's the squarest, whitest man on earth, and you play the game right or I'll make trouble."

"You are young and strong enough," replied the butler. "I used to do flip-flops, but these days I have the rheumatism."

MacGregor laughed, but his suspicion was a healthy thing. "Well, remember what I've told you."

"Yes sir."

"And perhaps you'd better show some recommendations aside from Charles'."

MEANTIME, Wiltbank wandered about the library. He hadn't taken down a book in more than a year. All these old friends neglected for the mixed flowing tides of Broadway! He paused before this shelf and that, oblivious to the lengthening absence of MacGregor. Occasionally Wiltbank drew forth a book, blew the dust from the gilded top, and riffled the pages. To read again! There were enough books here to carry him through five years, let alone one. And the first story would be "The Three Musketeers." How his father had loved brave old Alexandre! How he himself and Johnny had reveled in the exploits of *D'Artagnan* on his way to the English Channel!

Queer. He couldn't get that girl's face out of his mind's eye. It had momentarily been so close to his that the thrill wasn't gone yet. The unexpected propinquity of it had set his heart rolling like a Mexican bean. Of course it meant nothing. It might happen a thousand times with a thousand different pretty girls; each time the thrill would be the same. At ninety he might be annoyed, but not till then.

He recalled that she had inquired about the Hakett Hotel, which signified that she was not visiting friends in the village. Oh, well—

MacGregor entered, closing the door behind him.

"Where've you been?" Wiltbank asked, now conscious of the lapse of time.

"Talking to George. What do you suppose I found him doing?"

"Looking into the bottle?"

"Juggling six plates like a big-time artist."

"Juggling six plates?"—astounded.

"Where did Charles say he was going to visit this sick relative?"

"He didn't say. But I know Charles, and anybody he recommends must be all right."

"Are you sure Charles wrote the letter?"—mysteriously.

"I would recognize his fist with one eye. What are you driving at?"

"Well, you don't know where Charles is. You can't telegraph to verify the letter. How do you know Charles isn't dead?"

Wiltbank fell into a chair and burst out laughing. "Johnny, this isn't Hollywood. Lord, all you have to do is to look George in the eye to see that he is honest. Johnny, this is a real sporting proposition, and I purpose to play it like a sportsman. I can't be any worse off than I am, and if I can stick here for a year, I will have played square with Fordham and myself."

"All right. I'm telling you that something fishy is going on; and you're just the boob to walk straight into the pit. You think everybody's honest because you happen to be."

"How about this jailbird you've hired as private secretary? Hang me, if I don't watch him while you watch George."

"I'm off for home," said MacGregor sulkily. "I've done my duty."

"I know what's the matter with you. I wouldn't split the Clicquot."

"What's the French word for hell?"

"L'enfer."

"Well, you can go there!"

"Come over tomorrow and see if I have. Johnny, you're not leaving me with a grouch?"

"You darn fool, I'm trying to save you!"

"But I tell you I know Charles, and Fordham's reputation is beyond reproach. Of course there's an odd twist to the whole business, but I'm going to play it out. That's final. When the affair is over, I'll have nothing on my conscience."

"All right. I'll drop around tomorrow. But will you promise me one thing: that if anything queer turns up, you'll let me know?"

"I promise that, Johnny."

MacGregor went out, but he did not go

to his car at once. He decided to prowl about the house first. This juggling butler, coming on top of all his doubts, genuinely disturbed him. And there was Charles, his actual whereabouts unknown.

First he set about examining the cellar windows. The heavy screens were all intact. Still, to enter a cellar window would be a job of less than ten minutes. The old-fashioned outside cellar door was immovable; but it would not be impervious to a good burglar kit. At length he came to the window through which he had seen the face, and searched the ground. He saw a white object. Stooping, he discovered this object to be a woman's handkerchief, lightly impregnated with verbena. A woman, peeking into the window!

All the way over to his own home he murmured intermittently:

"A skirt!"

For Johnny held all women in contempt, and the height of opprobriousness in his mind was to dub them skirts, all and sundry. A skirt, sneaking around the Oaks; some bootlegger's prima donna. All right. Johnny MacGregor would take the whole affair into his own hands. There was no use warning further that darn', trustful, lovable fool, who was being subtly surrounded by danger and wouldn't believe it. Johnny MacGregor was going to stand by.

He did, with astonishing results. Sometimes our friends love us not wisely but too well.

MACGREGOR gone, Wiltbank rang for the new butler, who seemed to have been awaiting the summons, he answered so promptly.

"George, do you know where Charles has gone?"

"Yes sir."

"Where?"

"Cleveland."

"Do you know the name of this relative?"

"No sir. He said if his relative died, he would telegraph."

"I see. Well, I'll let it go at that." Wiltbank strode over to the reading-table and picked up an empty inkwell, the paper-weight and the ivory paper-cutter, gravely extending them to George. "Juggle them. MacGregor says you are very adroit."

"I meant to inform you, sir, when the opportunity came. Years ago I was a juggling clown in a circus. It's in the blood yet, and sometimes I let go. I was not aware of being observed by Mr. MacGregor."

Wiltbank studied the blue eyes which looked steadily into his. They were honest eyes. He laughed, recalling MacGregor's fears.

"Well, well—let's see how it's done."

George tossed the three varied weights into the air and kept them going dexterously.

"That will do," said Wiltbank. "Be seated. I wish to add to the orders I gave you before dinner, and I'm going to give you my reasons."

His tale was briefly told.

"I understand, sir. I'll do everything in my power to ward off mishaps."

"How does the thing strike you?"

"No doubt, when the time is up and you receive this new fortune, all the motives will be laid in the clear. Your father may have had a fortune which he did not believe it wise to tell you about."

Wiltbank nodded.

The butler went on: "He may have wished to surprise you in a novel way, sir."

"MacGregor and I agree that the whole business is alien to my father's character. My father was the last man in the world to jest. He was a silent man, but kindly. He always struck me as a man who had fallen into a dream and did not care to be awakened. Still, none of us can accurately judge humans by externals."

"I have found it like that, sir."

"I imagine you've had quite an adventurous life."

"Tolerable. But I suppose you have had enough adventure to last you the rest of your life. The war."

Wiltbank stared at the ceiling, thoughtfully. "Funny thing, about that. Not my notion of adventure. Adventure is play on a grand scale; and the war was hard labor on a colossal scale. I did not rescue a beautiful young woman and fall in love with her, as they do in books. There wasn't one single hurrah in it except Armistice night, when MacGregor and I deliberately got drunk. No. Adventure suggests mystery, the unknown. Perhaps I'm in the middle of one already, and don't realize it."

He sent the butler a quizzical glance, but the blue eyes were benign and unwavering.

Adventure, thought Wiltbank. Perhaps that was the true cause of his falling into this affair so easily: it smacked of adven-

His eyes bulged—there was the new butler juggling plates!

ture. Besides, it was as true as the hills that adventure was not to be had for the seeking; it presented itself unexpectedly.

"Home!" he said aloud.

"Sir?"

"Nothing, nothing. Just glad to get home. George, we humans are contrary cusses, aren't we? When this house was all mine, I didn't care a hang about it; but now it is slipping through my fingers—"

A KNOCK on the door left the sentence incomplete.

"Come in!" he called.

Mrs. Wolcott, cook and housekeeper, came in. She was a roly-poly woman in the fifties. She had been a servant in the house for twenty years.

"I have something to say to you, Mr. Jamey."

Wiltbank dismissed the butler. "Well, Mary, what's the trouble?"

"There's no trouble yet. But the other night, after Charles had gone and before the new man came, I was sitting by my window in the dark, and I saw two men watching the house. One came toward the house, and I lost sight of him. The other stayed where he was. Presently I saw the two of them again, and then they made off. I was a bit frightened because I was alone in the house."

"Everything was locked?"

"Trust me for that. I thought you ought to know."

"I'll keep my ears and eyes open. By the way, Mary, what do you think of Charles' substitute?"

"He'll do."

"Did Charles tell you where he was going?"

"To Cleveland."

"He gave you no house address?"

"No. And it was the first time I ever knew he had any relations. At least, none that he'd hurry to if they were sick. How long will you be home, Mr. Jamey?"

"A whole year, Mary."

"I'm glad. New York is no place for a young man without a wife."

"Or with one. Tomorrow I shall want one of your lemon pies."

Mrs. Wolcott beamed. "That sounds good. But I had to tell you about the prowlers. There's been some robberies hereabouts."

"Don't you lose any sleep."

"Is Mr. MacGregor going to stay home too?"

"I don't know."

"He used to be such a dear boy."

"I'm going to take him in hand, Mary. Good night."

SO there were prowlers about? MacGregor had seen some one peering into the window. Yet Wiltbank felt no thrill of alarm. There was Silas Fordham in the background, a rock of Gibraltar for-

integrity. That side of it would be square play. Fordham had stated frankly that he would have watchers about; and these prowlers of Mrs. Wolcott's might signify that the watchers' game had begun. Still, the prowlers might be tramps who had learned that the house was practically deserted. But once they found that the master had returned, they would sheer off, provided they weren't spies. He was going through because his curiosity was once more alive. He was in the middle of an old paper-back novel—hidden hand stuff and all that, and his sensation was one of amusement.

One of the strange phases—or was it mute testimony that his long spell of madness was over?—was that he missed the presence of his father in this room. It had been his father's favorite haunt. That old easy chair over there: invisible hands seemed to reach out of it pleadingly. For what? Whence came the notion that his father had anything to plead about? The human mind was a queer storehouse.

So New York, to Mrs. Wolcott, was no place for a young unmarried man? Marriage. Had he ever thought seriously of marriage? Now, marriage was a normal state, and the Oaks seemed pretty big for a lone man. What would happen with a young woman about? He had been so busy, for the past four years, making a fool of himself, that he had never speculated upon marriage. It might have been in the back of his head when he wrote those idiotic letters to the dancer *L'Inconnue*. He had often wondered why his father hadn't taken a second wife. It could not have been devotion to the memory of his son's mother, for Wiltbank could not remember his father speaking at length upon the virtues and attractions of the woman he had married.

He laughed, rather bitterly. He, musing upon marriage! He might, if luck turned, get a job as a clerk in some law-office, but it would be many a day before he could support a wife. Which brought him round the circle. What, in the name of heaven, had he done with his money? Why hadn't his brain been cleared of the devil's irony before it was too late?

That girl on the train—

He gestured impatiently, and once more roamed about the room, examining the books his father had loved. He took down the first volume of "The Three Musketeers," carried the book over to the chair and sat down to read, for the twentieth time, *D'Artagnan's* entrance into Paris. As he opened the book, a photograph and a letter fell to the floor. The photograph was that of a beautiful young woman in tights—some queen of the burlesque, probably. Wiltbank chuckled. It was, for all the world, as if he had run into the old boy in a theater alley. The austere elder Wiltbank and a demoiselle out of the Columbia! And to have hidden the photo inside a book which concerned sundry ladies of light fancies. Or had his father used the photo carelessly as a marker? But there was a letter; it might explain things. Wiltbank stooped for it—and found it addressed to himself! In this old Dumas volume which the father knew would some day be taken down by the son! He read the letter, over and over and over.

FOR a long time he sat perfectly still. Neither the time was given, nor the woman's name. Life! It might happen in any family. But the stark tragedy of what should have been only an episode! A silent, kindly man, going about his affairs as if in the middle of a dream—and only Death had awakened him.

> Why should I confess to you, my son? Why should I stretch a scar across your clean young brain? I don't know. I only know that I *must* tell you. Is there some queer notion in the back of my head that if I confess, I shall be forgiven? Of what? Love—out of convention. Love—out of bounds. Why do I not carry the secret with me? Why should you inherit it? Again, I don't know. Men love many times, but only once comes the grand passion. I loved this woman with all my soul. Give me that much honor. And she loved me with all her soul. We ran away in the night. I kissed her and put her in the sleeper. I then went forward into the smoker to plan our future. I had left my world, and she had left hers. I had even forgotten my little boy! At midnight we stopped for some reason. I was vowing to myself that I would be this woman's man forever, when there came a terrific jolt. I was crumpled up between two seats, senseless, when they hauled me out. The two sleepers were in flames when I came to. I never saw her again. I died a thousand times. I nearly went mad. I was the cause of her death. That is why I never made a comrade of you, dear son. Between us was always the shadow of this woman I still love. Play square, my son. God bless you and forgive me.
>
> YOUR FATHER.

Wiltbank's first impulse was to cast the letter and the picture into the fire; but instead he replaced them in the book which

he let rest upon his knee. Play square. So far in love he had. This queer history saddened him, but it did not repel him. It was life; and besides, it had happened years and years ago. Poor old chap!

CHAPTER XII

WE purpose to reverse the old order so beloved by the mid-Victorians. In those orderly times it was the hero who entered the heroine's house under false pretenses. Behold! Here comes one, up the driveway, this crisp, glorious October Friday morn—Kitty Harrison—in a senile village Ford, her luggage on each side of her and some under her feet. Her gipsy face was incarnadined by the mixed wines of air and mischief.

She told the driver of the Ford to deposit her belongings on the steps, then she paid him and bade him begone. If inanimate things can have pain,—we should say mechanical, not inanimate,—then the Ford was in agony. How it reached the main highway was something to ponder over. Still, we all have friends who are always apparently dying in front of us, but who eventually become the oldest inhabitants.

Kitty rang the bell and waited, and in due time the butler appeared. Tableau! Immediately he was vigorously embraced and kissed.

"Oh, Daddy, Daddy!"

"Kitty!" Michael Harrison, alias George Hammond, might have described his sensations, later, as akin to those of a falling aviator whose parachute has failed to open. Landing through the atmosphere of his astonishment, his first clear thought was that his daughter was again in his hungry arms. Father love. Then he became Authority; once more he had (as he believed) moral and legal rights over his offspring. He thrust her back, but still held onto her arms. "You little devil, you've tried to break my heart!"

"And you tried to break my soul!" she retorted.

"Where have you been?" He happened to remember where he was, and closed the door. "All these months without a sign! What have you been doing?"

"Earning my living, and properly. And now help me in with my things."

"What?" he exploded.

"Surely. Listen to me, Daddy. I love you better than anything else in this world. I am coming into this house to live. Deny me, and I'll at once expose you to Mr. Wiltbank."

"In the house of this wastrel?"

"Oh! Is he a wastrel? Nevertheless this shall be my home so long as it's yours. A butler! I saw you through the window the other night. You haven't put your thumb in the soup, I hope."

He saw the hopelessness of argument, of persuasion. His one chance would be Wiltbank's refusal to have a young woman about; and it needed but a glance into the face of this rebel child of his to convince him that Wiltbank would, if need be, build a wing to the house to keep her. Harrison boiled with helpless fury. She had him: with a gesture she could spoil everything.

"How did you find me?"

"A little bird told me."

"Have you met Wiltbank?"

"Yes."

"You have?"

"Oh, don't be alarmed. The meeting was accidental. I came out on the same train. I stumbled and fell into his lap."

"His lap?"—horrified.

"And stepped through his hat. It was all very funny."

Harrison got hold of himself. He was at her mercy. He would have liked to fall at her feet out of sheer joy, but he dared not let her know how weak he was. No matter what she did, he knew that he would, in the end, forgive her.

"You enter this house at your own risk. I cannot guard you continuously. A butler's daughter doesn't mean anything to that type of man. A Broadway Johnny, now gone broke."

Kitty smiled. "Dear Daddy, you are furious. I can see it in your eyes. You have no more business in this house than I have."

"Kitty, I *am* furious. You are a beautiful woman, and an infernally dangerous one. You have me on the hip. But if Wiltbank refuses to let you stay here?"

"In that event I'll return to the village hotel. But he will not refuse. The village says he's a gentleman, for all his wild habits. Besides, I am truly your daughter, and it's all proper that I should live in the same house with you. I'll know my place. I can play the maid quite as well as you the butler."

"Come with me," he said.

"Did you miss me, Daddy?"

He did not answer, but opened the door.

"Wait!" he said coldly. "Look me in the eyes, Kitty."

"Daddy, I shall always be able to do that."

His eyes were first to shift. He crooked a finger which bade her follow him along the hall. He paused before a door and knocked.

"Come in!" said Wiltbank's voice.

KITTY'S father pushed in the door.

"Ah, George!" said Wiltbank, who was cleaning out the library desk.

"My daughter, sir, has arrived unexpectedly. Have I your permission to keep her here for a few days?"

Wiltbank jumped up. The girl in the train! His blood raced.

"Why, of course she can. Of course. Why not?"

He knocked something off the desk and didn't care a hang what it was. It was the inkwell.

Kitty ran and picked it up. "Daddy, get some milk, or the rug will be spoiled."

It was thus that Kitty Harrison entered the Oaks. She alone was conscious of power. Wiltbank's brain had turned into a roulette-wheel and was wildly turning around in his skull. Michael Harrison's consternation revived. He knew Kitty; that is to say, he knew that he did not know her; his flesh and blood, but mentally as much a stranger as a girl he had never laid eyes on.

Her daring flabbergasted her father; her beauty temporarily destroyed Wiltbank's coherency of thought. And perhaps she wasn't aware of both effects!

When Harrison got her to her room, which was next to his, he began to question her again.

"Where have you been?"

"Fending for myself."

"At what?"

"The thing you told me I must never do."

"You have been on the stage?"

"Yes."

"Against my wishes?"

"Because it is in my blood; and to have repressed the instincts of the blood wouldn't have been safe."

"My love for you was nothing?"—tremulously.

"It was everything. I wrote you once a week, and Fordham has the letters. I just gave them to him. I dared not send them to you because you were hunting for me. I was very lonely at times, Daddy. There was an aching tooth, and it had to be pulled."

"The wild streak is gone?"

"It is subdued."

"Then why did you come into this house, which knows only spendthrifts?"

"Oh, perhaps I have the same notion in my head that you have: to amuse myself."

"You little devil!"

"But the same kind as you are."

Harrison had not kept together lion-tamers and acrobats during many years, without acquiring some diplomacy. Pan sprang into his eyes and mouth. He knew, all at once, what to do with this lovely termagant. He held out his arms, and she cried a little on his shoulder.

MACGREGOR did not telephone that morning. He needed a pair of hunting boots, and so rode into town for them. It was not necessary for him to visit his club before he purchased the boots. But he was lonesome and restless and was ready to make friends with anyone so long as they eschewed such topics as the income tax and reformers. He knew in his bones that Jimmy Wiltbank was going to try to reform him, and it grieved him.

He met a casual friend who invited him into the club's locker-room. The first one was merely a try-out. Everybody he knew had taken to lying about their pre-war stuff, and he had to be careful. This morning the stuff was fair to middling. The second trial improved it; the third tilt made Johnny ashamed of his suspicions. Underneath it all was the supreme satisfaction that he had defied the law.

When he left the club he had forgotten all about the hunting boots. A grand project shut out all other thoughts: four or five of them generally do create grand projects. It was going to be one of the funniest stunts he had ever pulled!

CHAPTER XIII

WILTBANK could think of nothing but the astonishing situation which the arrival of the new butler's daughter had created. The butler's daughter, who had but recently bestirred him to thoughts of matrimony! What would or should be her status in the house? Her father's guest, by the consent of the owner; thus she must

"Daddy, get some milk, or the rug will be spoiled!"

occupy a room in the servants' quarters and eat in the kitchen. There were six vacant bedrooms in the house, guestrooms, but he couldn't offer her one; nor could he ask her to dine in the dining-room. It seemed to him that he was bound to become involved in passive snobbery.

Heaven on earth, how close that lovely face had been to his on that rocking train! He recalled his punctured derby, and he laughed, which helped him considerably to reorganize his scattered mental forces. There was but one thing to do, and that was to let the current travel as it would.

Harrison —since his identity has been discovered, we purpose to call him that— Harrison showed no sign of discomfiture at luncheon. Yet he was on fire to learn what the boy thought of Kitty. The little vagabond! Was she going to make eyes at the boy? Was she really interested in the wastrel? Had something happened between the two the father knew nothing about? Kitty loved him—Harrison was certain of that; but he was equally certain that she hadn't come to the Oaks for the sole purpose of telling him that. Mischief: it radiated from her electrically. Fool! Why hadn't he let well enough alone?

Can you picture their minds at luncheon? Harrison serving silently and Wiltbank eating silently—both heads caldrons bubbling with interrogation points!

"I didn't know you had a daughter," said Wiltbank at last.

"I had no occasion to mention her, sir," replied Harrison. "She has been away for some time. She came here instead of returning home. She will make the beds and dust instead of Mrs. Wolcott. She must pay for her keep, sir."

"Beds?" Wiltbank's face expressed his horror at the notion. He would rather make up his bed himself. This beautiful young woman straightening out each morning the careless disorder of his bedroom?

"I don't like that," he said.

"Why not, sir?"—calmly.

"My room is always in such a mess. I prefer Mrs. Wolcott. I am used to the notion of having her about."

"Mrs. Wolcott finds it hard to climb up the stairs three or four times a day, sir. My daughter is young and vigorous."

Harrison was immediately caught by an inward laughter. Kitty, forced to do menial labor in a bachelor's house! In his endeavor to smother this chuckle, he spilled coffee on the polished mahogany table.

"I am sorry, sir."

"Never mind. The table needs varnish and a rubdown. MacGregor is always knocking over glasses."

When Harrison informed Kitty that she

would be expected to make up Wiltbank's bedroom, he waited for a furious outburst. None came.

"Well, why not?" said Kitty.

"Kitty, why do you crucify me so?" It was the best weapon he could have chosen.

"Daddy, Daddy!" Her arms went around him. "Why do you play so dishonorable a game? Getting into this young man's house under false pretenses—to mock him secretly? There is something back of it all I do not understand."

"I'm a clown, Kitty; I shall always be one. But enough of this. I'll make his bed, and you shall help Mrs. Wolcott in the kitchen; but you shall make her bed and mine. But if he ever gets familiar—"

"You mean, tries to kiss me?"

"Has no man ever tried?"

"None has ever succeeded since I was a little girl."

"Kitty, you have the most amazing eyes! They look so honest."

"Did I ever lie to you?"

"No. Having you here has knocked the pins from under me. He's a fine-looking young man; he was a brave soldier: but as he stands today he isn't worth an owl's hoot. He is going to behave himself because he expects half a million for his good behavior. And when he gets it—hurrah! The bright lights of old Broadway and the Follies. You are always judged by the company you keep. What company did you keep?"

"I am *L'Inconnue,* Daddy."

"The dancer?"

"Ask any theatrical producer or johnny if he ever saw my face. The company I kept was my own."

"The masked dancer!" Harrison sat down, a mixture of pride and terror in him: pride in that she had succeeded, and terror in that she had had the will to succeed. "*L'Inconnue.* What's that mean?"

"The unknown. My agent alone saw my face, but even he never knew my name or where I lived. All these months I have lived alone. Why did I do all this? I wanted to know absolutely what you always refused to permit me to know—if the lure was in me. I have been offered three thousand a week, and I have refused it. I hate the theater and I shall never appear behind the lights again. In all these months I never went into a restaurant with a man. The few friends I have had were middle-aged people who lived in the same apartments. I have thirty thousand in the bank. And now I'm going to play. I have as much right in this house as you have. As for Mr. Wiltbank trying to kiss me, he never will."

"Why not?"

"Because he is afraid of me. I saw the minute I entered the library. He is full of woman-hunger and doesn't know it. I mean honest hunger. Oh, he isn't in love with me; and I am certainly not in love with him. But he interests me. I know a good deal about the world, Daddy; my ears have been open. I do not believe he's a wastrel in the true sense. I believe him to be war-hurt. Indifference to life because he has lacked the proper influences. A sort of madness which cannot be coped with, madness which has to fall away from him of its own accord. What tortures you purpose to inflict on him I don't know."

Authority—parental authority?

Why, he had no more authority over this strange creature than if she were some other man's daughter! Where had she acquired, and how, this will, this resolution? To see if the lure was in her! Thirty thousand in the bank! Of what ancestral prototype—unknown to him—was she the reincarnation? His spine became cold—the gipsy in her mother!

"I am not going to torture him," he replied; "but he must pay the piper. And if there is any interference on your side, you'll regret it so long as you live."

There was nothing back of this threat except the notion to steady her. Woman-hunger in a young man, and audacity in a young woman. Oh, there should be no gipsy nonsense; her father would see to that. Not one item would he delete from his plans.

"Well, you make up my bed and Mrs. Wolcott's and do the dusting. There's a storm coming up. Remember how the big top used to belly and strain in the wind?"

AT two o'clock that afternoon Wiltbank entered the library, to find Kitty at work dusting the books.

"You mustn't do that!" he protested.

"Why not? The tops are dreadfully dusty."

"Well, I've a lot of work to do, and your presence will disturb me." That was true. He knew that this girl would disturb him every time he looked at her. "I imagine that the living-room needs touching up."

"Then I'll do the books tomorrow morn-

ing." Kitty folded her dusting cloth and departed.

Wiltbank sat down and proceeded to do nothing but stare at the door. Their first encounter to end like this!

Sharply he remembered the book which contained his father's strange confession. With this young woman about the house! He jumped to his feet, ran to the shelf, snatched the book from its resting-place and carried it to the desk, into which he thrust it, locking the drawer. Common sense invited him to destroy the letter and the photograph; but for the first time in his life he felt himself touched by superstition. If he kept this evidence of his father's side-step and reviewed it frequently, might it not serve as a barrier between him and some unexpected future impulse to run wild? Was it the half-million or was it his soul he was thinking of?

He roused himself out of this mood and noticed that the room had grown dark. Black clouds were scurrying across the sky. There was a spatter of rain on the window-pane. A wild night was in the offing.

Wilder than even his lively imagination could conceive!

For at a quarter to six the bell rang, and a troop of young men and women, headed by MacGregor, pushed Harrison aside and took the house by storm. Thunder and lightning outside, and bedlam within!

CHAPTER XIV

JOHNNY didn't mean any harm—no more than the man who rocks the boat or the man who wonders if it's loaded. A grand blow-out before his comrade went figuratively to jail for a year.

There are times when we refuse to believe our eyes and our senses. To Wiltbank it was as though a nightmare had walked out of his bedroom and linked arms with him. Having no inkling of how the affair had started, he believed the invasion a deliberate one. Johnny, with this troop of Indians here at the Oaks, this night of all nights! Johnny, his comrade, at whose tipsy antics he had so often laughed with careless indifference! And now he must pay.

He knew Johnny. Argument would be futile. Even when he was sober, argumentatively Johnny was difficult to handle.

A night of it. He had to admit, miserably, that a week ago he would have welcomed his guests cheerfully. A week ago this hadn't been his home; he had had no more respect for it than for a tavern. Now he blazed with anguish and indignation. He could not order them out of the house; the order would have bewildered them, when only yesterday he had been one of the crew, even though his attitude had been a spectator's. Besides, the worst possible move would be to rebuff them. John Barleycorn was always amiable, he knew, till one attempted to persuade or to thwart him. What you don't want him to do is the very thing he must and will do if he can. Propitiate him; let him have his way; soon he will become bored and take himself off.

The Darwinian theory becomes a visible fact when a man is in his cups. Like the ape, his energies are directed without continuity; he doesn't stick to anything long enough to find out what it's about. He roams, then he weeps. And later he will have an atrocious headache—a headache which from any other cause would scare the wits out of him.

Wiltbank saw that his guests had brought the banquet. Each carried a bundle; and as most of them knew the way, they thundered into the kitchen, driving Mrs. Wolcott out of it.

Harrison viewed all these excitements with a sardonic smile. When he saw that Wiltbank and MacGregor were alone, he stole into the dining-room and proceeded to set the table for this Walpurgis Night. Strange, that this act which he so longed for should come so swiftly. And best of all, Kitty would be witness.

"Johnny, what's all this about?" asked Wiltbank calmly.

"We are here to see the old year out—way out!" cried Johnny, thwacking Wiltbank on the shoulder. "You aren't going to start the reformation cold, I'll tell the cock-eyed world!"

"Of course you know what this means to me, if you don't handle it right."

"Keep your hair on. I'm going to pull that nigger in the woodpile right out into the open, where we can have a good look at him. I've consulted your father's lawyers, and they don't know anything about your dad having any more money, and they have the record of his finances from the day he was born in an Ohio village to the day of his death. And that's that. If there is half a million, it will be conscience money; and there'll be a couple of

millions that are yours that you wont ever set a peeper on. Now for crime!"

"You will be out of here before twelve?"

"Sure! And this bunch goes back to town. We're driving the cars ourselves. But tomorrow somebody will be coming around and asking what went on here. See what I mean? Nobody's going to put anything over on you."

"But—"

"Ha! Old General George W. But, and his chief of staff, General Jawn D. If! Pleased to meecha! Roast pheasant an' champagne an' ever'thing!" And Johnny began to sing:

"There was a young lady from Brussels
Who scorned to wear corsets and bustles,
And stockings and things,
Till one day, by jings!
She had nothing on but her muscles!
Oo—la—umpity—ay!"

He caught Wiltbank by the shoulders and began propelling him through the dining-room toward the kitchen.

"Hey, George!" he called to Harrison.

"Yes sir."

"Warm up! Warm up! Later you're going to do some juggling."

"Yes," thought Harrison grimly, "I'm going to do some juggling. With a soul. Let's see if it breaks."

Later he had the opportunity to speak to Wiltbank alone.

"Shall I give you the keys to the cellar, sir?"

"I have given you orders. Perhaps you'd better hide the keys. I haven't the least notion how this business is going to wind up."

"Very well, sir."

"And send word to your daughter to keep to her room. They are not bad—wild in the sense that the unusual freedom of the day is too much for them. Did you ever steal apples when you were a boy?"

Harrison admitted that he had.

"Well, they are still apple-stealing. They have promised to leave the house before midnight; and if we do not obstruct them, they will probably go at that time."

"It's a bad night, sir."

"So it is. Inside as well as out."

"I couldn't stop them from coming in."

"Of course not. I'm in a devil of a hole, and no knowing how I'm going to get out of it."

"I'll help as much as I can, sir."

"But warn your daughter that bedlam is loose in the house and to keep her room."

The thunder crashed at that moment, and both men sent a doubtful glance at the windows.

KITTY HARRISON loved thunderstorms. To sit by a window, in the dark, and to watch the lightning split the heavens was a delight. She never failed to gasp when trees, stones, fences, leaped from the blackness, paused for an instant, then vanished utterly. There was music in the rain, too. All these familiar atmospheric phenomena appealed strongly. Often, in summertime, she had rushed out bareheaded into a thunderstorm, stood with her face to the sky, and thrilled under the sweet drenching. The gipsy in her, that indefinable streak of wildness that always eluded analysis, that had brought her to this house, that had driven her out of her father's to play life on her own. It was impossible to dodge these thunderbolts of impulse that struck and were gone before they could be understood.

Her father had no wildness in him, only whimsicality. He never surrendered impulsively to a notion and then wondered why, the way she did. Oh, he was furious, and she knew that he would pay her back in some way. But nevertheless he was wrong, doubly wrong. What right—

Laughter on the first landing, a scuffle and a fall. Puzzled, Kitty approached her door and opened it. Dimly she could hear the tinkle of jazz music. Who had arrived?

Thunder. The house shuddered.

Kitty determined to find out what was going on. She wasn't a servant, she was an interloper; convention did not bind her. So she proceeded cautiously down the servants' stairway, to meet Mrs. Wolcott pantingly coming up.

"What's happened?" Kitty whispered.

"Some of Mr. Jamey's friends have arrived," said Mrs. Wolcott breathlessly. "I had hopes he was through with this nonsense. He was such a nice boy before the war. The women have driven me out of the kitchen. And tomorrow this house will not be fit to live in. I know. I've been through it all before."

"Women?" Kitty's heart seemed to turn sideways. "Women?" she repeated.

"And chorus-girls, too. You'd better go to your room and stay there. Oh, I don't say there's ever anything wrong. Mr. Jamey isn't that kind. But they'll drink

and dance the plaster loose. And there'll be cigar- and cigarette-butts everywhere, and broken glasses. I don't know what's the matter with this world."

Kitty stepped aside for Mrs. Wolcott, who went on up, laboriously. Kitty stood undecided for a moment. One of her father's phrases reverberated through her head—"the house of this wastrel." She knew something about these affairs. Sometimes they were innocent all the way through, sometimes they ended in tragedies, violent and unexpected.

"Dinner is served!" There stood her father in his clown's motley!

If she went down by the way of the kitchen, she would be caught. There was a chance of getting down the front way and hiding somewhere, temporarily. She returned to the top floor again and took the other staircase. On the first landing the hall led to the main staircase.

She passed a bedroom the door of which was open. She did not glance within purposely; but when she saw the silver slipper on the dresser, she felt queer, and reached the main staircase in a confused state of mind.

Her slipper! Those letters! His cross of war! He had never looked into her face till that day on the train, and no man fell in love with a woman whose face he had not seen. Bored, and sought amusement—the slipper being a memento of a temporarily escaped boredom.

A few days ago she had wanted to punish him—send a lawyer here with one of the love-letters and start proceedings for a breach of promise. Through the shabby gilt of this notion she now saw the sordid silliness of it. Truth was, she had been angry because his interest in her hadn't been genuine. War-hurt. Supposing it was so? No, she would not meddle. She would watch, but she would not add anything to the impending *débâcle*. She would also watch her father to see he did not go too far with his outrageous plans.

She reached the lower hall without being discovered. From the sounds she heard coming out of the living-room, she thought it best to enter the library. She could cuddle down in the reading-chair. The piano was no longer in action; a dance-record was whining on the phonograph. She found the library deserted, and so she climbed into the chair, sitting upon folded legs. She had no definite plan in her head, unless it was to witness a wild party.

Field-Marshal MacGregor was everywhere. He dashed from the living-room to the kitchen and back. He twirled the champagne in the impromptu buckets (water pails); he mixed the prandial cocktails and decided that these should be served in the mellow comforting space of the library. He sang most of the time, at the top of his lungs. The national anthem tonight was the Waddletum ditty. He sang it joyously if monotonously. He was singing it as he carried the huge salver and glasses into the library.

"From Waddletum to Widdletum
Is eighteen miles—"

He did not return to Waddletum, however. He was delayed by a most astonishing vision: a beautiful young woman standing beside a reading-chair and staring at him as if he were made of mud or something. He set down the salver, staring at her in return.

"Where—where did you come from?" he stammered.

"I am Miss Hammond. I am visiting my father."

"The new butler?"

"Yes."

"Holy mackerel!"

"Sir!"

"Nobody told me."

"I came this morning." Kitty recognized him as Wiltbank's companion on the train.

"How long are you going to stay?" Not that he cared, but he had to say something.

"You are Mr. MacGregor, I believe?" she inquired.

"Middle name Percival."

"You are Mr. Wiltbank's friend?"

"I'll say I am!"—vigorously.

"I didn't know."

"Finest chap in the world. Square as they make 'em. He's going to jail tonight for a year, and we're giving him a good send-off."

"Jail?"

"Well, next door to it. You see, if he's a good boy for a year, he gets half a million iron boys."

"Are you really his friend?"

"What do you mean?" There was something about this girl that puzzled him. She didn't smirk and kowtow the way serving girls generally did. And Lord, she was good-looking enough, he grudgingly admitted.

"I shouldn't call this friendship," said Kitty, forgetting her recent resolve not to meddle. "My father has told me something. After twelve o'clock tonight Mr. Wiltbank must not touch liquor for a year. And you bring roisterers into the house. Is that fair to him, your friend and comrade? Will you feel like this about it in the morning, when there will be nothing but regrets and headaches?"

"For a butler's daughter—"

"He used to be a clown in a circus, too."

"I beg your pardon!"

JOHNNY had been born gentle, but war and a silly woman had put the seal of lawlessness upon his brow, and for the first time he was conscious of the imprint. He wondered if his hair was hanging down over his forehead, as usual. His hand went up. No; the cowlick was still in place; it was too early.

To what lengths this dialogue might have gone remains among the unborn things. The roisterers burst into the library, clamoring for the initial libation to Bacchus.

There happened to be among the young women—five in number—the prima donna of Wiltbank's expeditionary flop in theatrical circles: Maizie DeLong, blonde and pretty, who was unknown either at Cartier's or Tiffany's, which is as good a recommendation as we can give her. She was a good fellow. Things went so far; then she set her foot down. She liked good times, but the line she drew was as high as the Chinese wall. She did not observe Kitty at once; and Kitty, observing her, would have joyfully jumped through the nearest window had it been open.

Maizie wasn't sure of her eyes; it was rather dim where Kitty stood. Four steps, however, convinced her. With a cry of joy and astonishment she rushed upon the victim.

"Kitty, what in the world are you doing here?"

"Hush!" whispered Kitty, in desperate straits. "My name is Hammond here. Please! I'll tell you later."

"What's going on?" demanded MacGregor.

"Why, this is Kitty Hammond, who used to go to school with me," Maizie explained, but throbbed with curiosity.

"That'll make an even twelve at the table!" cried one of the young men.

"I'm sorry," said Kitty. "I had no business to leave my room. It is quite impossible for me to join you. You see, my father is Mr. Wiltbank's butler, and I am my father's guest."

MAIZIE was quick. She did not shout: "A butler, when he's worth a million if a cent?" But she thought it. What was going on in this house?

"Come along," urged MacGregor, who saw a chance to apologize for his rudeness. "This is my party, and you'll be as welcome as the flowers in the spring."

Kitty gazed about, at the young and eager faces. The gipsy in her—the wild

untamable—took her destiny in hand. The gipsy had blindly led her into this; the gipsy should carry her through. She saw Wiltbank staring over MacGregor's shoulder, his face drawn with anxiety. In the doorway she espied her father, his Pan's mask covering whatever emotions he was prey to. To punish them both: spoil Wiltbank's sense of freedom and fill her father with boiling wrath. It wasn't as if she were really humiliating him: if he would dance this kind of a dance let him pay the piper.

"Very well," she said.

Harrison, having heard her decision, disappeared.

MacGregor maneuvered to Maizie DeLong's side.

"You went to boarding-school with her?" he asked.

"Yes. She's the nicest girl I know."

"But her dad, the butler—"

"Is the gentlest and kindliest man there ever was. He used to come and take her home for the vacations. I don't believe he'll remember me."

"Was he ever a circus clown?"

"Yes. But I imagine he's had some reverses." Maizie, without the least notion what Kitty's presence signified, decided to play up to her friend's needs.

"Well, I'll be tinkerdammed!"

MacGregor plowed his fingers through his hair. His theory that crookedness was in the house was zigzagging to earth like a punctured blimp. Jimmy was right: too many movies.

The cocktails were served. It was particularly democratic, this gathering. No one considered the impropriety of a butler serving his daughter at the master's table. Perhaps a quarter of an hour passed.

"Dinner is served."

Everybody turned toward the door. Kitty covered her mouth to stifle the gasp. For there in the doorway stood her father in his clown's motley, lampblack circling his eyes and lips!

CHAPTER XV

WHAT a remarkable thing the human will is! To chatter and smile and laugh, when the heart is stiff with misery and the throat is stuffed with tears! So it goes.

Kitty hated the motley, and she had sound reasons, but these reasons could not be imparted to her father. On his side he wrote her down a snob; loving her, he could believe her to be secretly ashamed of him. Life is woven out of these misunderstandings, these misinterpreted silences. Harrison had donned the motley in a fury of retaliation: to punish her for her coming into this house, for sitting at the table, defying him.

A boomerang is an object of peculiarly carved and polished wood. You throw it and it returns to you with malignant accuracy. No sooner did Harrison begin to serve these young bedlamites than he felt the staggering impact of the war-club he had cast so recklessly. He had thrown away something he never could regain in this house—his dignity. He saw, too, that his act was an invitation to this fool of a MacGregor to throw off the lid completely. There would be no restraint anywhere this night. Outside and inside—pandemonium.

Having fun is these days the leading industry in America, among the younger set. But in all industries there are failures, expediencies and makeshifts as well as successes. Harrison wasn't having fun. Neither was Kitty, who saw plainly that this gipsy impulsiveness must be brought to a final halt or she would be getting into trouble all the rest of her life. MacGregor wasn't having any fun; his theory of dark crime hadn't a leg to stand on. Wiltbank wasn't having fun, because he believed that this night's work would finish him. His brain whirled. But from time to time he steadied himself by recalling old Charles' letter and the integrity of Silas Fordham.

Convention had been turned inside out and upside down. He couldn't admonish the butler; in permitting the man to enter the dining-room in motley, he had condoned the breach. He knew MacGregor's suspicions to be utter nonsense, but for all that there was something mysterious in the subtle war which was going on between the butler and his daughter.

"You are not drinking your champagne," said Kitty to Wiltbank.

"No."

"On my account?"

"On my own account. I don't want it. Some one must keep a clear head. MacGregor is my best friend; but sometimes—"

"Deliver us."

"Does your father often cut up like this?"

"It's all my fault. I'm ashamed of myself. He wanted me to remain in my room, and I wouldn't."

"Why didn't you?"

"I wanted to see what a wild night was like."

"I expect you'll have your wish. Ordinarily I shouldn't mind; but there is a good deal involved tonight. I'm beginning to be a little afraid of myself, too."

"Afraid of what?"

"Of picking up a glass and joining the rumpus. I'm sorry that you should be a witness to this riot. Yet it isn't anything unusual. Last week I should have hurrahed with the rest of them. But a queer thing has happened to me. I've just come home."

"I don't understand."

"I can't explain it very well. I've been back in this country four years; yet it seems to me I've only just come home. Before the war this house was one of peaceful silence; and I've made a tavern out of it."

"Don't let any wild impulse run away with you. My father and I are good examples of how not to act. Perhaps it wasn't wise of Daddy to send me to a fashionable private school. It makes me forget my place. Shall I retire to my room?"

"Lord, no! I don't want to talk to these imbeciles. I'd rather talk to you, if you don't mind."

"I don't mind." He was likable.

She became conscious of a disturbing truth. She had thrown aside her woman's weapons. If any insulted her, she had no rights in retaliation: she was the daughter of a butler and had stepped out of her place. The vain regrets for irrevocable deeds! The apparently harmless impulses which invoked tragic scenes!

War-hurt. The phrase returned to her. The hunt for excitements, to be alternately excited and bored. Then, one day, to come home. And these bedlamites, piling in upon him at such a moment! His home in jeopardy, and only now realizing how much it meant to him.

"YOU really went to school with her?" said MacGregor.

"Why, of course I did," said Maizie DeLong. "Jimmy doesn't seem to be happy tonight."

"No," replied MacGregor moodily. "And her father was a circus clown?"

"Yes. Isn't Kitty a beauty?"

"You know what I think of you skirts," said MacGregor with a snarl.

"Johnny, you poor animal, wait till you meet the right one," warned Maizie.

Johnny laughed raucously, rose and thumped on the table.

"Ladies and gents," he began with a swashbuckling gesture. "We are gathered here tonight to see the old year out. Our friend and erstwhile helpmeet in crime leaves us in the lurch after midnight. For one year he can't take a drink. He can't go to New York, and a lot of other things. It seems his father left him another half-million, provided he obeys the terms of a will that was witnessed by lunatics."

Some one shouted: "You're one yourself!"

"Sure I am," Johnny shot back. "If I hadn't been one, I wouldn't have tried to make the world safe for democracy. But I am here tonight—"

And so on. When you are perfectly sober, how appallingly dull such doings are, what inexpressible boredom attaches to them! What produces the bore? Politeness. The very thing that should permit us to ride life softly has the curse of Crom'll in it. We just can't rise up and walk out on the bore; it isn't polite. We are bound to the chair, as Kitty and Wiltbank were bound.

Forthwith we shall proceed to jump from room to room, collecting scenes and what dialogue we can.

Scene One:

"I'm sorry, sir," said Harrison.

"What's one more bedlamite among a houseful?" said Wiltbank resignedly. "And how the devil are we ever to get them out of the house?"

"Can't you order them out?"

"And have them decide to stay all night? No, thanks."

Scene Two:

"George," said MacGregor, throwing an arm across Harrison's shoulder, "you're a man after my own heart. What a whale of a good time you must have had when you were young!"

Harrison shook off the arm. "I thought you were Mr. Wiltbank's friend."

"And I thought you were his butler."

"Did you ever hear of *Pagliacci?*"—gravely.

"Sure. The wop cuts my hair every other Saturday."

Blocked in one direction, Harrison tried another. "You say you are Wiltbank's

friend; and yet, knowing the ordeal he must go through after tonight, you fill his house with roisterers."

"How about yourself, George? Seems to me you're adding to the gayety of the nations. But I'll tell you this: if you ever go back to the circus and need a pink elephant, I'll sell you one cheap."

MacGregor wheeled and marched out of the library in search of noise.

"Fool!" cried Harrison, booting a helpless hassock halfway across the library. "Double-dyed old fool!"

If only he had kept his dignity! Or was he really lacking that attribute of character? Had he ever possessed dignity? Hadn't it been something he had put on, like a coat, when occasion demanded it? And to lose even his semblance of dignity in this house, of all houses on earth!

Scene Three:

"Mr. MacGregor," said Kitty, "will you get these people out in time?"

"Leave it to me. Were you in the circus too?"

"When I was a little girl. But my father would never let me in the ring."

"I see. Do you know anything about this hidden will?"

"What Mr. Wiltbank told Daddy."

"What do you think of it?"

"Every human mind has a little mystery spot in it."

"I knew Jimmy's father, and this doesn't listen like him. What got your dad into those duds?"

"His way of punishing me for joining the party."

"All right. I'll have that bunch out of here on the dot," MacGregor declared, nobly. She certainly was a pippin, but that hadn't anything to do with it.

WILTBANK wandered from room to room, observing but never joining the merriment. No one insisted. Johnny had provided well, and these days the provider only is necessary. A philosophical calm pervaded Wiltbank. He knew that he had lost the game even before it started. To know the worst has reviving qualities. Yet how he wanted that money! How he wanted this roof to remain over his head! All gone to pot through no fault of his own. Prescience that something was going to happen, that all would not end well at midnight, possibly because the time was so short; fatality would step in somewhere, somehow.

He wasn't angry with Johnny; Johnny was only the tool of Fate, the unconscious instrument of destruction. Why not admit it? At his own door lay the major portion of Johnny's bibulous comics: he had laughed at them. If anything broke wrong tonight, James Wiltbank had asked for it.

He believed that Silas Fordham was in possession of the money, of the queer document appertaining thereto, that Fordham could dispose of the money as his conscience directed. There was no reason why Fordham, a rich and distinguished lawyer, should utter a lie to one so insignificant as James Wiltbank. Yet Johnny was right: it was a crazy business.

A barrage of thunder caused him to lift his head. Perhaps it was the howling weather which created his doubts. Even the storm was against him. On a clear night he could have bundled these roisterers out, with never a twinge of conscience; but to thrust them into a deluge—

KITTY, missing her father, went in search of him. She found him in the library, his chin upon his chest.

"Daddy, I'm sorry."

He stood up. "You turn a knife around in my old heart, and then you say you are sorry. How easy it is to say that! You could leave me for a year, with never a sign where you were or what you were doing. And you tell me you are sorry! Oh, I know. That school taught you to be ashamed of your father."

"That isn't true, Daddy!" she cried, vigorously. "I love you with all my heart; but when you put on the motley, you torture me."

"Ashamed of me."

"No, no!" Her gesture was full of despair. "You used to come in upon my girl friends, dressed this way. You did not put shame into me. You tortured me. It was one of the reasons why I ran away."

"Ashamed of me!"

"I have tried to keep it from you, Daddy—the truth. But I see you will never understand me unless I give you my real reasons for hating everything and anything that has to do with a circus."

"What do you mean?"

"You'll remember, I spent a good deal of time in the dressing-tent. I was a little girl of eight or nine. And they tortured me, not meaning to—about my mother."

For a moment Harrison's astonishment made a stone image of him; then, with a

queer little cry, he fell upon his knees before her, seizing her hands.

"Dear God, why didn't you tell me, Kitty? I didn't know! I—didn't—know!"

And upon the tender tragedy of these two lives—upon the final understanding—in romped the roisterers. They wanted the clown to do tricks. You know how it is.

CHAPTER XVI

HARRISON had lived a life which necessitated both mental and physical alertness. He had lost slightly, by age, some of the physical side, but his wits were unimpaired. As the door burst open, he bent farther down so as to give the impression that he was fixing Kitty's shoestrings. His back being toward the door, the little farce went through. As he sprang to his feet, comic, grotesque, he whispered: "Hush! All is well. I am happy. I'll play the fool for them."

Kitty was no less ready of wit. None of the roisterers, as they propelled Harrison forcibly out of the library, suspected that they had trod upon a celestial moment. But alone, she broke down, sobbing only in her throat, her eyes shut but tearless. In a minute or two he would be juggling plates for those fools—her dagger in his heart; for she knew that the truth must have crucified him.

"In God's name, what is the matter?" Kitty opened her eyes to behold Wiltbank standing beside her. She had not heard him approach. "Has anyone insulted you? I'll break every bone in his body!"

"No, no! I'm ashamed of myself. Daddy wouldn't have put on the motley if I hadn't challenged him. I just wanted a good cry."

"Oh." Generally he found himself at ease conversationally with all types, but from the very beginning he had not been able to talk coherently to this young woman. "Anything I can do?"—lamely.

"You might leave me alone for a few minutes, till I get over this foolish hysteria."

"All right." He took a step or two, hesitated, went as far as the door, and turned. "If any of these fools get familiar—"

"I shouldn't have any right to protest, Mr. Wiltbank."

"Hang it all!"

"I'll be all right in a minute. Please!" He did not want to go, but if she wanted to be alone— He hung around outside the door for a while, then decided to cast politeness to the winds and order the crowd to take themselves off. It was eleven o'clock.

Johnny was mellow and amenable. The butler and his girl were all right; they were out of court; the nigger wasn't in the woodpile but was hiding somewhere behind Silas Fordham, who, no doubt, had been properly hornswoggled.

"All right, Jimmy. A fine time was had by all. We'll be on our way by half-past eleven. But there's something in my car I want to bring in. No elbow-bending on the way back, not on a night like this."

"Why don't you all put up at the hotel in the village?" asked Wiltbank, thoughtless. "It will be a wild ride back to town."

"I hear them bells a-ringing! What are you talking about? How the devil can this bunch put up at the hotel? Back to the Big Town for all of us, back to their mammas and papas—that is, if George W. Lightning doesn't pick us off."

"Hop to it, then."

JOHNNY hopped. Ten minutes later he returned, drenched and furious. He got his companions together.

"What moron let out all the gas in our cars?" he demanded.

"What?"—a chorus.

"Every drop, spare tanks and all."

"No gas?" cried Wiltbank. After all, he had been expecting something like this. He was done.

"Come across!" shouted MacGregor, fair sobered by the calamity. "I want the bozo who did this."

But all denied they had been outside the house since they had entered it.

"Have you any gas, Jimmy?"

"About three gallons in one car." Wiltbank shrugged.

"Telephone to the village garage," some one suggested.

"Open nights only in the summer season," replied Wiltbank. "The hotel might have some. I'll call them up. You, Johnny, take your pocket lamp and study the ground under the cars." He recalled that Mrs. Wolcott had seen two men loitering about in the night.

Johnny got into a raincoat and went upon his errand of investigation. He knew all about cars, and to his astonishment discovered the tire tracks of a Ford. The gas had been stolen—fifty gallons. All the

chance in the world, too, on a night like this. This was a job by the enemy. Trying to queer his pal before the race began. He returned to the house, miserable in all but one fact: his choice of companions had been vindicated.

"I thought so," said Wiltbank, when the news was given him. "Some one's been prowling about the house, so Mrs. Wolcott says. The hotel is sending out thirty gallons."

"What is it?" he asked. A lusty wail from the bundle answered the query.

Meanwhile Harrison had shed the motley and stood once more in the discreet habiliments of the butler.

"Don't worry, Jimmy," was MacGregor's advice. "Buck up."

"Johnny, you've given me the boot."

"But how was I to know that some crook would pinch the gas? I'm sorry."

"So am I. I asked you not to bring the bunch. No use, though, crying over spilt milk."

"But there's lots of time yet. They'll get here with the gas," Johnny assured his comrade. The Clicquot was coming out of his pores rapidly.

"Something's bound to happen," replied Wiltbank cynically.

"But look here. They can't crab you for something you didn't do and couldn't help. Why, I'd have cut my arm off rather—"

"It would have been safer for me if you had cut off your foot, so you couldn't have stepped on the gas that brought you here."

"What does it all mean?" whispered Maizie DeLong.

"I can't tell you now," answered Kitty; "but I'll write. Couldn't you have stopped them?"

"If I had known what was back of Johnny's play, yes; but I thought it was the usual stuff—a good dinner and dancing. But nobody can blame Jimmy Wiltbank, who's as square as they make them. He never breaks his word."

Ten minutes after twelve a car was heard panting up the driveway. A shout went up from the innocent bystanders, but the shout shriveled into a gasp, when a minute later, Harrison brought the news that Mr. Edgar Parbody would like to speak to Mr. Wiltbank, if convenient.

MacGregor was first to recover. "Hey, you!"—in a loud stage whisper, addressing his companions. "Beat it into the living-room, douse the lights and keep still. This is bad medicine."

If there was one man in Hakett neither Wiltbank nor MacGregor cared for, it was

Edgar Parbody. He was the official meddler of the village. He was a reformer. MacGregor put it that Parbody would have taken the gold off the goldfish and made their nakedness invisible if he could have found the means by which to accomplish the feat. But that wasn't the half of it. He was the attorney for the Wiltbank Orphanage.

"Let me handle this bird," whispered MacGregor.

Wiltbank assented. He disliked Parbody so thoroughly that he had no desire to converse with him. That Parbody was attorney for the orphanage was not due to his father but to the choice of the board of directors. Wiltbank Senior had endowed the orphanage liberally, but he had never meddled with the direction of it.

Parbody entered briskly. He was angular. His lips were pale and thin: they gave you the impression that he had just snapped at something and had missed it.

"Ha!" he began, rubbing his cold hands. "A dreadful night."

"It's a hell of a night," volunteered MacGregor, scowling.

"I thought I'd drop in," said Parbody to Wiltbank, ignoring Johnny, "and give you warning that I am familiar with the terms of the second will, Mr. Wiltbank."

"Why didn't you make it early? This looks as if you'd been peeking into the windows."

"Johnny!" warned Wiltbank.

"That's all right," said Johnny. "Parbody knows me and my sentiments. He was one of those birds who helped win the war by mailing tinfoil to the War Department. And say, better jog on your way. This place will be quarantined in the morning. Mrs. Wolcott's just come down with smallpox."

"That's funny," replied Parbody, consulting his watch with satisfaction.

"Funny? Do you call smallpox funny?" shouted Johnny. Any lie to get this meddler out of the house.

"Why, yes, it's funny. I called up Mrs. Wolcott at nine, and she said you were making a night of it. Mr. Wiltbank, we have never been friendly, but I have always found you honest. What does all this mean?"

MacGregor took the burden of replying. "I brought some men friends for a farewell dinner. Some bootlegger stole the gas out of our cars, and we are temporarily marooned."

Parbody smiled. There was a hat on the library table, a hat which had been sent out of Fifth Avenue or the Rue de la Paix. He inspected it. "Some very effeminate young men you have here. Madame Georgette. There are women in this house of moral turpitude!"—triumphantly.

"Moral turpentine," gravely corrected MacGregor, "moral turpentine. Will you have a drink before you go?"

Said Mr. Parbody: "I am duty bound, of course, to inform Mr. Fordham of this episode."

Wiltbank walked to the library door and swung it open. "Good night, Mr. Parbody," he said quietly.

"I hold no animosity," said Parbody, moving toward the door, "but I shall fight tooth and nail for the asylum."

"Atta boy!" shouted MacGregor. "Eat 'em alive!"

PARBODY departed, not without some dignity. He considered as he got into his car and went chugging away into the night, that he had used his victory modestly. There were many things he could have told that pair of spendthrifts.

"You see now, Johnny, there *is* money. If this was a hoax, Parbody would have been left in the dark."

"Call me anything you choose, and I'll believe you," said Johnny miserably. "But how was I to know?"

"Oh, well, I'm young. When the bank asks me to vacate, I'll not stand on a corner and hold my hat. The contents of the house will take care of me for a while. And perhaps Fordham will find a job for me in a law-office later. What grinds me is that I've fallen in love with my home. The pictures and the cellar would clean up the mortgage, but then I wouldn't have anything to run the house on. Do you know, right after Fordham broke the news, I had a premonition that it wouldn't come to pass. Buck up, old scout. If you hadn't brought the dynamite, somebody else would have. It was written. Anyhow, the orphanage will get the money."

"I'll never get over the notion that something fishy is going on," Johnny declared. "I can't make head nor tail to it."

"No more can I. Now let's get the bunch on the way."

There is an old saying that it never rains but it pours. Calamities have nephews and nieces and cousins and they generally flop down to visit you all in a bunch.

The crowning calamity of this night was toward. Fate is never niggard, for evil or for good; she has bursts of generosity both ways. This calamity is still whispered about in the village of Hakett. The village solons, forever polishing the hotel porch, still declare that it was only to be expected of a bad lot like young Wiltbank. We never hope for the best, if it concerns our neighbors.

The gas from the hotel arrived at one o'clock. The roisterers, now somewhat bewildered at the turn of events, got into their waterproofs and helping themselves out of Wiltbank's umbrella jar, were on the moment of their departure, when the doorbell rang again. The sound was thrillingly clear because there had come a lull in the fury of the storm.

Harrison hurried to the door.

Wiltbank was now indifferent to bells; the tension was over. The worst had happened. This side of murder, he could not conceive anything worse than that which had already taken place. And yet, how infinitesimal this mishap seemed! A wild night of which he was perfectly innocent. Men and women in the house after midnight, dancing and drinking; and he must lose a fortune, his home. Fordham had warned him that if there were any highjinks in the house after twelve, even if he had no part in it, the money would go elsewhere.

A thought which had the quality of a thunderbolt entered his head. His father! Had his father been a little out of his head toward the last? That utterly useless confession. Supposing his father's mind had broken down, and the elopement was the imagination of a disordered mind? The dignified scholar who had been his father did not link up with a lady of the burlesque, no matter how beautiful. And in this disordered state he had written a second will so grotesque that even Fordham had agreed that it was queer. His father, not right in his mind. Why hadn't he thought of this before? From this angle he could understand the puzzle. If he could only locate Charles! Charles would be able to state definitely whether or no Wiltbank Senior had been mentally sound. Clever enough to fool Fordham, but would it fool a jury? A dim hope sprang into being.

Upon the strength of this hope he turned and sought Kitty's face. It was lovely. It was sad, too. At this moment she appeared to be looking through everybody, to some vision beyond the walls. The daughter of a clown. . . . .

He got no further with these cogitations. The return of Harrison with the crowning calamity scattered them.

Harrison held a swathed object in his arms, held it gingerly. He approached Wiltbank and gravely extended this object. Wiltbank automatically accepted the bundle. "What is it?" he asked.

A lusty wail from the bundle answered the query.

"What in heaven's name— I say, this isn't the orphanage! Some one's blundered. Who brought it?"

"A woman," said Harrison. "I told her that this wasn't the orphanage. She replied that she was well aware of the fact, sir. She ordered me to give the infant to you. She added that you would understand perfectly why she left in with you, sir."

Tableau! Thunder, but it was far away now; the storm was evidently dying.

CHAPTER XVII

WILTBANK'S bewilderment had the characteristics of hypnosis: he saw nothing nor understood anything, till Kitty moved. Her movement broke the spell. He realized then that the calamity in his arms—now squalling lustily—was a minor one. The expression on Kitty's face, the little gesture as she turned and walked out of the room, was a blinding revelation of what had truly happened to him.

We know what love is; we can take it apart like a watch; but we cannot tell you why it takes years in one case and only hours in another to be felt.

Desperately he wanted to run after Kitty and explain that this howling bit of humanity wasn't *his*. He turned about for some one to hold the baby, but all were interested in the door. So the erstwhile roisterers surged through the door into the hall and into the night. Even Johnny was gone.

Johnny, however, had dashed forth upon a peculiar errand, but futilely. The woman who had brought the baby was kiting along the road to Hakett. The lights informed Johnny that the car was traveling fifty miles an hour. He sent a volley of cusswords after it, a threatening fist emphasizing them. Then he returned to the house.

Jimmy, poor old Jimmy, had been right! If he, MacGregor, hadn't brought the dynamite, somebody else would have; and while he had brought a stick, this mysterious woman had brought a couple of cases.

"Get out of here!" he yelled to the crowd struggling around the automobiles. "Beat it! I'm staying here."

He knew Jimmy Wiltbank, from the ground up. This baby was a put-up job; and he knew the dramatist, too. When he laid hands on Parbody there wouldn't be anything left of him but the Par.

"What the devil shall I do with it, Johnny?" cried Wiltbank, his arms beginning to ache.

"Chloroform it! George, what did this dame look like?"

"I couldn't see her face," answered Harrison. "If I hadn't taken it, she'd have laid it on the doorstep, sir."

"What makes it bawl so?" asked Johnny.

"Probably hungry."

"Lay it down on the lounge," suggested Johnny. "And get some milk."

"I'll attend to that, sir," said Harrison, fairly running from the room.

Wiltbank laid the baby on the lounge, his style like that of a man handling a cracked raw egg. Both he and MacGregor stared dumbly down upon it.

"The sneak!"

"Who?" asked Wiltbank.

"This is some of Parbody's work."

"No, Johnny. He hasn't the brains to think up a trick like this. Watch it for a minute. I want to telephone."

HE called up Dr. Ward, the family physician, who lived in Hakett. The doctor had to be routed out of bed; but being routed out of bed was all in a day's work with him. We present the dialogue.

"This is Dr. Ward."

"This is Jimmy Wiltbank. You were with my father during his last illness?"

"Yes."

"Was he sound of mind?"

"Sound of mind? Why, of course he was. He was worried about you, but that was natural. But so far as his mind went, it was as sound as my own."

"Did he ever speak of his will?"

"Only to say that he was leaving everything to you. What's the matter?"

"I don't know. Another half million has popped up, and the terms of this will convinces me that he wasn't in his right mind when he made it."

"Good Lord—another will?"

"Yes."

"I don't understand it. Your father's mind was a beautiful one, and clear to the last. Come in to my office some day, and we'll talk it over. Good night."

So hope went a-glimmering, and the riddle stood four-square again. He returned to the library, where he found Harrison feeding the baby by using the end of a napkin soaked in warm milk.

"I'll take it up to Mrs. Wolcott for the night," said Harrison. "She'll know what to do with it."

"I wish to the devil I did!" exploded Wiltbank.

"Gee, what a mug!" said Johnny. "I wonder if I ever looked like that?"

"Probably worse," said Wiltbank grimly.

"You never can tell what a baby's going to look like," interposed Harrison. "Now I'll take it up to Mrs. Wolcott."

Mrs. Wolcott was dumfounded; but once upon a time she had been a mother, and the instinct was revived when a little pink velvet hand touched her cheek.

"I'll take care of it till morning," she consented. "Whose is it?"

"The woman who left it inferred that it belonged to Mr. Wiltbank."

"Mr. Jamey? What nonsense! She mistook the house for the orphanage. It's been done before."

"Oh, it has?" Harrison shrugged.

"The poor mother! On a night like this! Run along, and I'll put it to sleep."

Harrison crossed the hall and knocked upon his daughter's door.

"Who is it?"

"Your father."

Harrison was let in. "You would come here," he said.

"And if I hadn't, would we understand each other as we now do?"

"Yes, yes—that is so. That wipes out everything. But a baby! You young folks are different than in my time."

"Oh, there were doorstep babies in your great-grandfather's time. But for all that, it bowls you over. You said he was a wastrel. Queer, too. He was a gallant soldier, and he carried himself like a gentleman all through the disorder of the night. But under the circumstances I can't stay here. What will he do with it?"

"Turn it over to the orphanage tomorrow." Harrison made a grimace. "It will be very easy for him. The orphanage will not refuse a Wiltbank anything!"

"I shall leave early in the morning."

"Where will you go?" Harrison could not hide the sparkle in his eyes. To get her out of the house!

"Oh, to the village hotel for a few days. You can run in occasionally to see me."

IN the village. He did not like that; the village was altogether too near. "Will you promise me one thing? That there will be no more nonsense?"

"I promise. It doesn't pay. But will you promise me something? Never wear the motley again."

"All right."

"Daddy, is—is she alive?"—in a whisper.

"No. She is dead. I don't know how she died, but I know she is dead. It tells me here." Harrison tapped his heart. "Why didn't you tell me years ago?"

"I didn't want to hurt you, Daddy."

"Well, well; we sha'n't hurt each other any more, thank God!"

"Give up this notion, Daddy."

"Too late. Got to go through with it. We've wasted enough talk. For years I made people laugh, till I began to lose the gift of laughing. To laugh—laugh!"

"Hush!" she warned.

"Sometimes it used to seem to me that I should go mad if I didn't find something to laugh at. Day and night to hear laughter, and none of it mine. So I shall go on."

"You'll be sorry."

"Who knows? Or who cares, so long as I have my laugh?" He kissed her tenderly. "Good night. What time will you be off?"

"At six."

"I'll have a taxi sent in for you. But I wish you would go home."

"I shall stay in the village for a while. Something may happen to you."

Harrison smiled. "Nothing can happen to me now. You are all mine. Thirty thousand in the bank!"

"Some day, when I'm old," she said, "I'll take out my mask and costume and ruminate over them. I shall say to myself: 'I was once the talk of the town!' *L'Inconnue*, and nobody but you and I shall ever know!"

"It doesn't call you back?"

"No."

In the hall, after he had closed her door, he paused. Romance. Oh, yes; she had come to see her Daddy; but she had come to see the young fellow, too. Hunting for romance; but she must not find it in this house. He went on downstairs—and did a little eavesdropping. Considering the game he was playing, it was permissible. . . . .

Wiltbank was pacing the library, and MacGregor was keeping step and arguing.

"You're going to keep that howling brat?" demanded MacGregor.

"I've said so."

"Are you crazy? They'll all believe the worst if you do."

"The only way I can ever prove it isn't mine is to keep it. If I send it to the orphanage, the mother can recover it without me ever knowing who she is or who bribed her to play such a shabby trick. If I keep the kid, sooner or later, if she's a mother at all, she'll be coming around to claim it. The whole village will hear of this in the morning."

"Blah! Who cares?" growled MacGregor.

"I do. I've thrown my birthright away, but I threw it clean. I've gambled and drank deep, but I've always played square. And listen to me, Johnny: I'm going to stay right here till the bank shoulders me out. Swindle or trick or whatever it is, I'm going to play the game. I never consciously welched in all my life, and I'm not going to begin now."

"I'm sorry for my part in it," said Johnny contritely.

"It was written. I knew that a fluke would bob up somewhere. For me the horseshoe has fallen off the door. Wine and women in the house after twelve, and I lose out! I'm in the middle of a nightmare. But there's always Fordham; I can't brush him aside. His integrity is known internationally."

"Say, I've got a hunch. This dough was meant for the orphanage at the start, and this stuff was piled on to you so you'd lose. Did it ever strike you that your dad might have been a little off when he died?"

"I thought of that. But I called up Dr. Ward a few minutes ago, and he swore that Father's head was clear to the last."

"Then, what the hell is it all about?" cried Johnny, filled with despair.

"It will all work itself out in time. Any lawyer but Fordham, and I'd dig up the truth in court. I wonder if I have a secret enemy somewhere, who has boosted me up only to throw me down the harder?"

"I'm sorry for what I've done."

"You're always sorry the morning after.

But I've always laughed at your damfoolery, and such kind of laughter always has a stiff price. Cut it out, Johnny—at least, till you get even. You've twenty thousand a year to fool with, and you are always in debt for two-thirds of it. Cut out the hootch. Nobody has to have it—just a habit, like putting on your left shoe first every morning. We played as boys together, Johnny; we went through hell together over there; we came back and played the fool. I'm not thinking of the fortune; it's the old home I want. I can get four thousand a year out of the sale of the stuff in the house. That isn't it; but it seems to me that every brick holds a drop of my blood." Wiltbank put his hand on his comrade's shoulder. "And I've got to lose it."

"There isn't a whiter man on all God's earth, Jimmy, than you. I'll see you tomorrow." Johnny rushed from the house, fearing the maudlin desire to weep.

Harrison, in his hiding-place, leaned against the wall and closed his eyes. Boys—just a pair of boys. And a secret enemy!

IN one of the rooms in the Hakett hotel sat two men.

"Fifty gallons!" whispered one. "That takes care of the launch for three or four days."

"And easy as pie. But I warned you we were losing time. It would have been an easy job the early part of the week. Nobody but an old woman about. This Wiltbank isn't afraid of gun-play."

"Can't we lure him away somewheres?"

"Mebbe. But the old woman piped us the other night, and she may have told her boss. But the gas racket was good."

"Four o'clock in the morning, three or four mornings, will do the trick."

"But the job was prime for Monday. Still, it's a whale of a chance. When I cleaned out the furnace in September, I reckoned the stuff would go to sixty thousand. All the rarest kind of stuff."

"And as easy as sticking your finger through a paper box."

"There's a new butler."

"Well, he's three flights up. He wont hear anything. And there's half a dozen good pictures, too."

"We'll lay doggo till the old woman forgets us."

"That goes with me."

"And if you crack a bottle on the sly, I'll bean you. 'Member that."

CHAPTER XVIII

JOHNNY did not sleep well that night. Yet despite the inclination to sleep it off, he was on his way to New York on the seven o'clock commuter. He was going to pay a visit to Silas Fordham. He owed that much to his friend.

The Fool-killer followed MacGregor as far as the Hakett railway station, then paused, struck by the anomalous bent of Johnny's mind. There was no illegal adventure there in the state of fermentation! In fact, he saw that there would be no club-lockers for Johnny this day. Johnny was going to visit Silas Fordham's office to learn if two things would have any weight with the man who was custodian of half a million belonging to Jimmy Wiltbank and a will full of flapdoodle: the two things being truth and friendship.

He was a resolute young man this morning, plus a headache, plus unsteady hands; but his heart sang with the fires of devotion.

When Fordham was given the card, he frowned; then he smiled.

"Send him in."

He had never seen MacGregor before, and was surprised out of his legal calm when he observed the well-shaped head, the lean, strong-jawed face, the steady but humorous eyes of this lad whose benders up and down Broadway were beginning to be talked about for their originality. Again Fordham mused upon the times which were making wastrels out of the best.

"You wish to see me?"

"Yes."

"Draw up a chair and sit down. Will you have a cigar?"

"No, thanks." Johnny shuddered. One puff of tobacco-smoke would kill him. "You heard about what happened at the Oaks last night?"

"It was in my mail this morning."

"Parbody?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Fordham, I want you to get this thing right. I alone was to blame for last night's racket. Jimmy was paralyzed when we dropped in on him. All my fault. We'd have beaten it before twelve, but some sneak-thieves stole all our gas. I came into town yesterday. I had too much. And you know the stuff isn't what it used to be."

"I imagine not," said Fordham dryly.

"There isn't a gamer, squarer man on

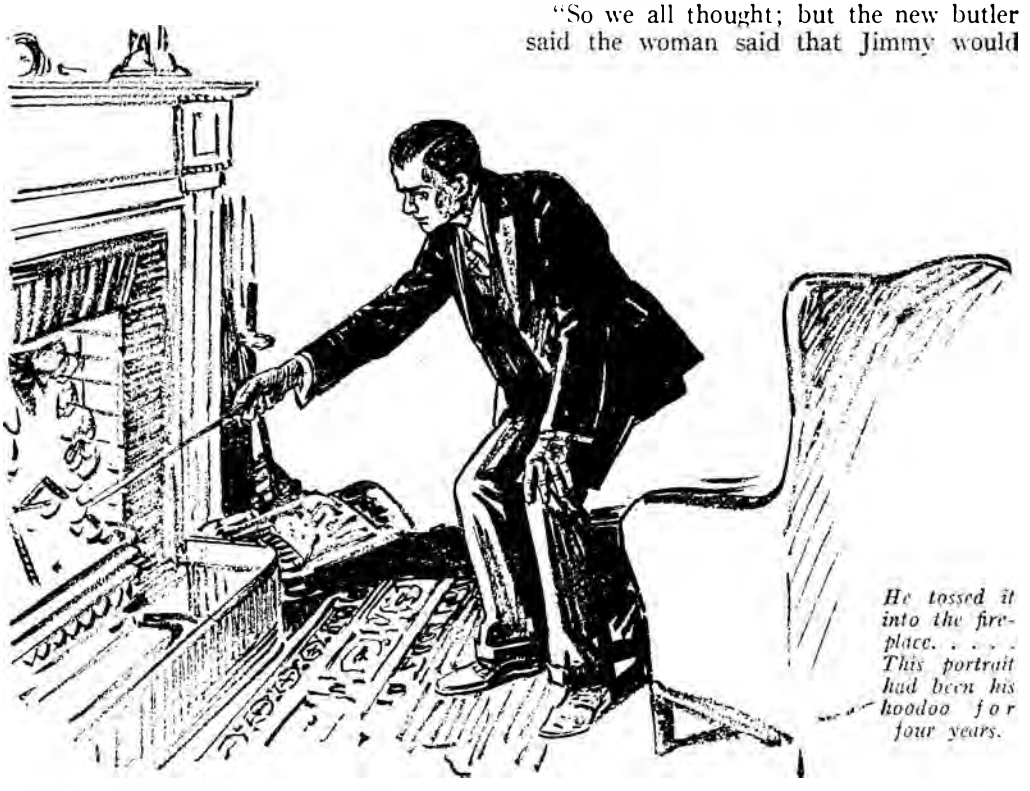
earth than Jimmy Wiltbank; and it isn't fair that he should suffer for some of my fool stuff."

"Women and wine in the house after midnight, Mr. Parbody writes."

"But I brought them there!" cried Johnny

"The terms were understood by Mr. Wiltbank. Even if the situation is as you say it is, the fact remains that he could have shut the door in your faces. He did not."

"The storm. It wasn't in him to refuse us hospitality. I took advantage of that, too," persisted Johnny.



He tossed it into the fireplace. . . . . This portrait had been his hoodoo for four years.

FORDHAM stroked his chin. He was thinking that in the beginning Wiltbank had refused half a million rather than give up this boy as a friend. Now he understood.

"Even if I were willing to ignore this slip," he said, "there would be Mr. Parbody with his facts. I have had a talk with Parbody, and he will fight tooth and nail for the orphanage."

"But does he strike you as a man who would play a game like this on the square? I know for a fact that he lied himself out of the draft. And to cap the climax last night, some dame drives up and leaves a baby on the doorstep, as it were."

"What?" barked Fordham. "A baby?"

"Yes; and it looks like Parbody's work. The woman inferred that the kid was Jimmy's."

"Some woman mistook the house for the orphanage."

"So we all thought; but the new butler said the woman said that Jimmy would understand perfectly. Now, if that isn't a raw deal, I never saw one. I know Jimmy from the ground up. They can't put any brat on *his* doorstep."

Fordham rose and walked to a window. He stared down into the street for a while. He turned.

"Don't worry about the baby, even if it belongs to Wiltbank. Any offense prior to last night isn't in the picture. There is nothing retroactive in the terms of the will. What's he going to do with the baby?"

"Keep it."

"Keep it?"

"Yes. He's got a notion that if he keeps it long enough, the mother will be coming after it."

Fordham laughed. "Capital! That's good common sense. In time the biter will be bitten. But I repeat don't worry about the baby."

"How about last night?"

"What is Wiltbank purposing to do?"

"Play square, even if nobody plays square with him."

"You mean that he purposes to follow out the terms in spite of last night?"

"That's the way he's built."

"Very well. If Mr. Parbody agrees to overlook last night's work, I promise to."

"But you're the original say-so. What's Parbody got to do with it?"

"Suppose you go to him and tell him the story as you've told it to me?"

JOHNNY gulped. Here indeed was a bitter pill. He hated Parbody. To him the man would always be a sneak. To get anything out of Parbody would necessitate an abject apology.

"All right. I'll do that—for Jimmy. I insulted Parbody last night. I'll have to crawl; but I'll do it. But if he refuses to bury the hatchet?"

"Report the fact to me."

"Did you ever handle a case like this before?" asked Johnny.

"No." In his mind Fordham hanged Michael Harrison!

"Did Wiltbank Senior seem rational to you?"

Fordham, who had never laid eyes on Wiltbank Senior, studied the pattern of his rug.

"Dying men sometimes have the gift of prescience. Perhaps he saw into the future, the aftermath of a terrible war. When a man may lawfully kill another, the whole moral fabric goes to pot. You have to build your house all over again, brick by brick; and many a man never builds again. My duty is to see that the terms are rigorously obeyed. I am not a judge; I am an executor."

"Jimmy's right."

"About what?" Fordham was growing restless and anxious.

"You. He said you wouldn't stand in front of anything shady."

"My son, I'm an honest man and will always remain one. Tell Mr. Wiltbank that I thank him for his opinion of me. Also tell him to stick it out, for his own sake, even if he loses. Let him take the bricks and rebuild. And you see Parbody."

"Parbody loves me the way rattlesnakes love ice. But I'll see."

"Good. Report to me what he says."

"And Jimmy loses out?"

"It now rests with Parbody. I'll overlook last night if he will." Fordham offered his hand, which Johnny found warm and firm. "I'm an oldish man, son. Take my advice and leave the stuff alone."

"It's always easy to swear off the morning after. But as Jimmy has gone on the wagon—well, I'll think it over. I'm a lonesome codger. I go everywhere and get into all kinds of mix-ups, but I'm always lonesome. Jimmy's going to play fair, and all I ask is fair play for him."

"He'll have measure for measure. So they have a new butler out there? What's his name?"

"Hammond, George Hammond." Johnny laughed for the first time that day. "He helped out a bit, too. Used to be a circus clown, and put on his make-up for us. And it was some night while it lasted."

"A clown?"

"Yes; and yesterday his daughter piled in on him."

"A daughter?" Fordham had almost cried out: "Kitty and Michael together there?" He understood. Kitty had traced her father and had dropped in to tantalize him. Why, he did not know much more about what was going on than this boy here. Kitty and Michael together in Wiltbank's house! To watch Wiltbank. He would telephone Harrison as soon as he dared.

He telephoned immediately after MacGregor had set out upon his *Via Dolorosa*.

FORDHAM: But it doesn't seem fair play. MacGregor swears that it was all his fault.

HARRISON: You will inform Wiltbank that he has broken the terms laid down. It does not matter whether he is guilty or not. Wine and women were in the house after midnight. He could have forbidden them the house.

FORDHAM: Michael, I've a notion to wash my hands of the whole business.

HARRISON: What business?

FORDHAM: What are you trying to do, anyhow?

HARRISON: Ask me no questions and I'll tell you no lies.

FORDHAM: Is Kitty there?

HARRISON: She was. We understand each other now, Silas, God bless her!

FORDHAM: Where is she now?

HARRISON: At the hotel in Hakett.

FORDHAM heard the receiver click. Harrison had hung up.

We fortify ourselves often by recollec-

tions. Fordham was on the point of withdrawing from the affair, when he recalled Harrison's words: "And when you find her, wire me. But first tell her I forgive her." Nevertheless he did not believe Wiltbank was getting a square deal.

Neither did Johnny MacGregor. War was nothing to this—an apology to Parbody. And Parbody would listen politely and then give him the air—refuse to accept any apology. All right. If it would help Jimmy Wiltbank, Johnny MacGregor would eat high crow and make believe it was partridge.

There was one bit of sunshine: the baby didn't count. Whoever had sprung that had mixed dates.

"MR. PARBODY refuses to see you," announced Parbody's stenographer.

"Tell him I've come to apologize for last night's talk," said Johnny, in a voice which suggested that he had been gargling astringents.

When Parbody—who was expecting fisticuffs—heard this astounding news, his mouth fell agape. Set for a dash to the fire-escape, he wilted into his chair.

"S-send him in!" he stuttered.

MacGregor came in sturdily. "Mr. Parbody, I apologize for what I said last night. I was in town this morning to see Fordham about it all. It was all my fault. Wiltbank couldn't help himself. Fordham said that if you would accept the explanation, he would do the same."

"In other words, give up a fine chance to get that money for the orphanage! No, thank you. I have the list of conditions, and Mr. Fordham himself must abide by them. I see. You apologize to me, hoping your friend will have another chance. There was carousing in that house after midnight. Wiltbank was passive. He could have ordered you all out."

"What good will it do you to get this money for the orphanage?"

"What good will it do Wiltbank? It would follow the first fortune. No, Mr. MacGregor, the orphanage is going to have that money. Your apology is accepted. Good day."

MacGregor whirled and fairly ran from the office. He dared not trust himself. He might not have been able to control his temper. He had done enough damage; he feared to add murder to the list. But of all the unfair games he'd ever heard of! Traps laid everywhere for Jimmy, and all the orphanage had to do was to hold out its hat.

He got into his car, which he had parked at the station that morning, and drove away with the speedometer registering sixty miles.

Spill milk and then try to dip it off the floor with a spoon. Blow life into something you have killed. Johnny MacGregor had done in his friend, and life would never be the same again between them.

Once he slowed down for a moment and reached into the side pocket of the door. A half-filled flask appeared. Johnny hurled it into a field.

"Damn you!" he shouted; and flew on toward home.

The Fool-killer had witnessed this act many times. He knew you had to do it cold; anger behind the far-flung bottle line never disturbed the bootleggers' income. Sometimes the bottle does not break, and you can go back to it, if you remember where it fell. But to this particular bottle Johnny never returned. Farmer Hendricks found it next spring, when he was plowing. He all but turned a furrow over it!

AT luncheon that day at the Oaks, Wiltbank fidgeted for a while, then asked his butler where the daughter was.

"She left early this morning, sir."

"Gone?"

"Yes sir."

"Did she think that brat mine?" asked Wiltbank after a pause.

"What difference would that make, sir?"—coldly.

"Difference? Difference? Damn it all, man!"

"Beg pardon!"

"If I ever have a brat, it will be a lawful one. And don't look so sanctimonious. When you put on the motley—"

"I ask your pardon for that, sir. My daughter disregarded my wishes; and as she hates the motley, I put it on to punish her."

"Funny world, isn't it? In one fell swoop I lose everything—house, money, friend. For Johnny will never forgive himself for what he did last night, and he will soon begin to fight shy of the house. I'm afraid I'll have to let you go, George. I can carry Mrs. Wolcott till the bank forecloses, but there wont be enough—"

"You are dismissing Charles, sir?"

"I hadn't thought of that. I can't discharge him behind his back."

"Better let me stay on, sir. I haven't any place to go."

"Where does your daughter live, then?"

"Boarding-house. She has no job just now, sir."

"What does she do?"

"Private secretarial work; and jobs are few these days. Do you believe it wise to keep this baby?"

"I'm going to keep it. Sooner or later the mother will be coming for it, and then I'll find out who is at the bottom of the hoax. I'm off for a walk."

"It's very muddy."

"It's all the same to me. I want to be alone. If MacGregor calls up, tell him to drop in after dinner."

"Yes sir."

WILTBANK walked to Hakett and into it. He was striding toward the hotel, when he saw Kitty going up the steps. He gave her five minutes, then marched into the hotel. He scribbled on his card: *"May I speak with you for a few minutes?"*

"Send this up to the room of the young lady who just came in," he said.

"All right, Mr. Wiltbank."

The card came back. Across it was written: *"Why?"*

He wrote on the card again, this time sealing it in an envelope. He put a dollar in the boy's palm, and waited. He had done it! He felt cold for all that his heart raced. Colossal fool that he was, he had done it!

"There's no reply," the boy said.

Wiltbank passed out of the hotel into the street, but with no sense of direction.

Kitty sat on her bed and read over and over what he had written under her "*Why?*" *"Because I love you."* Suddenly, with a gesture of disdain, she ripped the card into particles and blew these off her palm into the air.

CHAPTER XIX

IT is Monday. We leave the Oaks and I follow the Fates to the MacGregor home, having a notion that something is toward in that careless household. We find Johnny steeped in remorse.

He had learned from Fordham that the money would, after a certain lapse of time, be handed over to the trustees of the Wiltbank Orphanage. He had done in his comrade. He had neither called nor telephoned; brave as he was ordinarily, he lacked the courage to appear before the man he loved and through pigheaded foolishness had broken. Jimmy was a thoroughbred, and he would carry on the same as always. There wouldn't be a word of reproach.

But one thing he was certain of, though there were no proofs; and this was that Wiltbank Senior had been out of his head when he signed such a will. There was neither common-sense nor justice in it.

His throat was still raw from hauling that apology to Parbody out of it. He couldn't lay a hand on Parbody now. He had sacrificed his dignity for nothing; that was the tragedy of it. Everything had gone to pot.

Fortunately there were no women in the house. Two Jap servants took care of him, one as cook and the other as general houseworker. They had a soft time of it, for Johnny spent most of his time in New York; but they were too astute to impose upon him openly.

At nine o'clock George Hazelton arrived. Johnny greeted him joyfully. Here was a diversion. He was delighted over the fact that he recognized his private secretary at once. It vindicated the retentiveness of his memory, for Wiltbank had told him he had been boiled when he hired Hazelton and would not know him from Adam when he saw him.

"I was hoping for you," said Johnny, cordially.

Hazelton was astonished. He had come all the way from New York with the set idea he had wasted so much money on carfare and taxi; that he would not be remembered.

"Then you really expected me?"

"Sure. I'm glad to see you, for I'm as darned lonesome as any man on earth."

"But before we go any further, I want it understood that you can bow off, and I sha'n't be offended. Frankly, we were both boiled that night."

"You're hired. Come on, and I'll show you your room. Your job ostensibly will be to keep your eye on the bills, but actually I need company. You struck me that night as being a good sport. Fifteen hundred a year, and you're going to earn it, George; you're going to earn it."

After Hazelton's room was shown to him, he was conducted through the house and introduced to the Japs, who grinned and kowtowed.

In the living-room, on the piano, stood a framed picture of a pretty girl. MacGregor paused before this.

"That's the picture of the girl who gave me the gate while I was over in France."

The astonished Hazelton tried to screw up a sympathetic expression.

"I keep it there," went on Johnny, "as a warning, to keep me from ever making an ass of myself again. Oh, I run around with 'em in town, dance and all that, but they're all wise to the fact that there'll be no wedding bells for me. Can you shoot?"

"Shoot?" Hazelton's glance spun around the room. "Shoot?" he repeated, bewilderedly.

"Can you handle a pistol?" demanded MacGregor.

"Yes; but what for?" All sorts of notions entered and swung around inside of Hazelton's head: the way he had been hired, the frank explanation of the photograph, pistols. Was this young chap all right in his upper story? "Pistols?"

"Just listen to me for a moment. Two birds are hanging about the Oaks. They may be in on the big game, or just working on their own. Now, these are the facts." And he told Hazelton the story of Wiltbank and the strange will.

"Well," said Hazelton, "that beats anything I ever heard of. Why doesn't he go to court and drag 'em into the open? What was the date of the first will? That might be a key to something."

"We can find that out at the surrogate's. Now, supposing we cement our friendship—"

"Mr. MacGregor, I took this job to get away from all that. I'm on the wagon."

"That's what I wanted to find out." MacGregor held out his hand, which Hazelton shook warmly. "Another thing. Beggars and borrowers haunt my path. You're the boy who's going to side-track 'em. I'm too easy. I can't listen to a hard-luck story without shedding tears and ducats. My Japanesers always open the door when the bell rings. They can't be taught to peek through the curtains first. When we go to New York, I want you to carry my roll and my checkbook."

"All right, Mr. MacGregor." New York with this boy on his hands, the boy's money in his charge; he could weather that. Responsibility—that was what he needed. "It's a beautiful place you have here."

"Wait till you see Wiltbank's. You and I are going to have some fun."

IT seems that Wiltbank had the same notion about the first will; for that afternoon he got the copy from the wall-safe and gave it a thorough legal reading. It was a simple, direct document, giving everything to his son, aside from an endowment to the orphanage and bequests to the faithful servants. There was nothing in the will to indicate reservations or the possibility of a second later will. Between the date of this will and his death, the father had summoned Fordham and given him secret instructions to make the second will active four years later. A perfectly sane man, Dr. Ward had declared. Wiltbank returned the will to the safe and went for a walk.

There was a strange muddle here, beyond his legal attack. Did the second will make negative the order of the first? If so, he had wasted half a million to which he had not been legally entitled.

An inconceivable quandary. If he balked and went to court, he might find himself accountable for the money he had wasted! Rigmarole! Not till now did he behold the trap he was in: he could not get out himself; he could only be let out. The one thing he could do was to sit tight.

HIS thoughts shifted abruptly. *Because I love you*—he had written that. Mad as a hatter. Why hadn't he waited till the riddle of the foundling was solved? Ah, he understood. He had taken the plunge because he feared he might never see her nor hear of her again. Yet what he had written was true. Talked with her three different times, and now was a fit subject for a lunatic asylum. It didn't seem possible; yet it was in keeping with all the other thunderbolts.

That eternal emotion that we call love because somebody gave it that name centuries ago and because we haven't been able to think up a better name! We can analyze it, and take it apart, and tell you how and why it makes fools of us, saints and sinners and poets. But we are dumb upon the manner of its approach; why, in some cases, it coincides with the tedious, weaving, circuitous method of the boa-constrictor, while in others it imitates the stunning fall of a catamount from a tree to the back of your neck. We admit that the close-up is glorious beyond all other glories on earth, but the preliminary bouts are heart-rending.

Wiltbank wondered what she had

done with his card. (We can tell. Kitty picked up the bits from the floor and put them into her handbag; and was immediately after furious because of her sign of weakness. The truth is, she feared she might have missed a word; and there was no reason why the serving-maid should find it.)

So far as Wiltbank could see, he was at absolute nadir. He tried to get some satisfaction out of this, that all the bumps were over and he had reached the bottom.

Did he really have any excuse. Had he been sick in his mind? It might be so. Not that he was hunting for an excuse, but it did seem to him that he was beginning to see life from the old familiar angle. No longer indifferent, but wanting to go on with life, to possess a home, enough money to run it, and a wife to tidy up his trails. A feminine comrade instead of a masculine one: to fuss over him when he was blue, to anoint his scratches when he returned from hunting, and a lot of other things like that. To restore him to his old-time dignity and his proper niche in the world.

As Wiltbank strode along the sands, he frequently gestured, threatened the sky. The tens of millions of gestures that sky has seen, and never a star giving an extra wink! By and by he reached the Outlet, a narrow salt stream steepled with myriads of reeds and cattails, and all of them seemed to be full of amity toward each other, bowing and bowing. Wiltbank sighed. Many a time he and Johnny had pushed out of here for wild duck.

Suddenly he noticed that in one spot the reeds and cattails had been trampled, and there were several furrows in the mud, suggesting the keel of a boat. His thoughts, however, were too busy elsewhere to attach much, if any, significance to these signs.

Having reached the end of the beach, he began to retrace his steps, and all at once decided to look up Johnny. He hadn't heard from him in forty-eight hours. He hoped the poor chap's remorse wasn't more than skin-deep. . . . .

"Why—why, hello, Jimmy!"

"Hello, Johnny! Where the deuce have you been keeping yourself? Come over tonight and have dinner."

"Hazelton has come and I'm putting him through the ropes. Hey, George!" Johnny called. He felt terribly embarrassed. To be alone with the one human being he loved —the man he had let down—was agony.

"Johnny," said Wiltbank, "you're not letting this business dig too deep, are you?"

"Damn it all!" Johnny burst out. "I never expected to see you in my house again."

"Why not?"

"You ask that? And all I went to town for, Friday, was a pair of boots!"

Wiltbank laughed. A pair of boots! "Johnny, ten times half a million wouldn't cure me of liking you."

"I wouldn't make even a good doormat."

"I still have something, you know. The cellar and the paintings will carry me along till I've got my law warmed up. Johnny, I'll tell you something you don't know. When Fordham informed me, the first condition was that I give your friendship the go-by. I refused. So he crossed that off the list. I'm unchanged, Johnny; only I'm damned blue."

A step from both of them, and their hands were locked, with the knuckles showing white.

"We've been through too much, Johnny, to let a little money stand between us."

"Say!" Johnny's face broke out with sunshine. "What's the matter with me taking over the mortgage from the bank?"

"Would your trustees consider it?"

"I can put it up to them. It's a bang-up piece of property, and you can rent it of me and pick up the mortgage a little each year."

"That would be mighty fine."

WILTBANK thought it best to let Johnny have his way. It would, in fact, close up the chasm which appeared to be growing between them. The fine good will was still there; and if the trustees of the MacGregor estate declined, as no doubt they would, the present owner being in no financial condition to pay even a minimum sum in rent, Johnny would always feel that he had tried to do a fine action.

Hazelton came in. Wiltbank eyed him sharply. The young fellow looked as if he had been sober for some time. Wiltbank had been worrying about him. The two of them, irreconcilable and irresponsible, suggested future dangers. If he could, Wiltbank purposed to see the young fellow alone and have an earnest talk.

"Both of you come over tonight for dinner," he said.

"Sure!" cried Johnny. "And George and I promise to drink *aqua pura* so long as we're in the house."

This invitation fell in nicely with Johnny's plans. For it was his purpose and Hazelton's to prowl around the Oaks that night and several succeeding nights. Burglars or rum-runners were about, or some one with a purpose even more sinister.

LET us skip the dinner and also the midnight prowl, since nothing came of either worth narrating, and proceed to vault into the next day, at four o'clock in the afternoon.

Hazelton had gone down to the Outlet to examine the keel-furrows which Jimmy had previously discovered and to sweep the coast with a pair of army binoculars. Meantime Johnny wired his wine-bins with sufficient juice to knock out a man if he touched the wires after midnight. He was in an old hunting suit and looked like a journeyman plumber. He was contemplating the completed job, when Koto the butler came down.

"Lady to see you in the parlor, sair."

"A woman? Tell her I'm not at home," Johnny growled, wiping his grimy palms on his breeches.

"She say she wait."

"Wants to sell something?"

"No."

"Charity?"

"No. Important she see you, sair. She have a sad eye."

"All right, tell her I'll see her as soon as I'm washed up. Hang 'em, they're always around when they're not wanted! Probably wants me to buy some church sociable tickets."

Ten minutes later he entered the living-room, ready to bark and growl, wondering what size check the intruder would want.

A pretty young woman arose. Her eyes were brown and limpid. She was dressed in gray. Neither Fifth Avenue nor the Rue de la Paix had ever seen that dress, though it was trig to her slender and shapely form.

"What can I do for you?" he asked abruptly.

"I am Miss Hazelton," she said.

"Miss Hazelton?"

"George's sister."

"Sit down! Sit down! George is out for a walk. He'll be back in half an hour." George's sister! Well, well, he had known from the start that George had come from good stock.

"But it's you, Mr. MacGregor, I wish to see."

"To see me?"

"George is the best brother in the world," she began, "but he likes good times too well. I urged him to accept this situation, for it would be taking him out of New York, away from the companions who have more money and time than he."

Johnny pawed his chin embarrassedly.

"I hate to tattle, but he gets into all sorts of trouble, never meaning to."

"My twin, evidently," was Johnny's thought.

Miss Hazelton went on: "It is so beautiful here that a few months will bring him back where he used to be. Don't misunderstand me. It isn't as if I were really 'giving him away.' He was not perfectly sober when you hired him."

"Neither was I, Miss Hazelton. I was in the cell next to his."

"So I've been informed." And she smiled. That smile did more for her cause than a preachment a mile long.

Something landed on Johnny's shoulders oppressively. You may name it Responsibility. Some one to depend upon him. The thought irked him, but not visibly. If he drank at all now, he would have to do the drinking in town; and the stuff there was getting worse and worse.

"All right. I'll watch over George. Now, here's my notion. You will put up at the village hotel for two weeks as my guest. I wont tell him you've been here, but I'll tell him you're there. I on one side and you on the other will hold him. Fact is, I believe he's come to his senses. Maybe some day I shall. On my word of honor, he shall have nothing to drink while he is in my house. He's a good sport. He'll come around. What's his regular work?"

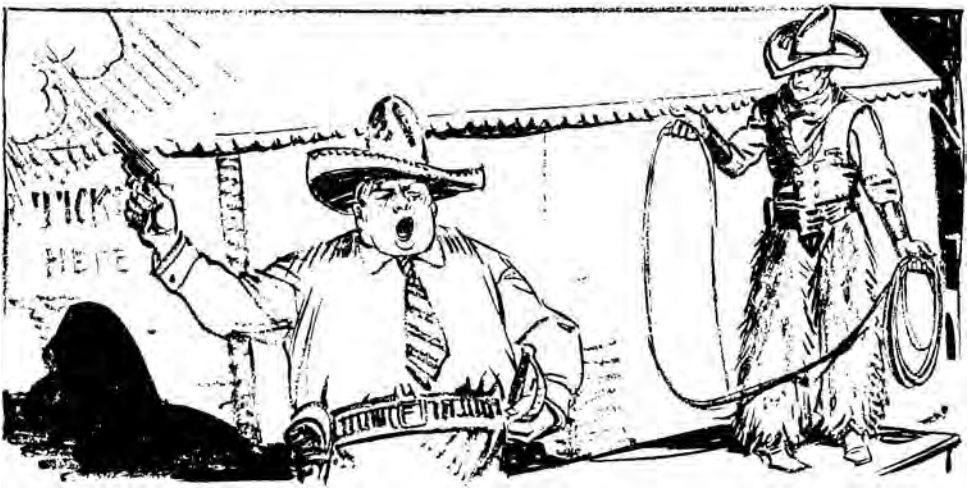
"A fine chemist, if he wouldn't play so much."

"I'll telephone you every day," he said. "Don't you worry. Do you know, I rather believe I needed a job like this."

"Thank you."

When Miss Hazelton was gone, Johnny walked over to the piano and studied the face of the girl in the gilded frame. Gravely he took it into his strong hands—and broke it, tossed it into the fireplace and, with the poker, bashed it into smithereens. He had come upon a startling discovery. This portrait had been his hoodoo for four years.

The conclusion of this fine novel by the distinguished author of "The Puppet Crown" will appear in the next, the May, issue.



Carnival Ballyhoo

The joyous story of Fatty Derringer's rodeo, told by a man who has himself ridden bad horses in many a bronco-bustin' contest.

By BUD LA MAR

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

"WHOOOOOOPEE! Bang! Hey, folks!" The Wild West Show of the Golden Sunset Carnival Company was about to open its doors to the public. That Fatty Derringer believed in plenty noise in makin' his openin' was a fact not to be got away from. In his right hand, he held a large revolver loaded with blanks that would go off at most unexpected moments. Sometimes he would point it in the air, sometimes toward the ground and then there was other times when it would belch fire right straight at the crowd, causin' people in the front ranks to back up sudden and scuttle for safety.

Fatty had took great pains to dress up like a cowboy. The resultin' effect was startlin', to say the least. Mr. Derringer was about as wide as he was long, or I should say *short*. Around his waist was a highly polished wide leather belt of the kind wore in the West by potato-pickers and other hard-working folks, but not by self-respectin' cow people. On one side of that belt was the restin' place of the young cannon now splittin' the air of an otherwise quiet and peaceful Iowa night. On the other side was hung a long and murderous-lookin' cavalry saber, which I am thinkin' would be a hell of an outfit for a cowboy to be packin' around, specially on a suspicious horse!

Whenever Fatty would run out of ammunition, he'd pass his pistol to an assistant, whose job it was to load it and hand it back to him, cocked and primed for six more ear-splittin' explosions. While the loadin' process was taking place, Fatty had to satisfy his apparent fighting disposition by pullin' out that there overgrown scalping-knife and slicin' up the surrounding atmosphere in small pieces, said atmosphere lettin' out hair-raising swishes!

On Fatty's right, a tall, rangy young fellow with a red shirt and good intentions was tryin' hard to teach tricks to a ten-foot cotton rope, which was plumb stubborn and ornery, and acted not at all like a well-behaved trick rope should—going so far as to knock the roper's hat plumb off his head and trippin' him for no apparent reason whatsoever, almost causin' Slim to fall off the small platform on which him and Fatty was standing.

Texas Joe and me, back in the dark shadow of a tent, enjoyed the show and waited for the time when we would come out and play our part. This was the first

time in our lives that we had been called on to be actors, and as the time drew nearer for me to appear in the bright lights and make my well-rehearsed proclamation in front of all them gappin' folks, the sweat began rollin' down my face. I had faced many crowds before, as a contestant in rodeos, but this was different.

Tex and I had drove in some little town near by to take part in a rodeo contest that would be staged in a few days. After payin' our entrance fees in the bronc'-ridin' and a week's room-rent in advance, our funds was low.

The second day we was in town, Fatty Derringer, who was drivin' through to another seaport, twenty miles away, where the Golden Sunset Carnival Company was to play for a week, stopped to talk to us, said powwow resultin' in a keen scheme.

Every detail was talked over, so no slip would be made. Fatty had spotted a horse a few days earlier that belonged to a farmer, which horse was supposed to be a shore enuff wild fire-eatin' bronc' shipped in from Wyoming. The farmer had agreed to bring in his horse to Fatty's Wild West Show, to be rode or rode at by Mr. Derringer's top hand and only cowboy. Everybody in the surroundin' country had heard about the horse and the fact that another attempt would be made to ride him would draw a large crowd inside of Fatty's tent at two-bits a throw. But Fatty had thought of a way whereby, with our assistance, he could fill his tent three times in the same evening.

He would get up on his platform and announce that he was offerin' one hundred dollars to anyone in the crowd ridin' the horse to a finish accordin' to contest rules. I was to come out and take him up, then go in and buck off. The tent would be cleared, another ballyhoo made, and Tex would go in and do the same. To git the people back in a third time, he would announce that his rider Slim, "that famous champeen of the Southwest," would ride the man-eatin' outlaw to a standstill. Tex and me was to receive ten dollars apiece for our services, which looked like big money to us then, and anyway we would of took a chance on ridin' a keg of dynamite for ten dollars. But now the time had come and I couldn't see where I needed money so doggone bad, none at all!

"La-dies and Gentlemen!" Bang! "A little closer, if you please!" (Which you can be shore they didn't come no closer!) "I have a special attraction to offer you tonight!" Bang! "Inside of this canvas-surrounded arena there is, at this moment, a horse that you all know or know of—a horse who, with blood in his eye, is waitin' for a victim! Waitin' impatiently, prancin' madly around and pawin' the dust!" Bang! "He is waitin' for some one reckless enuff to mount him so he can throw him on the ground, and trample him in the earth! Will he wait in vain?" Bang! "He will not! Should no one take up the offer I am going to make, Slim, here—the cowboy who is makin' his rope obey him like it was a thing alive—Slim, that fearless champion of the Southwest, will attempt to vanquish this fiery steed!" *Click!* (Fatty's pistol is empty and passed to his helper.) "But first, I have an offer to make! One hundred dollars to the man who goes in there and rides him accordin' to contest rules!" *Swish!*

Here Fatty stops jumpin' around like a Mexican full of mescal, and points his sword in the direction of a fat farmer.

FOR a minute there is a death-like silence. Them folks is plumb hypnotized. There is still time for me to get away and I tries to do so, only to be stopped by Tex, who pushes me out of the shadow. I aint scared of no ambitious plow-horse, but I could shore stampede at the thought of havin' to walk out and stand up on that platform, in front of all them folks! I gathers up my escaping courage and shouts: "I'll ride yore horse, Mister!"

Every eye is turned on me. The rodeo has been advertised all around the country and as I am dressed as usual, cowboy hat and high-heel boots, they realize I must be one of the contestants. Tex is standin' right behind me.

"Aha!" says Fatty. "A couple of the contest boys! Two of the best riders in this country! Come up here, gentlemen."

I would a whole lot rather go the other way but I gits up on the platform. There aint room for Tex, so he stays below.

"Now," continues Fatty, "ladies and gentlemen, I had no idea that such cowboys as these fellows are were within hundreds of miles of this place. Will I take back my offer? This man is a professional buckin'-horse rider. You couldn't blame me for doing so. But I will stand on my word, as I sincerely believe this young man cannot ride the horse I have inside!"

Fatty turns on me, squintin' his eyes. He elevates his sword under my nose and shouts:

"Young man, do you understand contest rules?" *Swish!* That danged butcher knife describes an arc about an inch from my face, and I grabs Slim around the neck to keep from fallin' off the stage.

"Er—yes suh, you betcha!" I stutters.

He advances in my direction, glarin' and holdin' his saber like he was gonna perforate me any minute.

"Do you realize," says he, "that you are going in there at your own risk, and that you are takin' chances with your life and that you may be mangled beyond recognition?" He is now right close to me with his cleaver elevated over my head, lookin' like a picture I saw oncet which was named "The Avenging Spirit," only the fellow in the picture wasn't so fat and didn't have any clothes on.

"I takes chances for a livin'," says I.

"Aha! Hear you, good people! He admits he is a professional. Think of the spectacle you are about to witness! A champion rider against an untamable horse from the wind-swept prairies of the West; this spectacle to take place in the inside of this tent immediately. What is the price of admission for a high-class entertainment of that kind?" Bang! "Five dollars? Two dollars? One dollar? No! Only one quarter, twenty-five cents!" *Bang!* "Git yore tickets, folks!" *Bang! Bang!*

SLIM the pistol-loader and me goes in first and the rush is on. Them natives have been drinkin' that ballyhoo and now they are plumb soaked with it and you can they will go in to see me git stomped on. They wouldn't miss it, none whatever. As I goes by Fatty, he whispers: "Don't jump off *too* soon—and make it look real!"

Me, I can only think of one way I can make it look real and that's to pull both feet outa the stirrups and quit ridin'. I can't imagine nothin' easier for me to do than to buck off, as I have been known to do so several times when I was really tryin' to stay on top, contest ridin' bein' a gamblin' kind of an occupation and what with followin' all the rules and tryin' to please the judges, you are liable to git piled any time.

This bloodthirsty hellbender of a horse is inside of the arena, only he musta got tired of prancin' madly around with blood in his eye, as he is now peacefully occupied in eatin' what grass is left on the ground. He's a roan-colored bronc' and would weigh about eleven hundred. He don't look much different from any plow-puller to be seen on any farm, only for a Roman nose and a shifty eye. He is fat and built in a chunk, short legs and wide shoulders. There aint no doubts that he is powerful and I wonder how many sets of harness he has tore up for them farmers while they was tryin' to break him.

I ASKS Slim what kind of a saddle they aim for me to use, and when he drags it out of an old trunk, I almost scream with joy—it is one of the kind I aint seen for a long time. Up until a few years ago, that style of saddle was used at all rodeos and was called a contest saddle or a freak. Mounted in one of them, most any fair bronc'-peeler could cut up capers and make the ridin' of an average buckin' horse look about as hard a job as stayin' on the middle of a merry-go-round horse. Rodeo-goin' crowds began to take to ball-games, as if nobody is carried away in an ambulance, they will holler fake and ask for their money back. Somebody then interdooced the association or committee saddle which is used today at all contests, and any bronc'-rider will tell you it aint no disgrace to fall out of one of *them*, as they are built to give the horse all the advantage.

Slim goes out to a small corral outside the tent and comes back leadin' a saddled horse which is to be used as a snubbin'-horse. The tent is now chuck full and it would be impossible to squeeze in even that there livin' skeleton follow in exhibition across the way, so Fatty quits sellin' tickets although it dang near breaks his heart to do so.

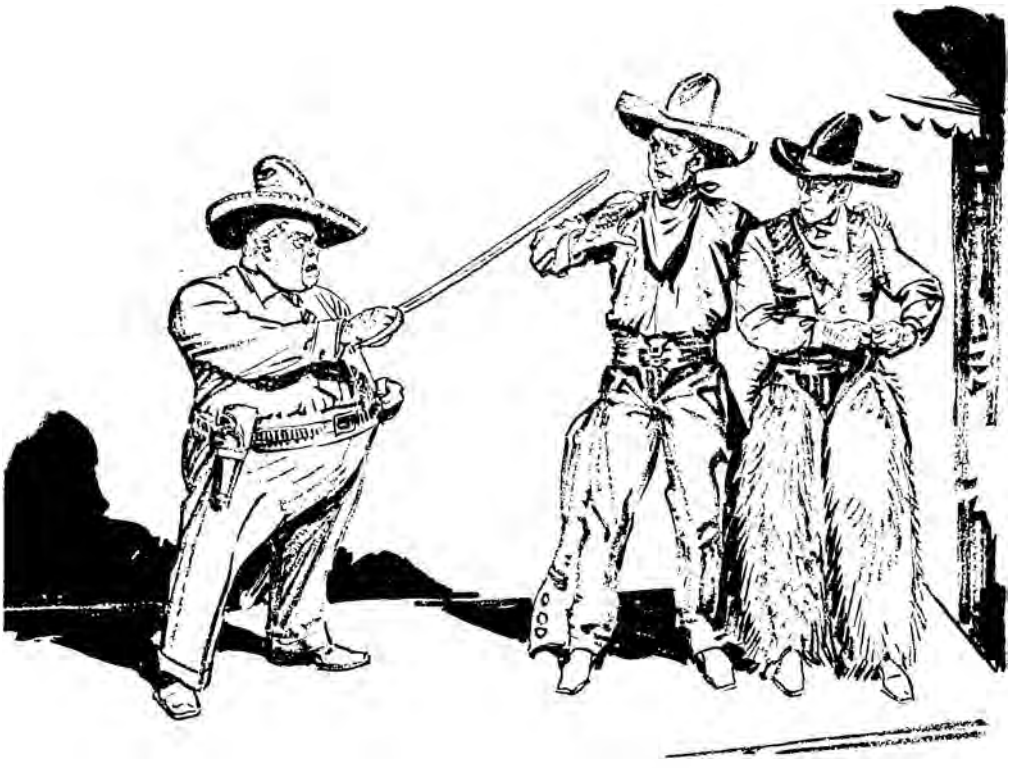
I picks up a rope to snare my mount and begins swingin' my loop, but an excited farmer runs up and grabs me by the arm. "No, no, don't do that—you'll git him all mad!" says he.

"Well," I answers, "who cares a hoot in hell if he does get sore? I likes my horses mad, Mister—yore more apt to know what they will do next."

"Yes, but this horse is bad; he might kick you, even!"

"Oh," I answers, "that would be too bad!" And I throws my loop. As ropin' goes I am a fair bronc'-rider, but I am lucky this time, and catches him right.

Mr. Farmer leaves pronto, tearin' his



Fatty turns on me. "Young man, do you understand contest rules?"

pants as he barely makes it over the fence. This leaves Tex and me alone in the arena. Tex is mounted on the snubbin'-horse, and I hands him my end of the rope, which he dallies around the horn.

That roan horse aint mad yet, just surprised. It has been a long time since folks have been familiar with him thataway. Ropin' him around the neck without sayin' "*Whoa!*" first! Imagine it! He don't know what to make of it. I have a suspicion he aint natcherly ornery, but that people always actin' scared around him has give him a lot of confidence. Buckin' off a few willin' but unable farmer boys has boosted him pretty high in his own valuation of himself and now we have a man-made outlaw horse, one that would break a leg tryin' to get away from you if you yelled "*Boo!*" at him, and looked like you meant it.

Tex rides his horse up to him, takin' up his slack as he goes. Roany decides to stampede but it's too late. Tex takes his right foot outa the stirrup, brings his leg back over the cantle, outa the way, then standin' in one stirrup he reaches over and grabs Roany delicately but firmly by the ear, gives it a couple of twists and clamps down on it with his teeth.

There is a gasp from the crowd. They've never seen anything like it before. The cruelty of it! A great big brute of a man weighin' a hundred and sixty pounds actually chawin' the ear of a poor little *pony* (eleven hundred pounds) just to keep him from pawin' his head off! That aint no human way to treat a horse. What you should do is drive him in a stall, stretch him out with seven or eight cables, pet him for a while, then cut the ropes and run like hell! We ought to be run in jail, and them folks don't spare no words to let us know what they think of us. We're used to it. What should we know about horses? All we do is make a livin' breakin' and ridin' 'em, but do they look at it that way? No suh! We are inhuman devils that take pleasure in torturin' poor dumb brutes.

I have different notions. If a bronc' kicks you in the ribs or throws you on yore head, who gits hurt. I rises up to ask—the horse or the man? No cowboy will hurt a critter onless he has to, to pertect himself. The present ways used to break a horse have been figured and worked out by several generations of horsemen that couldn't be beat anywhere in the world. The ridin' of a rough bucker in a committee saddle and accordin' to all the rules, is nothing short of an art requirin' years of study and practice and many broken bones. Them as don't believe it better try it first, then air out their views.

Slim and Fatty decide that everything is safe, and crawl in the arena to help us saddle. I puts a sack over Roany's eyes for a blindfold and rubs his back to prepare him for the feel of the saddle. He shivers and trembles but soon quiets down. All he is thinkin' about, just now, is them teeth in his ear and how it hurts when he moves around. I places the freak well ahead on his withers, runs the latigo through the cinch ring and tightens up; a couple of reins is snapped in the halter and I am ready to proceed.

FATTY makes another announcement explainin' the rules of contest ridin' and that if I break any, I wont git no hundred dollars. Of course everybody hopes I will git throwed as they are proud of this horse and don't like to see no stranger come out and ride him after he has bucked off all their crack riders.

I don't think much of the idea of gittin' piled on purpose any more, but I have promised and I figures on goin' through with it.

I mounts easy and careful and grabs my reins. That freak saddle sure feels good—high swells in front with deep cuts on each side, small seat, dished cantle, limber stirrup leathers that let yore feet shoot way up ahead of the cinch. They just aint no way of fallin' out of it if you make up yore mind to stay.

Tex turns loose of his ear and loosens the snubbin'-rope; then he grabs the blindfold and asks me if I am ready. "You betcha!" I says, and he jerks it off and whispers, "Don't fergit!" I winks at him and stabs Roany in the neck with both spurs.

He don't hesitate none at all. I have got him figured out pretty well. At first we had him buffaloed but now he can see it's just another attempt at stayin' on his back. How well he knows that can't be done! Then spurs in his neck is a new one on him and a good reason why he should git rid of his pack in a hurry.

Howsomever, his old tricks don't seem to work. Every other time, the two-legged critter on his back would bounce up in the air and come down *kerflop* on the saddle, every jump. Nothin' like that happens this time. I couldn't no more bounce in that tight freak than I could fly. It shore feels easy and smooth. Fatty is gittin' nervous and starts makin' motions at me for me to fall off. I don't like it.

Every horse I ever rode before, the main idea in my mind was to ride and stay on top and I always found it more or less hard to do so. But now that I am supposed *not* to ride, I finds that it feels damn' good to be up here and that the safest place in the world is right here on top of that danged jumpin'-jack of a bronc'. I tries standin' up in the stirrups, but I am only jerked back in the saddle. Then I tries loosenin' up, but I rides loose on balance anyway, so *that* don't work.

I would have never thought it was that hard to fall off a horse. Tex rides alongside and says: "Come on, what do you think this is, an endurance contest?" Which aint no way to talk to a friend and partner when he is in trouble like I am. I gives him a sad look, wishin' it was him instead of me that was supposed to play Prince of Wales.

I jumps up and down in the saddle a few times to see will that work it—and hopin' it don't—but it aint no use. The way I feels I could ride this bronc' till he died. If only he would buck harder, but all he does is jump way up in the air and come down with a grunt, no tricks to his work, no science, just plain old crow-hoppin'. He is gittin' tired too, and will quit pretty soon but I aint carin' no more as I have give up any notions to take up a homestead in this arena with my head for a location notice.

WHEN Roany makes his last hop, I am still on him. He stands pantin' for a while and I kicks loose and jumps off. Fatty gives me a dirty look and so does Tex. It shore is a hell of a note when a *hombre* gits looked down on because he made a good ride, but such is the case.

Don't look like Fatty will be able to git another crowd, but he is a showman and knows how to make the best of every break.

"Ladies and gentlemen," says he, "we will all have to admit this young man rode our horse, even if he was in distress most of the time, as you all could see. And I will have to pay him one hundred dollars, as promised." And he pulls out a bill and hands it to me. Only it aint a hundred; it says plain on it, "Ten Dollars." But I pockets it, and grins a hundred-worth, anyway.

"Folks," continues Fatty, "that was a wonderful demonstration of horsemanship, but I am thinkin' it was just luck about

this young man stayin' above, and I am so much convinced of that fact that I will put up another hundred dollars for any man that rides him a second time. Said ridin' to take place in a half hour, to permit this wonderful buckin' horse to regain his strength. In the meantime the tent will be cleared, and you ladies and gentlemen will kindly pass out. I thank you one and all for your kind attention."

So about half an hour later Fatty commences the fireworks and tries to convince the people that they should be tickled to witness such wonderful doings for only a quarter. Of course there is quite a few that wasn't able to git in the first time,

Right away he tells us he was maybe a little hasty.

That was well done, but I could see right away that there would be no great rush for tickets the next time. Fatty knows it too, and as I am tryin' to slip out, he grabs me by the arm.

"Wait a minute," he tells me; "I want to talk to you!" So I stays till everybody has left. When we're alone he starts in on me as I expected.

"How come," says he, "you don't fall off like you said you would?"

"Well," I answers, "I don't mind fallin' off a buckin' horse, but that leather-headed crowbait you got inside don't fill the bill. I could no way make it look natural. If I tried it, everybody could tell it was a fake and maybe hang us. Which wouldn't make me mad if they only stretched *you* out, but they would prob'ly include me in the party and I am an *hombre* that's plumb thankful to be alive."

We argue back and forth for a while and finally it is decided that Tex will try it next. Only Fatty is kinda doubtful about him doin' his part and he tells Tex that should he feel that he can't do it, at the last minute to grab the horn in both hands and look sick, which will disqualify him, makin' it possible for Fatty to git another tentful.

"Don't worry," says Tex. "I am the kind of a cowboy that aint scared at all, and I will have 'em all thinkin' my backbone is broke, and that my head is about to be jerked off."

and that will help some. Git a few started and the rest will follow, which is the way with a crowd.

Anyway, we git a pretty good sized flock inside. Roany is roped again and you can see right quick it's not to his likin'. That horse is mad shore enuff now! He is grain-fed and powerful. The fight me and him had didn't tire him much like it would a grass-fed horse. That he should be subjected to any more insults don't suit him at all and we have more trouble saddlin' him. Tex has been cussin' me every chance he'd get, about me not jumpin', which I don't think is no way for a partner to act. He should be glad and thankful that I didn't break my neck—and anyway I have my ten dollars. You wouldn't catch me wishin' a friend a lot of hard luck thataway; it aint right and I feels plumb riled about it and hopes this danged roan horse piles him on his empty head, although I know it wont happen, Tex bein' a pretty good rider.

Tex is a lot bigger boy than me, specially around the parts of him as fit in a saddle and he has to squirm to git screwed down in that freak. When he gits mounted and just before I pulls the blindfold off, I tells him:

"Now let's see you look like you had

swallowed a sardine without takin' it out of the can, cowboy!" But I am thinkin' if he manages to look worried on that horse, he should be in the movies, although I already know he is a champeen liar, but not that good.

He gives me the word that he is ready and willin' and I turns him loose. Tex is the kind of a cowboy that loves a fight or trouble of any kind and gits a lot of kick outa ridin' a bronc' and most always smiles while makin' a ride. To be seated in a freak saddle on an easy horse tickles him almost to death and the only way he could fall off this one would be by laughin' himself off.

After the first jump, his mouth is stretched from ear to ear and as Roany proceeds, he gits plumb hilarious and happy and begins to shout what a ripsnortin' bronc'-rider he is, fergittin' all about what he was supposed to do just like I had an idea he would.

"Whoopee!" he yells. "Powder River! A mile wide and an half inch deep, and Lo-ord knows how long!"

His hand is way up in the air and noways near the safety-valve. He scratches that old pony from his eyebrows to his tail every jump and otherwise puts up a shore enuff cowboy ride, which is just what he shouldn't be doing.

I looks over toward Fatty, who seems to be pretty sore and is busy stuffin' cartridges in his gun. I have a suspicion they aint blanks. Roany quits buckin' and Tex jumps off, sendin' a wild kick as he hits the ground, said kick takin' effect in the old pony's ribs, who makes his gitaway lookin' very much tamer.

"You shore looked sick!" says I sarcastic. "Where was you hurt? Was yore boots too tight, or did somebody spill a flock of feathers inside yore shirt?"

He just grins, bashful-like. "Shucks! I couldn't do it. I'm a bronc'-rider, not a doggone fit-thrower! The more I tried to act my part, the happier I felt and the thing to do in a case like that is to laugh, as there will be days when you will wish you had laughed when you had the chance."

BY this time, the crowd has decided Roany is anything but a buckin' horse and that there will not be any human blood spilled this evening and they are very much disappointed, leavin' the place with their minds made up that they will not spend no more quarters, anyway not in this tent. Fatty knows it and don't make no more offers. Instead, he begins to use a large and varied dictionary on us. Had he been talkin' to ordinary folks, much of his speech wouldn't have been understood, but we had lots of experience in that line and we can make out that his opinion of us is anything but favorable, some of his tamest words bein' to the effect that of all the bleary-eyed, pin-headed, lyin', lowdown, sneakin', carrion-eatin' yellow cayotes he'd ever seen, we was the worst!

That was a mistake on his part. He should never have spoke to us thataway, and he knows it himself right soon after Tex grabs him around the neck and draws back his fist. Right away he tells us he was maybe a little hasty but not to mind what he said. Tex demands his ten dollars and gits it, but Fatty asks us that as a special favor to him, we leave his showgrounds and that although he has enjoyed very much meetin' us, the longer it is before he sees us again, the better he will feel about it.

We don't mind doing that very thing, as we feel satisfied—everything turnin' out for the best. Anyway a cowboy with ten dollars in his pocket is the most independent critter as can be found by travelin' a long ways.

We crank up old Baldy our trusty flivver, which has been with us for a long time and has took us all over the country, and starts down the highway toward where our room-rent is paid for the night.

It's a nice peaceful evening and there is not much to be said so we just sit back feelin' happy just to be a-livin'. After a few miles, Tex breaks the silence.

"I wonder," says he, "why I ever teamed up with an *hombre* that's so powerful ignorant he don't even know how to fall off a horse!"

"Sweetheart," I answers, "I was thinkin' about the same thing. Buckin' off is an accomplishment, and requires nerve. *You* aint even able to pull leather! You should talk about me, boy—you aint smart yoreself!"

Tex grins. "If somebody was to hear us talkin' this way," he says, "they'd think we was locoed shore enuff—me givin' you hell because you rid a horse, and you givin' me the same because I didn't pull leather! Haw! Haw!"

Which everybody will have to admit *was* strange doings!

Free Lances in Diplomacy

"The King Business" gives a fascinating picture of life in Windsor Castle—and presents a remarkable situation that has real thrills in it.

By CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

THE gathering was a peculiar one even in these days of frequent attempts to mix oil and water. Sayldean House is known to every Londoner as the town-residence of the Sayldean viscounts and barons—a line reaching back to Henry VII—most of them stanch supporters of the sovereign and his established government. In every line, however, there always will be mavericks—descendants who flout the ideas of their ancestors and make a point of outradicaling the radicals. Michael, tenth Baron Sayldean, is of this kidney—notoriously frequenting the society of reds, communists, socialists and other obstructionists when the duties of his estate and position permit. His original lapse of this sort was tentatively academic, but since his colleagues in the Lords have made rather pointed remarks concerning such activities on his part, he has defiantly gone further in his public utterances and the selection of his intimates than at first he meant to do or, in fact, really approved—if one got at his real beliefs. So that on this particular evening the group who sat with him in the library of Sayldean House, Belgravia, was made up of individuals who never, up to the last ten years and with three exceptions, would have been admitted save through the tradesmen's entrance. The exceptions were Muggins—a Liberal M.P. who had gone over to the Labor party, who had enough education and ability to gain him occasional conferences with Conservatives on the ground of political expediency; Shrader, a similar type, and McNamee, an outspoken radical but amenable to foreign policies requiring a united stand among English politicals.

Schmidt and Rourke were pronounced communists—not of the extreme Left, but somewhat in sympathy with it. Lipowski and Anna Soper were bolshevists—clever enough to be easily the most dangerous pair in the room. And the object of the conference was a discussion upon the advisability of scrapping all hereditary rulers. Anna Soper, as the only woman present, an undeniable Titian beauty, had been asked by His Lordship to state her views.

"I fancy that may be done in a few words, Your Lordship! Why should any nation saddle itself with the expense of an

hereditary ruler who is at best a mere puppet without power, a figurehead, with a family so large that they eat into the national income like a swarm of locusts? What is there of sense or reason compelling the people to be heavily taxed for the support of so useless a burden?"

"Are those your views also, Lipowski?"

"Of course! Only I shouldt not be so polite as our Anna. I shouldt call t'e hereditary rulers all vultures—w'at prey upon ze vitals of ze people."

"You agree with them, Rourke? Schmidt?"

"In a general w'y, I fancy we do, Me Lud. Yet, d'ye see, the ruler in this particular case isn't what one might call a vulture. Rather decent chap, personally—well meaning in his w'y. But it'll get down to Miss Soper's questions, after all. Why burden ourselves wit' even a well-meanin' figgerhead who's absolutely unnecess'ry—who'll be now accepted an' supported merely as a matter o' precedent?"

"Would that be your general position also, Muggins? Or yours, Shrader?"

"If they were entirely right in their statements, it might, My Lord—but they seem to be in error upon some points. —You and McNamee see them, don't you, Shrader? To be sure! —Puttin' it briefly, My Lord, I'm none so sure His Majesty is altogether a useless puppet—an' they'll not substantiate their statem'nt that the R'yal Family are bleedin' the people by heavy taxation for their support. Of course, if we were taxed to support a silly an' useless figurehead, there'd be no argum'nt—no sense in doin' anything of the sort. But the alternative would be a president or chief commissar elected by the people—changed every few years; an' while they do that sort of thing in the States with little disturbance of trade, it's a question as to whether a permanent head to a country doesn't mean even less disturbance, an' more efficient foreign policies."

BARON SAYLDEAN nodded. "H-m-m—you three, I fancy, have about the same convictions as I have. And you other four, including Miss Soper, appear to have very decided misconceptions of the British rulers of today—in fact, you'd do well to read up certain facts concernin' 'em. For example, His Majesty is possibly one of the six wealthiest men in the world, counting nothing but his own hereditary property. His legal income is so vast that if he were a private individual he could dominate this nation by sheer money-power alone—if his own property were all turned over to him. The Crown estates, d'ye see, have been increasin' in value for centuries, until now, the sum of them is so vast that the sovereigns have had the good sense to see that it is out of all proportion to their needs. For this reason, and originally on the sovereign's initiative, I believe, the income from all the hereditary Crown properties, offered to the sovereign at the beginning of each reign, is surrendered by him upon the understanding that Parliament, in return, votes the current requirements for the royal household, family and civil-list. The only taxes any British subject pays for his king and the royal family are the rents, tithes, dues, which every tenant pays his landlord. In other words, British subjects throughout the world do not pay one penny for the king who nominally rules them—he is so much more than self-supporting that the shoe is rather on the other foot."

"Aye—but how did his ancestors git th' money at firrst—save by killin' an' grabbin' from their people?"

"Well—if you're going back that far, why not go further? How did Adam and Eve make themselves comfortably well-to-do for those days after they were kicked out of the Garden? In His Majesty's own line of ancestry I doubt if you find any serious acts of oppression for their own pockets. Originally most of Britain was taken by the sword,—Saxons, Picts, Scots, Normans,—but after the conquerors had established law and order, the lands were bought, sold or conferred according to their law. At all events, we can't go back for centuries probin' into how the royal line originally got their lands. They've been in possession so long that no court in the world would question their title."

"Aw—well! L'ave it that way! No king has ony right to be havin' as much money as this felley! W'y, he must be 'avin' a income of a quarter-million, sterlin'—even wi' only w'at Parliam'nt votes 'im!"

"He gets around half a million pounds—and sixty-eight thousand more from the Duchy of Lancaster. But the annuities for various members of the immediate royal family come out of this civil list. Contingent annuities and those for more distant relatives are deducted from the consolidated fund into which the hereditary rev-

enues are carried. The Prince gets eighty-five thousand from the Duchy of Cornwall, direct. But if His Majesty took over all of his hereditary revenues each year, these amounts would be only a small part of the whole."

"Puttin' it as you say, Me Lud—'e's nothin' but one rich toff a-governin' of us. Wot I say is w'y him any more'n any other rich toff? That's wot a lot of us will be likin' to 'ave explained!"

"His Majesty has been educated from birth to rule this empire. He's had the experience of his father an' grandmother to profit by. He has better knowledge of foreign affairs than most men in this country. He is connected by relationship with almost every other ruling house in Europe."

"Eet seem to me, My Lor', t'at you are not in accor' weeth us—no? We t'ought w'en we come 'ere t'at you wass more as less on t'e radical side—no?"

"Let me put myself straight upon that point, Lipowski! I am on the radical side in wishing to substitute a governm'nt more of the great mass of the people than we now have. But I'm not a revolutionist, if you get what I mean. That is—I would bring about changes through Parliamentary action in preference to bloodshed. Upon this question of bein' ruled by a king or president, I fancy I have an open mind. If we're going to retain the king, I fancy we'd not get another man as well fitted for the berth as the one we now have. But if we've progressed to a point where kings are obsolete,—an' you give me convincin' reasons for that supposition,—I'm willing to see an elective ruler put in his place. Though—let me make one point clear! If we ask for His Majesty's abdication, we must return his property to him—*all* of it."

"W'at foolishness! Absurdt! All t'at money for one man—w'en it shouldt pe diwided among t'e beople! W'y wouldt we do t'at?"

"Because any other course would absolutely destroy property-rights throughout the Empire!"

"Well, but—t'at ees just w'at we mean to do, Milor'! Destroy ze property-right' —capitalism—divide ze money up among ze people!"

"That's impossible, Lipowski—and you know it! You've tried it in Russia—had to go back to capitalism! As long as the human race exists, you'll never get anywhere without capital and the men who acquire it! Divide up the wealth of the world, pro-rata, and before the end of a single day you'll have capitalists. Some men save and accumulate—some men spend and waste. That condition will exist as long as the human race. And you'll never go more than a very few years after any upheaval before those same capitalists will find the means to protect their property-rights. Put it to vote in Parliament—I'll wager you'll get no majority against returnin' the King's property if you ask for his abdication. So it'll run to money if we do make that change."

HERE the woman stunned the less radical four with a quiet remark.

"If the King and all his heirs were eliminated within a month or so—to whom would you pay the money?"

A breathless silence.

"Good God, Miss Soper! Do you realize what you're implyin'?"

"Perfectly. You present the King's fortune as one of the more serious obstacles to removing him as the head of this nation. If that obstacle no longer existed, wouldn't you be rather more in favor of making a change—trying it out?"

"If His Majesty were not an exceptionally good head as he is—I might. An' the Prince gives promise of bein' equally good with a few more years. Really, you know —who could you suggest as bein' better for the job than either of 'em?"

"Almost any efficient man who came from the masses and looked at government from their angle rather than that of the privileged classes."

"Oh, bosh! His Majesty is a better democrat, a better all-round mixer, than you are, Miss Soper! He'll go into a workingman's cottage an' chat with him entirely at his ease. You couldn't go to dinner at Buckingh'm without makin' a few worse breaks!"

"Possibly yes—possibly no. He'd seem to me out of place in a workingman's cottage—to the workingman and every one of his family—a person from a class so vastly different that they'd have no common ground upon which to meet! The truth is, My Lord, we've gotten beyond the use for kings anywhere in the world. The war put scores of them out of the trade—and the general point of view since then disapproves of them even more. Flatly, if you will have it so, Lipowski and I are for elimination of the entire royal family within a very short time. We made a clean job of it

in Ekaterinburg—and have had no further trouble of that sort."

"Please do not overlook the fact that that one act aroused a general horror an' repulsion in the outside world from which Russia will not recover in a century or two! Enforced abdication—yes. If you convince me there's any advantage in it—which I don't as yet see. But assassination—*no!* A thousand times, *no!* Would you and Schmidt countenance anything like that, Rourke?"

"Well—dommed if I know! If 'twere a political necessity, now—somethin' fair bad, ye know, but th' easy way o' settlin' the whole question—w'y, it might be done, I s'pose. I'm not the killin' sort, meself, as a matter o' custom. But I'd not pay over hoondreds o' millions to one I was kickin' out o' 'is job, d'ye see—eyther. Mebbe 'twere better killin' 'im than that. 'Twould 'ave to be considered, ye know."

"DO you an' Shrader agree to that, Muggins?" inquired Sayldean then.

"Faith, we do *not!* Assassination is not the British way! Foreigners may fancy that sort o' thing, but there'll be mighty few British workin'men as would agree. 'Tis not fair play, d'ye see! Not sportin'! No, it aint! An' we three, Shrader an' McNamee an' me, will 'ave to 'ear a good bit o' argym'nt before we see w'y His Majesty up yon in Buckin'h'm isn't as good a head for this nation as anyone we'd find in a month o' Sundays. We'll go this far wi' ye, Me Lud! Show us a general feelin' in Parli'm'nt of gettin' tired o' the King idea, wishing f'r a change, an' we'll vote with the majority. But I fancy it'll be against our judgm'nt, at that."

"That's about as I supposed you felt. Now—my idea would be this, d'ye see: Suppose a few of us in both Houses do a bit of soundin' out among the Members—see how they stand on the question of a ruler, put it bluntly to 'em whether we'd not do better with a president elected for six or eight years? I fancy that four is too short a term. Aye—an' give such a president absolute veto-power if his cabinet concurs. Agitate the subject in the cloak-rooms an' lobbies. If there appears to be a reasonable amount of support, test it out upon the floor of the House by offerin' a bill an' bringin' it to vote. In that way, you'd have the trend of opinion throughout the country—an' if, as I believe, that opinion is overwhelmingly against such an idea, drop it until something in future brings it up again. Would that meet your views, Shrader?"

"Aye, Me Lud—there'll be no questionin' the fairness o' that. An' it avoids doin' anything foolish until there's reason for it. But I fancy it'll not suit the red Lefts overmuch. Eh—Lipowski?"

"Oh—do not mind *us!* Go as far as you weel weeth ze experimen'. An' w'en you 'ave feenish, an' get nowhere, t'en we try ze leetle direc' action. In fac', we 'ave consider' already 'ow he might be done. We 'ave study' ze 'abit' of ze royal familee—where t'ey go—w'at t'ey do—how t'ey wass guarded. Undt we know five—seex way'—to accompleesh ze rresult we contemplate weeth small reesk to ourselv'."

"My word! Are you really in earnest? By God, if I thought you meant it, I'd—"

"Betray us—an' 'ave your t'roat cut in twenty-four hour', Milor'? Yes—possibly. But we 'ave plenty othair agent' to complete ze work if we fail. If we are arrest', t'ey couldt not convict us on ze wordt of you alone! No! But you get ze t'roat cut, just ze same!".

"Oh, well—that's a small matter. You'll not intimidate me, Lipowski. Er—not that sort, d'ye see. If I hear of any real attempt to do what you say, I'll report it—you may stake your life on *that!* We might as well understand each other on this point. I invited you here this evening for a discussion upon matters of political expediency—not assassination. And I really can't believe, you know, that you mean any more than airin' your theories of what, in your narrow Russian point of view, you'd like to see brought about. Nobody asked you an' Miss Soper to declare yourselves potential murderers—an' we can only assume that you've been havin' us on a bit in what you've said. Jokin' aside, however—you'd best be demmed careful to arouse no suspicion that you're actively engaged in any attempt of that sort! There are four of us here whom you'll not intimidate by any personal threats, d'ye see."

THE party broke up shortly afterward—Muggins remaining, as he said, to accompany His Lordship as far as Westminster. But after the others were gone, they talked over the discussion at some length before leaving the house.

"Does Your Lordship really fancy those bounders would be up to anything like what Lipowski an' the girl said?"

"Hmph! I supposed, naturally, that you would have more information concernin' the reds than I, Muggins—seein' that your party is to some extent affiliated with 'em. But it seems I know more about 'em than you. Point's this: Governm'nt is quite well aware that we have emissaries of the Moscow soviet here in the United Kingdom who not only preach direct action an' revolution incessantly, but have among 'em both men an' women sworn to murder when orders come to them—many of 'em crack-shots, expert knife-throwers, chemists skilled in gases, poisons an' explosives. It is assumed, however, that all of these are more or less under observation, an' that the bulk of the radicals, here, wouldn't risk their necks with such methods even though they may approve of 'em in theory. But from those I've met, hundreds of 'em, I'm of the impression that the majority are potentially assassins. In every case where I've discussed the matter with 'em—like these four, tonight—there's no makin' 'em listen to anything but complete revolution—destruction of property-rights as far as they may accomplish it. They'll not consider Parliament'ry governm'nt at all!'

"H-m-m I wonder if His Majesty is sufficiently well guarded against anything of that sort?"

"As well as it's possible to guard him without makin' a prisoner of the man in one of his own castles. If a half-dozen scoundrels are bent upon killin' him regardless of their own personal risk, there's opportunity enough, goodness knows! An' yet, on second thought, not quite so much as might appear, d'ye see. There always are secret service men surroundin' Their Majesties wherever they go. . . . . I say, Muggins! D'ye see that young chap in the portrait, over yon—the one in plate armor?

Lammerford whispered: "The damned red! Am I right, George?"

He was the third viscount in our line—gentleman-in-waiting to Henry the Eighth. Had been married to a beautiful girl but a few months when he threw himself in front of the King, one night, an' took in his own body the dagger meant for Henry. That other one on this wall—one o' the best blades of his time—was in an ante-chamber while Charles the Second was spendin' an evening with Nell Gwynn. A cavalier with a drawn sword came in through a secret passage, sprang into the room where the King was with Nelly—would have run him through. But Viscount Sayldean caught the blade on his own—fought all round the room, an' killed him. An' here am I—theoretically opposin' the sovereign of my day—which is to say, I'm opposin' in Parliam'nt some of the Governm'nt policies because I've a few radical beliefs. Yet at a pinch, d'ye see, I fancy I'd defend the King's person as quickly as any of my line if I fancied him in danger. So after reflectin' a bit more, it's not un-

likely I may tip a hint to the Foreign Office as to the advisability of tightenin' up the watch on all the reds in the United Kingdom. Eh?"

"Do so, Mc Lud—an' I'll do the same with the Foreign Secretary—who happens to like me better than my politics."

A FEW nights later there had been a dinner-party at the famous Trevor mansion in Park Lane—after which the Foreign Secretary had remained for a chat with his hosts and their two most intimate friends when the other guests had left the house. They were in the big Jacobean library, sitting around the spacious fireplace with its blazing logs—and when the massive door from the hall had been closed, the Secretary got down to what he had in mind.

"I received two calls in Downing Street, yesterday, which surprised me a lot—until I had more leisure to analyze the motives behind them. No use mentioning names—might be dangerous for both men. One was a Member of Parliament on the Labor side—chap who has come up from the masses and will be knighted, presently, merely for what he's accomplished with his commercial enterprises. Personally, I like him—we play chess occasionally. Politically, we're in opposite camps. T'other chap is in the Upper House, but also on the Labor-Radical side—mostly in theory, I fancy, but a rather serious obstructionist when he's an occasion to say anything on the floor. Well, each one of them, coming at diff'rent times and presumably with no knowledge of the other, impressed upon me with a good bit of seriousness that we'd best guard His Majesty at all times as closely as it is possible to do so. They said it was contemplated to bring about discussions, *ex camera*, in both houses, as to abolishing the idea of sovereignty and substituting an elective presidency in its place. Each of the men admitted his intention of taking part in such a discusion,—to ascertain the general trend of opinion throughout the country,—but said that he was decidedly in favor of continuing the sovereignty, at least until a time should come when it seemed outgrown or impracticable. On the other hand, they very frankly stated that there were a number of extremists in the country who are sworn to overturn parliament'ry governm'nt and particularly the institution of monarchy—that a majority of these talked of assassination, boasted that arrangements had been considered to carry it out."

"Didn't mention names, I suppose?"

"One of them stated his belief that a certain Igor Gratz was the executive from whom the others took their orders, here—also that three women whom he didn't name, and four men—among them Lipowski, McSorrell and Sworthy—were likely to be actively employed in any direct action which might be decided upon. The women, he said, were sufficiently handsome and well-dressed to appear at almost any social function without arousing suspicion. McSorrell and Sworthy were considered equally able to make a conventional appearance, anywhere."

"Er—have your men or any of the King's Messengers, knowledge of those seven?"

"We know something of the lot, I fancy. One of the women, for example, would be Anna Soper—a Northumberland lass who happened to be in Russia at the time of the revolution and didn't come back here until three or four years ago. Handsome, well educated, dangerous. Another must be Maria Schmidt—a Prussian who also was in Russia as a spy during the war, but remained to become a bolshevist of the most extreme type. The four men we've had under observation for some time."

"Faith—you'd best double the espionage, old chap! We know something of that lot—they're utterly unscrupulous! An' luckily, as it happens, we know a good bit about a dozen others who might act with them if the job appeared to be extra-hazardous. In case we turn up anything, by luck or accident, we'll let you know at once. But when two leaders of the Opposition come to you with a warning of this sort, it's quite evident they consider the menace a serious one—not to be minimized even by the F. O. What?"

"Well—that was precisely my impression. I've already taken steps to double the safeguards around Their Majesties and considerably increased the espionage over all radicals of whatever breed."

UPON the following morning the Earl and Countess of Dyvnaint, Earl Lammerford of St. Ives, Sir Abdool Mohammed Khan and the Honorable Raymond Carter, formerly American Chargé d'Affaires in Paris, received courteous notes from the King's secretary asking if it would suit their convenience to be at Windsor during

the following week—perhaps longer. A sufficiently good reason may be given of course for declining such an invitation, but conventionally it amounts to an order—a summons to Court. Each of the five was a person of multitudinous affairs by this time—having engagements for months ahead. On the other hand, none of them ever made a hard-and-fast engagement which couldn't be easily put over to another time if necessary. So their preparations for a week or two at Windsor meant little more burdensome than a lot of work for their personal secretaries in canceling or rearranging dates for the next fortnight—just as they would if a suddenly decided-upon cruise to the Orient had caused the same amount of cancelation.

Driving down to Windsor in their own cars to avoid having their destination traced as it would have been from any railway station, the party included valets, secretaries and Countess Nan's personal maid, all of whom had been tested so many times in emergencies that it was their employers' belief they couldn't be bribed. Aside from the respect and affection every one of their employees felt for the Earl, the Countess and their friends as well, it was thoroughly understood that a bribe of any amount offered to one of them was promptly doubled the moment it was reported to the employer in question—the Earl's valet having been handed, upon one occasion, two thousand pounds, merely upon his statement that one thousand had been guaranteed if he would drug his master's coffee upon a certain evening.

Arriving at Windsor, they were given their old suites in and adjoining the Victoria Tower—overlooking the Long Walk and the Home Park. These suites had been assigned to the Trevors and their intimate friends every time they came to Windsor because that portion of the buildings around the Upper Ward was closest to the private apartments of their Majesties overlooking the East Terrace Gardens, and afforded easy access to a small chamber in which the King conferred with them when he wished to be secure against interruption.

IN the few days before they came down to the Castle, the two earls and Sir Abdool had spent considerable time in the Wapping neighborhood of the East End, dressed as workingmen, and had managed not only to get where they could make a close study of Igor Gratz and his subordinates, but even to be included in some of the talk supposed to be among the more extreme radicals only. At the same time, without their knowledge, Countess Nan had been in the same part of the city as a labor-agitator from the northern manufacturing centers—her experience in one of the large cotton-mills enabling her to pass without question as a woman who had herself worked at a loom. She spotted her husband and Sir Abdool, but Earl Lammerford's make-up fooled her because she had no chance to examine him closely. Between the four of them they picked up several bits of serious information which—with what they were able to fit from previous experience with that class of scoundrels—enabled them to form the impression that some action might be taken by the reds much sooner than even Lord Sayldean and Muggins had anticipated. Consequently it seemed to them most fortunate that His Majesty had requested them to join him at Windsor just at that time.

WHEN their luggage had been settled in their various suites, they sat down in Countess Nan's drawing-room, and Earl Trevor opened a discussion of the situation.

"His Majesty is riding in the Great Park at the moment, with some of his other guests—but Sir Derek said he'd be in fairly soon and would see us in the little conference-chamber on his side of the wall for an hour before dressing-time for dinner. There seemed to be no inference that he wished to see us about anything of an unusual nature—and yet he knows a good bit more of what goes on under the surface, politically, than is generally supposed."

"I wonder if he really does suspect that there is talk—among a small minority at present—of deposing him, one way or another? How much do you suppose he is up with the trend of the times all over the world?"

"Up to the very last minute of it—don't make any mistake about that! He doesn't fool himself for one holy second—and like every other ruler, he's constantly discounting the possibility of assassination at some unexpected moment. Every king or president in the world has that sort of thing to think about—to protect himself against, if he can, but they get so used to the idea that it becomes rather fatalistic and they pay no more attention to it than the chance of being killed in a motorcar on one of the public highways. . . . . Hello! There he

comes now, with his party—riding up to the George Fourth Gateway. Turn your binoculars on him. Wouldn't call that a careworn face, would you? Doesn't look like a man with a sword hanging over his head—what? How would you describe his appearance, Nan, as he sits his horse down there?"

"As a smiling and very affable country gentleman—coming home with his guests to his own private manor-house where his ownership of everything on the place couldn't be legally disputed by even a revolutionist. In whatever direction he looks—and about as far as he can see—everything here is his own private property. A lot of soreheads might take away his crown and retire him to private life—but on this, his own ground, he would be still the supreme authority, with the right of ejecting *anyone* he didn't like or even shooting him it necessary. Wonder what he really thinks of the king business, today?"

"Well, I fancy all five of us might guess rather close to the mark, from little personal things he's said to each at various times—but we can't quote his remarks because they were made in confidence. An' quoting him, anyhow, is one of the things which isn't done. We may conjecture what we please from our knowledge of the man. I suppose he must attempt, at times, to weigh the extent of his personal influence, socially and politically. He'd be fairly certain, for example, as to that influence being a very real and far-reaching one, because he's had proof enough of the fact. Time after time, when statesmen have found themselves apparently up against a political *impasse*, he has summoned them to conferences in which his tact and thorough understanding of the situation have settled the matter when the statesmen, without him, couldn't have done so.

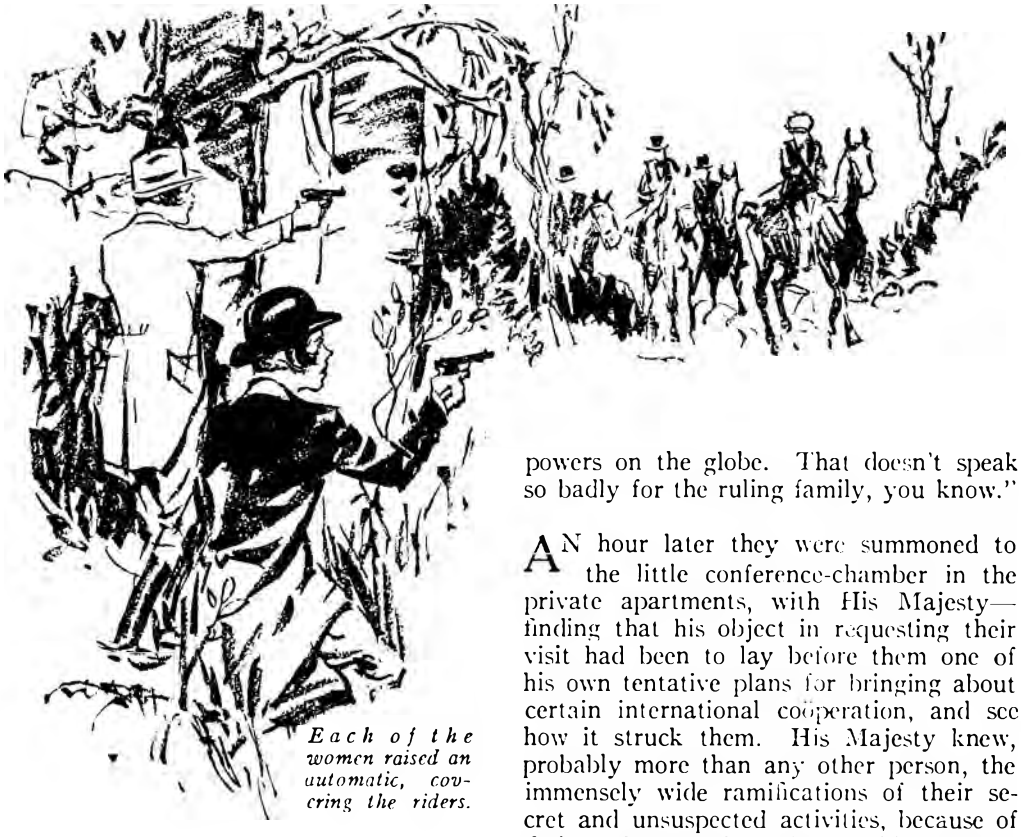
"Socially he's the first gentleman in the Empire—a person who makes no pretence of being of finer clay in a crowd, takes no stock whatever in the heavenly anointed bunk. Were he willing to give any estimate of himself, I can imagine him putting it that he's merely a man—neither better nor worse than other men of the educated class, though possibly better qualified by special and exhaustive training than most, for his particular job. There must be times when, from some window, he looks over these castle buildings—the Home Park, the Great Park—and pictures the conditions here when Henry the Eighth walked the halls, passages and cloisters with Anne Boleyn: when a man who killed a deer on the estate was promptly hanged; when even a joking suggestion that the people might prefer some other type of ruler would have gotten the joker beheaded for high treason. There wasn't much question as to who was boss in those days! Henry's subjects literally held their lives and property at the crook of his finger—he had the power to make his slightest whim respected."

"Which our charming host of today has not—and knows it!"

"On any of his own estates, he has. If he wishes anything done here in the Castle, nobody is drawn and quartered for disobedience—but the servant or subordinate who balks at carrying out his orders is quietly dropped from the personnel and finds it very difficult to get another berth if the fact is known. His Majesty cannot say that such an edict shall be enforced—or that such a law shall be abrogated; but you'll notice that no legislation to which he is strongly opposed manages to get through Parliament and onto the statute-books. His foreign policies have a way of being supported—because they're about right to start with, from his knowledge of international conditions. Here you have a ruler whose official power has been taken away from him in so many ways that uninformed people in other countries consider him a mere puppet in the hands of the British statesmen—a figurehead. In which estimate they're so far mistaken that it's a joke! No British political thinks that of him—nor even the man in the street. It's too well understood throughout the Empire that he wields an intangible power obtained from his control of public opinion which goes pretty far and accomplishes rather wonderful results, at times."

"Suppose he were asked rather unexpectedly to abdicate in favor of an elective presidency? What do you fancy his reaction to that would be?"

"It would depend entirely upon his estimate of the times, his knowledge of the British people, and his belief as to which form of government would best suit the nation under modern conditions. I don't fancy that the personal glory of bein' a crowned monarch would occur to him as having any bearing on the question. The idea of retiring from public life and becoming merely a wealthy landowner, living very comfortably on his own estates,



Each of the women raised an automatic, covering the riders.

would appeal to him very strongly—as a far easier life than the one he now leads. The barring of his own sons and heirs from all future opportunity for becoming empire-rulers would carry very little weight. All of them would have property enough to live on, and a sufficiently good education to support themselves in some form of business if necess'ry. In these days he certainly doesn't fool himself with any nons'nse about rulin' by divine right—that's too far out of date, too utterly ridiculous. He's more in the position of a man who has been elected head of some great industrial enterprise, appreciating that it's a whale of a responsibility, but confident of handling it, with any reasonable support."

"Discounting, you think, the historic element in his position?"

"No. Rather looking back upon it with considerable pride, all things considered. It's something, you know, to have had the ruling of a great nation in one's own family for two or three centuries, even if some of them rather botched the job. They didn't wreck the country, at all events—or its finances. On the contr'ry, with each succeeding reign, the country became greater as a political power until today it stands as one of the two greatest powers on the globe. That doesn't speak so badly for the ruling family, you know."

AN hour later they were summoned to the little conference-chamber in the private apartments, with His Majesty—finding that his object in requesting their visit had been to lay before them one of his own tentative plans for bringing about certain international coöperation, and see how it struck them. His Majesty knew, probably more than any other person, the immensely wide ramifications of their secret and unsuspected activities, because of their underground services to his Government. It struck them, as he first went over his plan, that his deductions were sound. After a little reflection it seemed to them that he had a better grasp of state affairs and the proper course to pursue with them than any of his ministry. Also they were considerably surprised at a joking reference to discussion in certain quarters about his abdication. Their impression was that of more amusement than apprehension upon this point—a disbelief that the bulk of the British people would support any change of the sort. One thing which seemed furthest out of mind that afternoon was any thought of bolshevist plots against him.

As the house-party was a comparatively small one that fortnight, dinner was served in the dining-hall of the private apartments at the extreme eastern end of the Castle—a magnificent room in itself. In fact, the private apartments as a whole include one of the greatest artistic treats in Britain if one has the luck to see them! China, porcelains, bric-à-brac, arms and armor, rare and beautiful books, pictures, the King's great stamp-collection, sculptures and textiles of various sorts.

After dinner that evening—an almost informal meal with none but a few of his best-liked friends and a couple of

financiers present—the King suggested bridge for an hour or two, with the Castle orchestra playing softly in an anteroom. Then the guests retired to their own wing of the Castle and amused themselves in two or three of their private drawing-rooms until after midnight.

AS Trevor entered his own living-chamber with Lammerford and Sir Abdool, Carter having remained to chat with Countess Nan and another couple, his personal man and chauffeur Achmet appeared with a low request that the three would step out with him to a passage overlooking the Upper Ward. At once they followed him until he stopped them in the deep shadow of a window-embrasure and pointed out a couple of indistinct figures who stood talking in the paved court near the entrance to the kitchens and sculleries of the private apartments.

"That one, O Thakur Bahadur—that short and skinny one—is not of the Great Emir's regular household. One who hath come within three days, that he may take the place of another who hath gone. And he who speaketh with him apart is the servant of a guest in the South Turret who came but yesterday. It may be that these men are known to thee, O Thakur—if thou but look at them closely. Or, if the darkness be too great, mark the movements of the shoulders the twists of the head—their positions, when no one observes?"

A moment or so they watched the figures below them very closely, through the open window. Then Lammerford whispered:

"By gad! McSorrell's the short one! An' Sworthy—the damned Hungarian red! Am I right, George—Abdool?"

"As far as one may judge at this distance, there's little question if it, Lammy. McSorrell has a way of standing with his weight on the right leg—the right shoulder sagging down—left hand waving about as he talks—as one is doing now. The taller Sworthy stands like a stick, as if his neck were in a cast—he even fences that way, with everything rigid above the shoulders. I saw him in one of the Buda-Pest *Écoles d'escrime* last year. But Achmet has been much closer to them, I fancy—and will be more sure. Is it not so, O son of my father's cousin?"

"Aie, Khan—though they have other names in this place. I have followed the tall one in Wapping at thy orders—he is the Hungarian, Sworthy—known here as Eduard Tgiel, the bodyservant of Sir John Moroscani, the banker."

Both of the Earls looked quickly around, at this.

"Moroscani! My word! But—dammit all, he can't be mixed up with any such crew as that lot! It's not conceivable! All his interests would be against it! Why—"

"Wait a bit! I overheard Lady Moroscani tellin' Nan something about Sir John's old valet dyin' suddenly of heart-failure—man who'd been with him for years—apparently in perfect health. An' his place bein' filled by a new fellow who applied for the berth with the highest possible recommendations! That crowd would have little difficulty in gettin' first-chop recommendations, you know—an' Sworthy undoubtedly poisoned the old valet. They hesitated about takin' the fellow on, especially in view of his visit to Windsor, but the man was so well vouched for by those to whom Sir John's secretary made inquiries that it seemed equivalent to his bein' bonded by one of the surety comp'nies. So that would seem to place Moroscani above suspicion in the matter. But none the less, we know why Sworthy applied for the berth at this particular time—an' what he's in Windsor Castle for. Same thing with McSorrell. If he has a berth in the royal kitchens, there's plenty of opportunity for poisoning Their Majesties' food! Oh, the devil! Achmet, could you get hold of Sir Derek's man at this time of night—at *once?*"

"It should not be difficult, O Thakur. The guards of the Castle know that I am thy man—from many visits at other times. They will send an orderly to that one's sleeping-place for me, and have him out."

"Go at once, but do it quietly—attract no attention. Have the man ask his master where we may see him at once. If he calls upon us here in our own apartments, it will look as though he were merely anxious to see that we have everything that we require and are thoroughly comfortable. If we go to his quarters at this time of night, it will arouse comment among the guard and any others who see us. Tell his man that."

IN less than twenty minutes the Master of the Household knocked at the door of Earl Trevor's suite and was promptly admitted to the living-chamber where the three were smoking at the time—Achmet

The women drew small bombs and ran out to throw them.

placing a chair against the single outer door in the anteroom and sitting on it, alert to every whisper of sound in the stone passage outside. Sir Derek's poise was of the sort which nothing ever disturbed. From long acquaintance they thought he had one of the best controlled nervous systems they ever had noticed. He was quiet, efficient to a superlative degree, usually smiling even when his multifarious duties were most exacting—a man who kept his head no matter what happened. And he knew, instinctively, that he wouldn't have been sent for at nearly one in the morning unless something very unusual had come up.

"Sir Derek, you will of course accept our apologies for disturbing you at this time of night. Briefly—there are two of the most extreme reds inside the Castle at this moment, occupying perfectly ord'n'ry an' unsuspicious berths. We happen to know some of the plans bein' discussed among their crowd in the East End, last week—an' the mere fact of their gainin' access within the Castle is quite proof enough of their intentions. One of 'em is Moroscani's new valet—the other is a scullion or has some such capacity in the royal kitchens, where there's little question of his bein' able to poison food whenever he wishes to do it.

"Now, from what we were able to pick up in London, there was an inference that any of the reds assigned to this job by Igor Gratz, who is the Moscow executive in England, would be accompanied by two women of much higher social standing, apparently—who had diff'rent courses of action assigned to them. We've not spotted anyone resembling them in the Castle—though of course we've had little opportunity for a thorough look-see as yet. If they're not here, we are fairly certain as to their bein' somewhere in the neighborhood. Now, after giving you these facts,—all we know at present,—the first suggestion which occurs to us is for you to have the inspector of the Castle put half a dozen of his best men where they can keep those two scoundrels under observation every minute."

"Why not arrest and send them to Dartmoor at once—pending more definite evidence against them?"

"That would be the safest course as far as those two are concerned, but it leaves two or three others unaccounted for—with nobody watching 'em—to commit murder when we least suspect it. If you could arrange to have every morsel of Their Majesties' food tasted before it is sent up to them—morsels given to one of the less valuable dogs, or analyzed by the household chemist—an' nab McSorrell if he's seen

doin' anything suspicious? It is more than likely either or both of those bounders will be in communication with the women sometime within a day or two—which would give us a line on them. Of course, there will be this to guard against: Those men expect to kill one or more of the royal family and get out of the Castle before it can be traced to them—but they are up against having their own throats cut if they leave this place without accomplishing their object. If a good opportunity presents itself, they'll act even with the certainty of bein' killed the next minute—but they prob'ly wont act unless it seems impossible to fail."

"H-m-m—Your Lordship's point is well taken. You're suggesting more responsibility than one likes to assume—but, if the two men are arrested, the others may act, as you say, when we've no idea where to look for the danger. I fancy the Inspector and I will have to risk it for another twenty-four hours at least—but it will be a weight off my mind when we definitely settle this matter! We've had similar cases before. In fact, you gentlemen were the means of blocking one a year or two back—but the danger came from a couple of the Castle guests at that time—men supposed to be above suspicion. Servants should be rather easier to handle. Er—you understand of course how thoroughly I appreciate this action on your part! Very good! I'll be up for another hour or so—then we'll meet sometime during the forenoon."

IN the morning His Majesty was busy with his secretary and the morning post—so that, knowing they'd hardly see him before luncheon, the Trevor party asked for mounts and rode out into the Great Park, while Achmet and two of the other men sauntered through the narrow streets at the foot of the Hundred Steps, across to Eaton, and around through the Home Park, trying to pick up some hint as to any strangers who might be stopping at one of the small hotels or a house in the vicinity. In one of the town pubs, they heard of two ladies who were visiting friends at a manor-house near Datchet, at the east side of the Home Park, and strolled over that way on the chance of getting a glimpse at them.

The five, meanwhile, had ridden a couple of miles south through the Home Park, past Frogmore and the Royal Gardens, then switched over to Queen Anne's Ride down through the Great Park toward Ascot. Lammerford was of the opinion that any couple of women pretending to be aristocrats would be most likely out riding or motoring during the morning hours, and that if any female reds actually were in the neighborhood, they might run across them along one of the bridle-paths or drives usually chosen by the King when he was out for a constitutional. As it proved, his impression was correct. They were in a bypath a little east of Queen Anne's Ride when they came upon two exceedingly good-looking women, faultlessly dressed in riding-coats, boots and breeches, who had dismounted and were prying a stone out of one horse's shoe. They smiled pleasantly as the party rode up—asking if either of the men happened to have a jack-knife with a bottle-opening hook in it.

Trevor swung down from his saddle and had the stone out within a moment or two, then, noticing that the horse's shoe was a bit loose, he suggested that his rider had best stop at a smith's on the way home.

"But really, you know—I don't remember seeing such a place in the neighborhood. We're visiting friends over near Datchet—haven't had much opportunity for looking about, as yet."

"There are smiths at Windsor, if you go around that way."

"Thanks—we'll do so. Er—pardon me! Have we met before, sir? Your face is familiar—"

"It's quite possible, I fancy—we've a rather wide acquaintance. Madam is—"

"Lady Moorford—and Mrs. Frederick Drake, who is by way of being American, you know."

"Ah! Your Ladyship is a friend of the Athelstanes in Surrey, I fancy. It was very likely at Athelstane House—not?"

"To be sure! Your Lordship was down in the summer for the week-end. Thank you very much for the assistance. We must be getting on toward that smith's you mentioned."

THE title she gave Trevor was pure bluff. She couldn't place him—though she vaguely recalled familiar gazette-illustrations. Trevor bent his knee slightly and placed his hand upon it for her to mount—but she laughingly waved him aside. As she grasped the bridle and her horse's mane, the animal started—but in a graceful flying-mount her left foot landed in the stirrup and the impetus swung her up

into the saddle. Only an expert horsewoman with a good deal of reserve strength could have done it—and they watched her out of sight with grudging admiration.

"Quite fit, isn't she, old chap?"

"She certainly is—damn her! Doubtless she throws a bomb or shoots as well as she rides. With a knife, she'd be more than a match for an unarmed man. An' I'll wager anything you please that she has all three on her at this moment! Didn't even care about leaning against me in mounting, lest they be spotted!"

"Anna Soper—not?"

"Aye—an' Maria Schmidt! No mistaking 'em, though I'll admit they look a dev'lish sight more like aristocrats than they did in London—so much so that His Majesty wouldn't believe they could be potential murd'resses if he met 'em here in the Park! He'd be courteous enough to dismount an' pry out a stone for 'em if his equerry was too far behind. Humph! He'll not ride alone for a bit if I can prevent it. An'—I say, you chaps! In case we run across those women any time we're out with His Majesty, I'll concentrate on the Soper woman—pay no attention to anyone else. You chaps keep your eyes closely on Maria an' anyone else who may be with 'em. Have it understood which you're lookin' after."

SIR DEREK was for arresting the women at once when the five reported their discovery to him—until Lammerford asked him upon what grounds he proposed taking such action.

"Up to this, your only evidence against 'em is our recognition of two unquestionable reds. Suppose they face you down, produce proof that they are what they claim to be—an' they're quite likely to have such apparent proofs with 'em. Claim our recognition to be a most insulting case of mistaken identity? In fact, we simply can't publicly testify to any such recognition because it would betray us to the reds—who'd know we'd been among them dressed as workingmen. That's out of the question! An' if you arrest 'em without more evidence, you run into a nasty scandal an' lawsuit for defamation of character. Have the Inspector's men shadow 'em an' get some evidence! Meanwhile—ask His Majesty to avoid walking or riding anywhere in the neighborhood without us during the next week. We should get a showdown on this matter by then, I fancy—an' it begins to look as if these four were the only ones sent here."

AT once Sir Derek put this up to His Majesty exactly as it was given—a request from five of his friends who had been tested many times. The King had no idea what prompted the suggestion but was curious to learn—and proposed a fairly extended ride next morning, out through Windsor Forest and around by Virginia Water. The Free Lances felt that the sooner matters came to a climax the better—and kept a sharp look-out in every direction as they rode. Trevor and Sir Abdool were ahead—while Lammerford and Countess Nan were on either side of the King, and the Honorable Raymond Carter just behind him.

Halfway across to the Forest, Trevor noticed that a couple of horses had left the bridlepath, climbed the low bank along its side and walked back into the woods, among the oaks and beeches. Pointing this out to Sir Abdool, they reasoned that the riders of those horses, if they had any intention of sneaking back toward another stretch of the path, would choose a point ahead of approaching riders rather than back of where they had left it—so, lifting their caps to mop their foreheads, they knew that Lammerford would understand the signal and halt the party for a few moments. Then they reined their mounts up the bank and followed the hoofprints—Sir Abdool being from long training very good at such trailing.

As they had anticipated, the tracks after going deep into the woods swung about toward the path again. When there was no further doubt as to the direction, they dismounted and tied their mounts to an old beech. Then they noiselessly followed the hoofprints in the black loam, keeping hidden behind the boles of the great oaks as they went. In a few moments they saw two women hidden behind a couple of massive beeches, watching the bridle-path along which the party were now approaching, with Lammerford just ahead of the King. A moment more—then each of the women raised a hand with an automatic in it, covering the approaching riders.

Had their purpose been unsuspected, they could have killed or disabled all four of the party without being seen, and gotten safely away before their victims were discovered. According to their calculations, they were playing a safe enough game—

with no evidence but hooftracks left behind. But the Earl and Sir Abdool had now seen all the evidence they required—proof positive of what the women meant to do, and each fired a single shot—one striking Anna Soper's weapon from her hand, the other crippling the arm of the Schmidt woman. They had, however, an amount of nerve that would have been admirable had it not been so absolutely fiendish.

In spite of the pain they were suffering, they drew small bombs from their pockets with their uninjured hands and ran out into the path to throw them. But two more shots smashed those wrists before they could hurl the missiles—one of the bombs exploding as it hit the ground several feet away, while the other rolled harmlessly under a bush as the Schmidt woman sank down upon the ground, neither being touched by the shrapnel from the exploded bomb, as it happened.

At the first shot Countess Nan had grasped at His Majesty's bridle—swung his mount around—and spurred the horses into a canter for home, while Carter pounded along guarding their rear. His Majesty hadn't seen the women and didn't know what had happened until Sir Derek tried to censor his report of the affair that afternoon,—and failed to get away with the expurgation,—McSorrell and Sworthy being then locked up in one of the tower-dungeons, while the two women were in a neighboring hospital under close guard. Subsequently the four received life sentences and were sent to Dartmoor. In giving their evidence, Earl Trevor and Sir Abdool merely said they had been warned by the Inspector of the Castle that two bolshevist women were in the neighborhood with the presumable intention of attacking His Majesty, that they had seen two women leave the bridle-path ahead of the royal party and had followed them. So that was that. It was a catastrophe which the reds in London couldn't understand—giving them a far greater respect for the vigilance of those guarding the King than they had had up to that time.

As for the King himself—it is doubtful if even the members of his own family got from him an expression of opinion on the occurrence. The momentary danger was past. The "king business" is a most exacting trade—giving little time for idle speculation. His Majesty handles it well, smilingly, with perfect tact and urbanity.

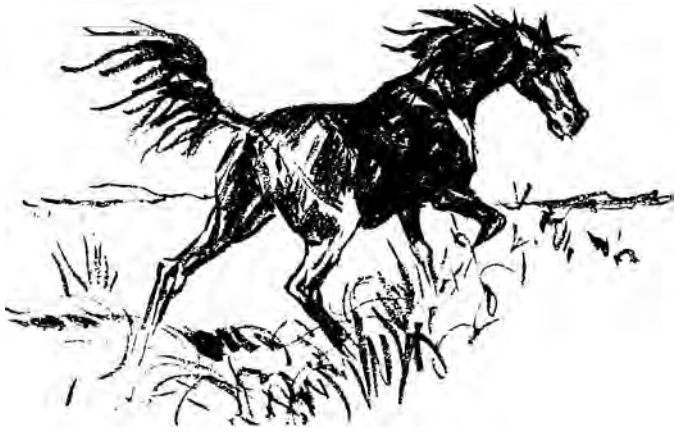
The Black Mustang

A LITTLE less than twenty years had seen the fall of John Colter. He had at one time owned the land on which the town of Danton now stood, and he had valued the arid, sagebrush site, then, at two-bits an acre. The scant grass of the whole plot would not feed one cow the year through, so it was not worth more.

At that time Colter was a rich man, and not concerned with such details. He bulked his cattle, running on the open range, at ten thousand. His horse *remuda* numbered five hundred head. He employed twenty Mexican riders the year around, giving them the best wages in the south country—twenty-five dollars a month. Colter was a strong figure. Yet his strength was underlain, frontiersman-like, with a genial, easy something—a regard for human companionship, bred from his own long solitudes, a love of fair play and justice, a feeling of generosity and friendliness toward the world in general.

"What matter," he was heard to say, "if them-thar starvin' new homesteaders up to the no'th do jerky a steer or two of mine now an' then? They needs meat worse'n I do, shore. An' I got plenty."

If the new homesteaders to the north had been all, it would have made no great difference. But there were others. A man who called himself Joe Lamarra shortly came to the country. In the course of ten years Lamarra's shrewd, hard cunning built a ranch that eclipsed John Colter's by twofold proportions. Lamarra did not stick solely to the cattle business; mines, land, all that could be turned at a profit received his attention. Colter's Mexican riders, in the nature of that people, were easy to cor-



By

ROLLIN BROWN

A specially attractive story by the man who wrote "An Act of Justice" and "The Back Trail."

rupt: Joe Lamarra knew markets below the Mexican border, for he had a tinge of Mexican blood in his veins. A lawsuit—a new thing for the country then, and one skillfully built up by bribery—finally took a good half of John Colter's lands. The rest was easy, except for one thing.

IN a round-up, far to the mountains to the west, John Colter had captured a coal-black mustang filly. The animal was a short yearling at the time, and John Colter brought her back with him. She received his special attention, in a special corral built beside the others. As a two-year-old, the animal had become as affectionate as a dog, under Colter's care. She grew tall; her long, gangling legs muscled gracefully; her body filled out, under the best of feed, a third larger than the usual mustang. Yet she was mustang-bred, with all the mustang's stamina.

As a three-year-old, John Colter broke her to the saddle, slowly, carefully, taking infinite pains with each new step of the many that make a top saddle-horse. A year later the filly was complete, and soon she was reckoned the best saddle-animal in the country. She was John Colter's pride—the one perfect thing of his own making and handiwork.

Joe Lamarra saw and wanted this animal, and at a time when five hundred dollars would have saved John Colter a thousand cattle, he offered twice that for the colt. John Colter, standing by the corrals, laughed at him, and whistled a long, warbling note. The four-year-old filly, feeding in the pasture land an eighth of a mile away, lifted her head and raised her dainty, pointed ears. Then she came in a long, graceful, swift trot toward John Colter.

"No," he said. "No, I'd sell anything else, but not her."

Lamarra did not wish to buy anything else—his hard, crafty cunning got all that later, without buying it; it also got the mare he wished when she was a six-year-old, and at her prime.

John Colter had gone back to the mountains to the west, the Topatonas, and he did not take the black filly with him because the grass feed was poor there. A *cholo* Indian came and got her one night from the corrals, and rode her fifty miles north to some new holdings of Lamarra's. It was all very simple; and a year later John Colter himself would not have known the animal that he had raised from a little mustang colt.

But he was not given the chance to see her. Lamarra had promoted the town of Danton by that time, and was busy with a gambling-hall and two saloons, all paying him large profit. He forgot the black mare that he had taken so much trouble in getting. His new interests did not concern fine horseflesh, but rather amusements: cards, and the wholesale price of liquor. Lamarra's whole scheme of life changed, guided by his hard, shrewd versatility. His success measured greater with Danton than it had in all the past.

The black mare was ridden by one of Lamarra's half-breed *vaquero* bosses for a time. Then she went to the string of a top hand. By the time she was ten years old she was a stiff-kneed, saddle-galled old horse. At that, she had held her own longer by two or three years than the usual animal of the cow camps. She had been a

good horse; half a dozen riders remembered her more or less affectionately under half a dozen names. She was branded only with the great scrawling mark of Lamarra, for John Colter had never put his iron upon her.

The black mare was at last done for, a year later; and the rider to whose string she then belonged was told to shoot her. He took her out next evening to a coulée, far enough from the ranch buildings so that the smell of her decay would not bother. But here he did not follow his instructions; he tied the black mare to a thick stem of sagebrush. The next morning he rode west, in accord with his duties —and he led the black mare behind him. Outside the line of the farthest fences, he turned her loose, and stroked the soft black muzzle for a time before he rode on.

She had been a good horse, and she deserved this last. After ten years, in which she had known only servitude, she was free. . . . . Mustang blood ran in her veins; that is why she had lasted so long. She lifted her thin scraggy neck, and raised her small pointed ears. To the west, the ranges of the Topatonas were hazy blue; their peaks made a ragged, uneven skyline of the horizon, yet one that was soft and misty, so that the sky and mountains almost blended into one.

IN the course of these later years Lamarra had expected John Colter. It was, therefore, with no especial surprise that he saw one morning the gaunt old figure of the man he had finally ruined, standing before the office door to his larger gambling-hall. It did not greatly alarm Lamarra, however. As he told John Colter to come in he pushed a signal button beneath his desk, and a paid gunman named Syne came to watch the scene carefully from behind a false wall at the far side of the desk.

But the event Lamarra had expected for some years, as a possibility, was not forthcoming. Lamarra's black eyes twinkled. John Colter, more than any other one man, had enriched him, yet the old frontiersman appeared not to know this. Very soon Lamarra made a motion which he knew would take the paid gunman back out of hearing to the greater comfort of the hall beyond. This thing was droll! Lamarra leaned forward.

"Let's see the specimens," he said to John Colter.

From a torn, bulging pocket John Colter drew out a double handful of rock. It was a whitish, veined stuff; a dull yellow gleamed along the discoloration of the veining. Lamarra took a bit of the quartz between his fingers, which had grown fat, and focused a pocket-glass down upon it. After a moment the fat fingers trembled.

"How much of it is there?" he asked.

"This is surface float," said John Colter. "The vein's never been opened up."

Lamarra was quiet for a time, his beady eyes scrutinizing the gaunt, wide-shouldered old figure before him.

"Where is it?" he asked at length.

"In the Topatonas—west."

"How did you come by it?"

"One of the riders of my old ranch gave it to me. The rider died a week ago—it was a last gift to me."

"Huh! You know the location!"

"Within a mile. That's why I came to you."

Lamarra's hard, crafty eyes burned. "What do you mean?"

"That I want money to go into the Topatonas and open the thing up. Then I'll split with you—fifty-fifty."

"Huh!" Lamarra nodded. "The claim's never been recorded then? It belongs to you alone if you file the papers of location first?"

"Yes."

For five minutes Lamarra haggled over nothing, to veil his thoughts. Unrecorded claims, in various ways, had known his attention long before this time. In the end he spoke slowly, with an air of decision:

"I'll go with you. I'll put down the money for that. If the vein looks worth while, I'll put up the rest."

So it was settled. The next morning at sunrise John Colter, Lamarra, and the paid gunman Syne, leading two pack mules, rode west.

FATE had played again into Lamarra's hands, as it had so often before. There was a grim irony to the whole thing; the man who had enriched Lamarra's unscrupulous cunning most was to give all, in the end—and by his own choosing. The humor of the thing was biting. Colter, to Lamarra's eyes, was not unlike the beautiful black saddle-animal that he had gained as a six-year-old. Both were upstanding, proud, strong; and both had given to Joe Lamarra a life that amounted to servitude. The black mare had already

given hers; Colter was in the act of giving the last of his.

Yet this was not all. Even the slight roughness in the way Lamarra had planned was suddenly ironed smooth: In the act of finding the vein, which showed rich beyond Lamarra's hopes, old John Colter slipped, fell a few feet, and broke his leg just above the ankle. Lamarra—in secret triumph—and the gunman Syne bore Colter back to their camp, and here the gunman used what skill he had learned in an eventful life to splint and bandage the leg. He did the best job he could because he had come to like the old frontiersman.

That night, after a long silence, Lamarra spoke to Colter:

"It's necessary," he said, "for you to have some kind of a doctor, and it's also necessary that we record this claim as soon as possible. . . . . I'm going to ride back to Danton tomorrow. Syne'll stay here, and look after you."

"I reckon I could get on alone," said John Colter. "The leg don't feel so bad, splinted up so strong as it is."

"No," said Lamarra, decidedly.

"Call the claim the Fifty-Fifty, then," continued John Colter, "because half of it's to be your'n, an' half's to be mine. Make my name out as locator, an' your'n as pardner—"

"Yes," agreed Lamarra. "Now—"

His words stopped short. He listened for a moment, then turned to Syne.

"Hear anything?" he asked.

"No," said Syne.

"I thought I did—horses' hoofs. . . . . How's our stock fixed tonight?"

"I got the mare you ride hobbled. She's the strongest of the lot—"

"They ought to all be hobbled," said Lamarra, tersely.

"Naw. They'll stick by yore mare. They don't get enough to eat, with feed so pore as it is, strugglin' around with hobbles."

Lamarra was silent; and then, far off, came a long, shrill whinny.

"Listen! What'd I tell you? That's a mustang's whistle!"

"Naw," said Syne. "That's yore mare. Hell—"

STARTING at daylight, Syne climbed for two hours up a steep, high cañon before he found Lamarra's saddle-mare. The mare had plainly given up to the hobbles about her forefeet only when she was exhausted. In the cañon bed ran the unshod, dainty tracks of a little band of mustangs. The two loose horses and mules had followed them. They were gone.

Syne returned to meet his employer's anger. Lamarra's beady eyes flamed. He cursed Syne with a thick, unintelligible mumbling of his lips.

"Hell!" said Syne, at last. "Don't be so cheap! You lost four hosses, but you make a million in this deal. You got a hoss to ride, an' that's all you need. Besides I aint no forty-a-month camp tender; you pay me for—"

Lamarra suddenly became cool, and glanced at John Colter.

"Shut up!" he said.

Without further words he mounted the tired mare, and rode away.

"Pusson'ly," said Syne, turning to Colter, "I'm danged glad to git rid of *him*. He gits on my nerves!"

Then the gunman moved John Colter over to a little knoll, where there was the shade of a stunted pine, and the down-cañon breeze blew cool.

AN hour later Syne returned swiftly toward the camp.

"Shh!" he said to John Colter, in passing. "I'm gittin' shells an' a rifle. That herd of mustangs is comin' down cañon."

John Colter's eyes opened.

"Where?" he asked. "Kin I see 'em from here?"

"Yeah. Look under that lowest limb to the right. See? A scrawny black mare's a-leadin' 'em. She's a third bigger'n the rest, except our own hosses."

"Git me the other rifle," said John Colter. "They's eight of 'em—you cain't git 'em all. If they's one left our hosses'll foller."

The gunman nodded. In a moment he was back.

"Let 'em come on down as close as they will," said John Colter. "I know mustangs; I've hunted 'em. I'll shoot first—thet old black lead mare. Then open up. The wind's in our favor."

The gunman nodded, and stayed by John Colter's side. After a time, he crept a little ahead, eagerly.

"No, they're comin' closer," whispered John Colter. "Not yet! Say, does it appear to you thet-there black mare carries a brand? Look at the near flank. See? A big, scrawlin' thing, like Lamarra's. . . . . They's sumpthin' familiar in

the way thet mare carries herself—proud-like. 'Pears like she's saddle-marked, too!"

After a while John Colter whispered again, but his words were too low for Syne to catch except in part:

"Proud-like . . . . yeah . . . . she's big, tall, a third bigger'n—"

Then Syne, a gunman of much experience, who had once been wounded close to the point of death, recognized something he had heard once before in another voice. It was a cold, steel-like, deadly ring, as John Colter muttered: "Take keer! Leave yore gun where it air, but draw yore hands back slow. Keep one to each ear!"

SYNE concluded that the old man had suddenly gone mad, for Colter began to whistle, a low, plaintive, warbling note.

Instantly the mustangs stood tensed, poised, their slender legs gathered for the spring, their nostrils wide to catch the scent of danger. Alone, the old black lead mare lifted her head high and flicked her slender, pointed ears erect, but not with any trace of fear. Rather was she eager, waiting expectant. She suddenly appeared even less wild than the four animals of Lamarra's, grazing on stupidly at the tail of the herd. She took a dainty step forward.

Again the whistle sounded, more shrilly, echoing down into the cañon. By its repetition the mustangs perceived the direction of the danger, and they were gone in a swift, mad rush of unshod hoofs, the four tame animals of Lamarra's lumbering after them. It happened in an instant. But up the slope of the cañon came an old black mare, her head high, alert, trotting with a long, graceful stride. . . . .

After a while John Colter said clearly, "Get up, Syne, and stick a saddle on the mare. I'm ridin' to Danton this mornin'."

The gunman obeyed. He helped the old man into the saddle, when he could have overcome him as easily as if Colter had been a child; and he padded the splinted leg with a half-blanket off his own bed.

He watched the old man on the scrawny black horse charge down the slope in the way Lamarra had gone. And when the old man was almost out of sight, he cupped his hands to his mouth. "So long, ol'-timer! Good luck!" he called.

In the echoes of his voice the man and the horse were gone.

"Guts!" said Syne. "He has 'em. I wonder—"

The thing Syne wondered was just what, after all, had happened. Syne had only seen the black mare once before—when she was the top-horse of a Lamarra top hand—and of course he did not remember her. He did not know of the twenty years that had marked the gradual fall of the old frontiersman to the cunning of Lamarra. And he did not know that the scrawling Lamarra brand on the black mare had just made this all clear to old John Colter.

Yet Syne was certainly not without sympathy in the affair. . . . .

An apparition, it seemed, had come into sight behind Lamarra. It was an old man, and there was no mistaking that gaunt, rugged body swaying in the saddle. The horse he rode was coal black—Lamarra recognized that horse, remembering with a sudden vividness, although he had not thought of it all in years.

Lamarra lashed his own tired mount; he beat her frantically with his heavy *romel.* The flat plains of the desert lay down below, not far. Once there, he reasoned, his mare would be the swifter. She was a good animal and well bred, but she was not a mountain horse. The very fact that she was well bred had told on her in the short time she had been forced to live on the scant mountain fare. Her night of struggle with the hobbles had rendered her weak and unsafe to start with.

She plunged on through the rocks and brush of the slope. Lamarra was a heavy man; he had grown fat and ungainly with middle age, and he had not ridden thus for ten years. . . . . He glanced back. The black mare was gaining.

Again he began to lash his mount. She responded weakly.

IT happened in an instant. One second the animal was racing on, headlong, frantic under the beating of the *romel;* the next, she was upending, turning over and over, until she lay in a limp heap, a hundred feet down the slope from the point where she had stumbled. . . . .

After a time, Lamarra rose, dazed, from the brush where he had been thrown. He got slowly to his feet. Swaying giddily, he saw John Colter go by on the mountain-bred old black mare, that had the stamina of the mustang breed in her body.

John Colter rode upright and straight in the saddle, looking neither to the right nor to the left. Years before, when Lamarra had first wanted the black filly, John Colter had sat his saddle thus.

One of the most interesting exploits of Hercule Poirot, detective extraordinary, in his battle to the death with a big crime combine.

"Regard, I pray you, this mutton. Regard it closely!"

The Dartmoor Adventure

By AGATHA CHRISTIE

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

"BUT where are we going?" I inquired for perhaps the tenth time.

Poirot loves being mysterious. He will never part with a piece of information until the last possible moment. In this instance, having taken successively a bus and two trains and arrived in the neighborhood of one of London's most depressing southern suburbs, he consented at last to explain matters.

"We go, Hastings, to see the one man in England who knows the underground life of China."

"Indeed? Who is he?"

"A man you have never heard of—a Mr. John Ingles. To all intents and purposes he is a retired Civil Servant of mediocre intellect, with a house full of Chinese curios with which he bores his friends and acquaintances. Nevertheless I am assured by those who should know, that the only man capable of giving me the information I seek is this same John Ingles."

A few moments more saw us ascending the steps of "The Laurels," as Mr. Ingles' residence was called. I did not notice a laurel bush of any kind, so deduced that it had been named according to the usual obscure nomenclature of the suburbs.

We were admitted by an impassive-faced Chinese servant and ushered into the presence of his master. Mr. Ingles was a squarely built man, somewhat yellow of countenance, with deep-set eyes that were oddly reflective in character. He rose to greet us, laying aside an open letter which he held in his hand. He referred to it after his greeting.

"Sit down, wont you? Halsey tells me that you want some information and that I may be useful to you in the matter."

"That is so, monsieur. I ask of you if you have any knowledge of a man named Li Chang Yen."

"That's rum—very rum indeed. How did you come to hear about the man?"

"You know him then?"

"I've met him once. And I know something of him—not quite as much as I should like to. But it surprises me that anyone else in England should even have heard of him. He's a great man in his

way—mandarin class and all that, you know—but that's not the crux of the matter. There's good reason to suppose that he's the man behind it all."

"Behind what?"

"Everything. The Republic, the various upheavals of China, all this last unrest. It's even suspected that he was at the bottom of the Russian trouble. Wherever you find the hand of China, there you will find Li Chang Yen behind it. What's his game? Nobody knows—but you can be sure of this, it's deep, and it's oriental. That man is the controlling brain of the East today. We don't understand the East—we never shall—but Li Chang Yen is its moving spirit. Not that he comes out into the limelight—oh, not at all—never moves from his palace in Pekin. But he pulls strings—that's it, pulls strings, and things happen far away."

"We have reason to believe that that is true," said Poirot quietly.

"Very odd, your knowing about him. Didn't fancy a soul in England had ever heard of him. I'd rather like to know how you did come to hear of him—if it's not indiscreet."

"Not in the least, monsieur. A man took refuge in my rooms. He was suffering badly from shock, but he managed to tell us enough to interest us in this Li Chang Yen. He described four people—the Big Four—an organization hitherto undreamed of. Number One is Li Chang Yen, Number Two is an unknown American, Number Three an equally unknown Frenchwoman, Number Four may be called the executive of the organization—*the destroyer*— Tell me, monsieur, is that phrase known to you at all? The Big Four?"

"Not in connection with Li Chang Yen—no, I can't say it is. But I've heard it, or read it just lately—and in some unusual connection too. Ah! I've got it!"

He rose and went across to an inlaid lacquer cabinet—an exquisite thing, as I could see. He returned with a letter in his hand.

"Here you are. From an old seafaring man I ran across once in Shanghai. Hoary old reprobate—maudlin with drink by now, I should say. I took this to be the ravings of alcoholism."

He read it aloud:

Dear sir:

You may not remember me, but you did me a good turn once in Shanghai. Do me another now. I must have money to get out of the country. I'm well hid here, I hope, but any day they may get me. The Big Four, I mean. It's life or death. I've plenty of money, but I daren't get at it, for fear of putting them wise. Send me a couple of hundred in notes. I'll repay it faithful—I swear to that.

Your servant, sir.
JONATHAN WHALLEY.

"Dated from Granite Bungalow, Hoppator, Dartmoor. I'm afraid I regarded it as a rather crude method of relieving me of a couple of hundred which I can ill spare. If it's any use to you—" He held it out.

"*Je vous remercie, monsieur.* I start for Hoppator *l'heure même.*"

"Dear me—this is very interesting. Supposing I came along too? Any objections?"

"I should be charmed to have your company," replied Poirot, "but we must start at once. We shall not reach Dartmoor until close on nightfall as it is."

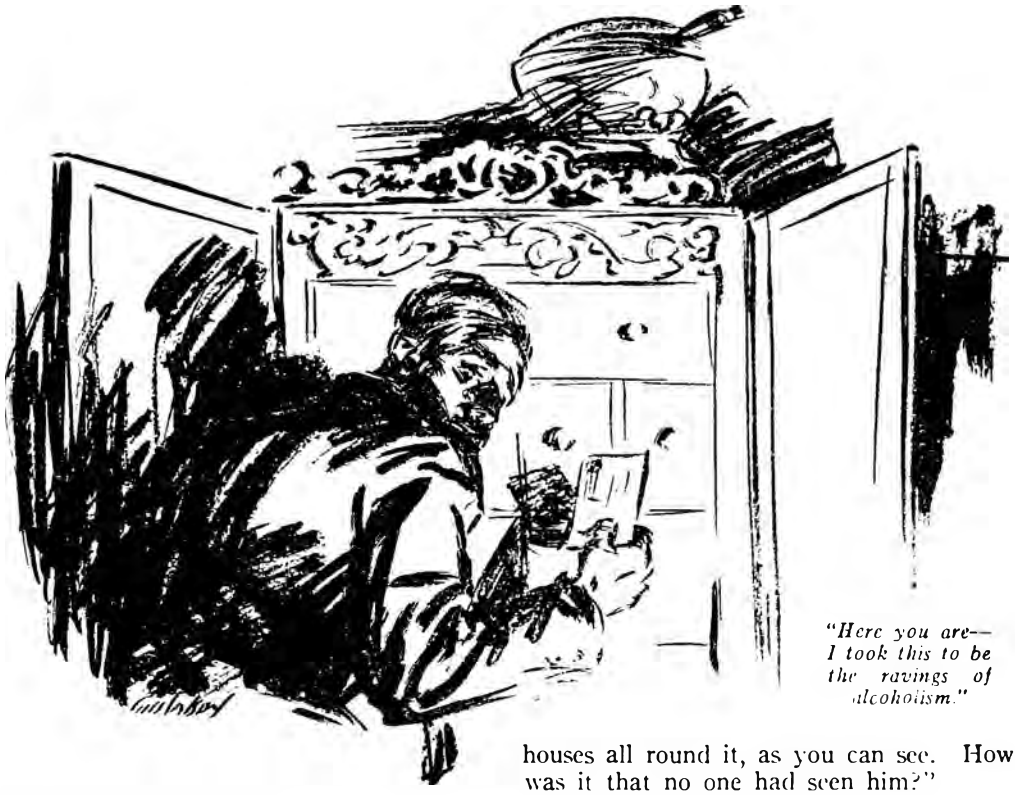
John Ingles did not delay us more than a couple of minutes, and soon we were in the train moving out of Paddington bound for the West Country. Hoppator was a small village clustered in a hollow, right on the fringe of the moorland. It was reached by a nine-mile drive from Moretonhamstead. It was about eight o'clock when we arrived, but as the month was July, the daylight was still abundant.

We drove into the village and asked for the whereabouts of Granite Bungalow. A dozen willing hands pointed it out, a small gray cottage right in the center of the village.

"There be t' bungalow. Do ye want to see t' Inspector? A shocking murder t'was, seemingly. Pools of blood, they do say!" vouchsafed one of the villagers.

WE wasted no time in seeking out Inspector Meadows. Poirot introduced the magic name of Inspector Japp, and all was made easy for us.

"Yes sir, murdered this morning—a shocking business! They phoned to Moreton and I came out at once. Looked a mysterious thing to begin with. The old man—he was about seventy, you know, and fond of his glass, from all I hear—was lying on the floor of the living-room. There was a bruise on his head and his throat was cut from ear to ear. Blood all over the place, as you can understand. The woman who cooks for him, Betsy Andrews, she told us that her master had several



"Here you are—I took this to be the ravings of alcoholism."

little Chinese jade figures that he'd told her were very valuable and these had disappeared. That of course looked like assault and robbery, but there were all sorts of difficulties in the way of that solution. The old fellow had two people in the house: Betsy Andrews, who is a Hoppator woman, and a rough kind of manservant, Robert Grant. Grant had gone to the farm to fetch the milk, which he does every day, and Betsy had stepped out to have a chat with a neighbor. She was away only twenty minutes, between ten and half past, and the crime must have been done then. Grant returned to the house first. He went in by the back door which was open—no one locks doors round here, not in broad daylight at all events—put the milk in the larder and went into his own room to read the paper and have a smoke. Had no idea anything unusual had occurred—at least that's what he says. Then Betsy comes in, goes into the living-room, sees what's happened and lets out a screech that'd wake the dead. That's all fair and square, some one got in whilst those two were out and did the poor old man in. But it struck me at once that he must be a pretty cool customer. He'd have to come right up the village street, or creep through some one's back yard. Granite Cottage has got houses all round it, as you can see. How was it that no one had seen him?"

"Aha, I perceive your point," said Poirot. "To continue?"

"Well, sir, 'fishy,' I said to myself. 'Fishy.' And I began to look about me. Those jade figures now. Would a common tramp ever suspect that they were valuable? Anyway it was madness to try such a thing in broad daylight. Suppose the old man had yelled for help?"

"I presume, Inspector," said Mr. Ingles, "that the bruise on the head was inflicted before death?"

"Quite right, sir. First knocked him silly, the murderer did, and then cut his throat. That's clear enough. But how the dickens did he come or go? They notice strangers quick enough in a little place like this. It came to me all at once—*nobody did come.* I took a good look round. It had rained the night before, and there were footprints clear enough going in and out of the kitchen. In the living-room there were two sets of footprints only—Betsy Andrews' stopped at the door—Mr. Whalley's they were (he was wearing carpet slippers), and another man's. The other man had stepped in the bloodstains and I traced his bloody footprints—I beg your pardon, sir."

"Not at all," said Mr. Ingles, with a faint smile: "the adjective is perfectly understood."

"I traced 'em to the kitchen—but not beyond. Point Number One. On the lintel of Robert Grant's door was a faint smear—a smear of blood. That's Point Number Two. Point Number Three was when I got hold of Grant's boots which he had taken off and fitted them to the marks. That settled it. It was an inside job. I warned Grant and took him into custody, and what do you think I found packed away in his portmanteau? The little jade figures and a ticket of leave! Robert Grant was also Abraham Biggs, convicted for felony and housebreaking five years ago."

The Inspector paused triumphantly.

"What do you think of that, gentlemen?"

"I think," said Poirot, "that it appears to be a very clear case—an almost *singularly* clear case if I may say so. This Biggs, or Grant, must be a very foolish and uneducated man?"

"Oh, he is that—a rough, common sort of fellow. No idea what a footprint may mean."

"Clearly not a reader of detective fiction! Well, Inspector, I congratulate you. Any chance of our seeing the scene of the crime?"

"I'll take you there myself this minute. I'd like you to see those footprints."

"I too should like to see them. Yes, yes, very interesting, very ingenious."

FORTHWITH we set out. Mr. Ingles and the Inspector forged ahead. I drew Poirot back a little so as to be able to speak to him out of the Inspector's hearing.

"What do you really think, Poirot? Is there more in this than meets the eye?"

"That is just the question, *mon ami*. Whalley says plainly enough in his letter that the Big Four are on his track, and we know from our experience that the Big Four is no chimera of the imagination—yet everything seems to point to the fact that this man Grant committed the crime. Why did he do so? For the sake of the little jade figures? Or is he an agent of the Big Four? I confess that the whole thing seems more credible on the latter hypothesis. However valuable the jade, a man of that class was not likely to realize the fact—at any rate not to the point of committing murder for them. (That, *par exemple*, ought to have struck the Inspector.) He could have stolen the jade and made off with it without committing a brutal and quite purposeless murder. Ah, yes, I fear our Devonshire friend has not used his little gray cells! He has measured footprints and omitted to reflect and arrange his ideas with the necessary order and method."

The Inspector drew a key from his pocket and unlocked the door of Granite Bungalow. The day had been fine and dry, so our feet were not likely to leave any prints; nevertheless we wiped them carefully on the mat before entering.

A WOMAN came up out of the gloom and spoke to the Inspector and he turned aside. Then he spoke over his shoulder.

"Have a good look around, Mr. Poirot, and see all there is to see. I'll be back in about five minutes. By the way, here's Grant's boot. I brought it along with me for you to compare the impressions."

We went into the living-room and the sound of the Inspector's footsteps died away outside. Ingles was attracted immediately by some Chinese curios on a table in the corner and went over to examine them. He seemed to take no interest in Poirot's doings. I, on the other hand, watched him with breathless interest. The floor was covered with a dark green linoleum which was ideal for showing up footprints. A door at the farther end led into the small kitchen. From there another door opened into the scullery where the back door was situated, and another to the bedroom which had been occupied by Robert Grant. Having explored the ground, Poirot commented upon it in a low running monologue.

"Here is where the body lay; that big dark stain and the splashes all around mark the spot. Traces of carpet slippers and Number Nine boots, you observe, but all very confused. Then two sets of tracks leading to and from the kitchen. Whoever the murderer was, he came in that way. You have the boot, Hastings? Give it to me." He compared it carefully with the prints. "Yes, both made by the same man, Robert Grant. He came in that way, killed the old man, and went back to the kitchen. He had stepped in the blood—see the stains he left as he went out? Nothing to be seen in the kitchen; all the village has been walking about in it. He went into his own room—no, first he went back again to the scene

of the crime. Was that to get the little jade figures? Or had he forgotten something that might incriminate him?"

"Perhaps he killed the old man the second time he went in," I suggested.

"*Mais non*, you do not observe. On one of the outgoing footmarks stained with blood, there is superimposed an ingoing one. I wonder what he went back for—the little jade figures as an afterthought? It is all ridiculous—stupid."

"Well, he's given himself away rather hopelessly."

"*N'est-ce pas?* I tell you, Hastings, it goes against reason. It offends my little gray cells. Let us go into his bedroom—ah, yes, there is the smear of blood on the lintel and just a trace of footmarks—bloodstained. Robert Grant's footmarks, and his only, near the body, Robert Grant the only man who was in the house. Yes, it must be so."

"What about the old woman?" I said suddenly. "She was in the house alone after Grant had gone for the milk. She might have killed him and then gone out. Her feet would leave no prints if she hadn't been outside."

"Very good, Hastings; I wondered whether that hypothesis would occur to you. I had already thought of it and rejected it. Betsy Andrews is a local woman, well known hereabouts. She can have no connection with the Big Four, and besides old Whalley was a powerful fellow, by all accounts. This is a man's work—not a woman's."

"I suppose the Big Four couldn't have had some diabolical contrivance concealed in the ceiling, something which descended automatically and cut the old man's throat and was afterwards drawn up again?"

"Like Jacob's ladder? I know, Hastings, that you have an imagination of the most fertile—but I implore of you to keep it within bounds."

The Inspector touched his head significantly, with a grin at me.

I subsided, abashed. Poirot continued to wander about, poking into rooms and cupboards with a profoundly dissatisfied expression on his face. Suddenly he uttered an excited yelp, reminiscent of a Pomeranian dog. I rushed to join him. He was standing in the larder in a dramatic attitude. In his hand he was brandishing—a leg of mutton!

"My dear Poirot!" I cried. "What is the matter. Have you suddenly gone mad?"

"Regard, I pray you, this mutton! But regard it closely!"

I regarded it closely, but could see nothing unusual about it. It seemed to me a very ordinary leg of mutton. I said as much.

Poirot threw me a withering glance.

"But do you not see this—and this—and this—"

He illustrated each "*this*" with a jab at the unoffending joint, dislodging small icicles as he did so.

POIROT had just accused me of being wildly imaginative, but I now felt that he was far more so than I had ever been. Did he seriously think these slivers of ice

were crystals of a deadly poison? That was the only construction I could put upon his extraordinary agitation.

"It's frozen meat," I explained gently. "Imported, you know. New Zealand."

He stared at me for a moment or two and then broke into a strange laugh.

"How marvelous is my friend Hastings! He knows everything—but everything! How do they say?—'Inquire Within upon Everything'—that is my friend Hastings!"

He flung down the leg of mutton on its dish again, and left the larder. Then he looked through the window.

"Here comes our friend the Inspector. It is well. I have seen all I want to see here." He drummed on the table absent-mindedly, as though absorbed in calculation, and then asked suddenly. "What is the day of the week, *mon ami?*"

"Monday," I said, rather astonished. "What—"

"Ah! Monday, is it? A bad day of the week. To commit a murder on a Monday is a mistake."

Passing back to the living-room, he tapped the glass on the wall, and glanced at the thermometer.

"Set fair, and seventy degrees Fahrenheit. An orthodox English summer day."

Ingles was still examining various pieces of Chinese pottery.

"You do not take much interest in this inquiry, monsieur?" said Poirot.

The other gave a slow smile.

"It's not my job, you see. I'm a connoisseur of some things, but not of this. So I just stand back and keep out of the way. I've learned patience in the East."

The Inspector came bustling in, apologizing for having been so long away. He insisted on taking us over most of the ground again, but finally we got away.

"I must appreciate your thousand politenesses, Inspector," said Poirot, as we were walking down the village street again. "There is just one more request I should like to put to you."

"You want to see the body, perhaps, sir?"

"Oh, dear me, no! I have not the least interest in the body. I want to see Robert Grant."

"You'll have to drive back with me to Moreton to see him, sir."

"Very well, I will do so. But I must see him and be able to speak to him alone."

The Inspector caressed his upper lip.

"Well, I don't know about that, sir."

"I assure you that if you can get through to Scotland Yard you will receive full authority."

"I've heard of you, of course, sir, and I know you've done us a good turn now and again. But it's very irregular."

"Nevertheless it is necessary," said Poirot calmly. "It is necessary for this reason. Grant is not the murderer."

"What! Who is, then?"

"The murderer was, I should fancy, a youngish man. He drove up to Granite Bungalow in a trap which he left outside. He went in, committed the murder, came out and drove away again. He was bareheaded, and his clothing was slightly bloodstained."

"But—but the whole village would have seen him!"

"Not under certain circumstances."

"Not if it was dark, perhaps, but the crime was committed in broad daylight."

Poirot merely smiled.

"And the horse and trap, sir, how could you tell that? Any amount of wheeled vehicles have passed along outside. There's no marks of one in particular to be seen."

"Not with the eyes of the body, perhaps, but with the eyes of the mind, yes."

The Inspector touched his forehead significantly with a grin at me. I was utterly bewildered, but I had faith in Poirot.

Further discussion ended in our all driving back to Moreton with the Inspector. Poirot and I were taken to Grant, but a constable was present during the interview.

Poirot went straight to the point. "Grant, I know you to be innocent of this crime. Relate to me in your own words exactly what happened."

THE prisoner was a man of medium height with a somewhat unpleasing cast of features. He looked a jailbird if ever a man did.

"Honest to God, I never did it!" he whined. "Some one put those little glass figures amongst my traps. It was a frame-up, that's what it was. I went straight to my room when I came in, like I said. I never knew a thing till Betsy screeched out. S'elp me God, I didn't!"

Poirot rose.

"If you can't tell me the truth, that is the end of it."

"But, guv'nor—"

"You *did* go into the room—you *did* know your master was dead, and you were

just preparing to make a bolt of it when the good Betsy made her terrible discovery!"

The man stared astoundedly at Poirot.

"Come now, is it not so? I tell you solemnly—on my word of honor—that to be frank now is your only chance."

"I'll risk it," said the man, suddenly. "It was just as you say. I come in, and went straight to the master—and there he was, dead on the floor and blood all round. Then I got the wind up proper. They'd ferret out my record, and for a certainty they'd say it was me as had done him in. My first thought was to get away at once."

"And the jade figures?"

The man hesitated. "You see—"

"You took them by a kind of reversion to instinct, as it were? You had heard your master say they were valuable, and you felt you might as well go the whole hog. That I understand. Now answer me this. Was it the second time you went into the room that you took the figures?"

"I didn't go in a second time. Once was enough for me."

"You are sure of that?"

"Absolutely certain."

"Good. Now, when did you come out of prison?"

"Two months ago."

"How did you obtain this job?"

"Through one of them Prisoners' Help Societies. Bloke met me when I came out."

"What was he like?"

"Not exactly a parson, but looked like one. Soft black hat and mincing way of talking. Got a broken front tooth. Spectacled chap—Saunders, his name was. Said he hoped I was repentant, and that he'd find me a good post. I went to old Whalley on his recommendation."

Poirot rose once more.

"I thank you. I know all now. Have patience." He paused in the doorway and added. "Saunders gave you a pair of boots, didn't he?"

Grant looked very astonished.

"Why yes, he did. But how did you know?"

"It is my business to know things," said Poirot gravely.

After a word or two to the Inspector, the three of us went to the White Hart and discussed eggs and bacon and Devonshire cider.

"Any elucidations yet?" asked Ingles with a smile.

"Yes, the case is clear enough now—but see you—I shall have a good deal of difficulty in proving it. Whalley was killed by order of the Big Four—but *not* by Grant. A very clever man got Grant that post and deliberately planned to make him the scapegoat—an easy matter with Grant's prison record. He gave him a pair of boots, one of two duplicate pairs. The other he kept himself. It was all so simple. When Grant is out of the house and Betsy is chatting in the village (which she probably did every day of her life) he drives up wearing the duplicate boots, enters the kitchen, goes through into the living-room, fells the old man with a blow and cuts his throat. Then he returns to the kitchen, removes the boots, puts on another pair, and carrying the first pair, goes out to his trap and drives off again."

INGLES looked steadily at Poirot. "There's a catch in it still," he commented. "Why did nobody see him?"

"Ah, that is where comes in the cleverness of Number Four—for it *was* Number Four, I am convinced. Everybody saw him—and yet nobody saw him. You see, he drove up in a butcher's cart!"

I uttered an exclamation. "The leg of mutton!"

"Exactly, Hastings, the leg of mutton. Everybody swore that no one had been to Granite Cottage that morning, but nevertheless I found in the larder a leg of mutton, still frozen. It was Monday, so the meat must have been delivered that morning, or on Saturday, and in this hot weather, it would not have remained frozen over Sunday. So some one *had* been to the bungalow, and a man on whom a trace of blood here and there would attract no attention."

"Damned ingenious!" cried Ingles approvingly.

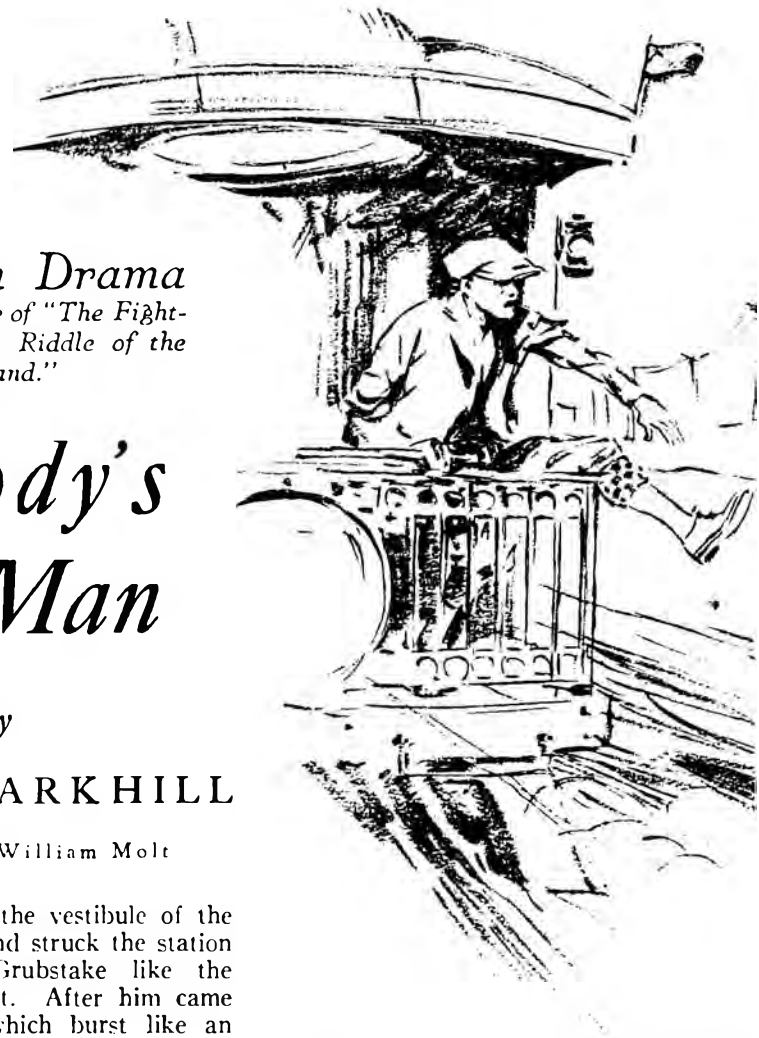
"Yes, he is clever, Number Four."

"As clever as Hercule Poirot?" I murmured.

My friend threw me a glance of dignified reproach.

"There are some jests that you should not permit yourself, Hastings," he said sententiously. "Have I not saved an innocent man from being sent to the gallows? That is enough for one day."

"The Lady of the Stairs," another story of Hercule Poirot by Agatha Christie, will appear in our forthcoming May issue.



A Western Drama

by the gifted author of "The Fightin' Fools" and "The Riddle of the Range-land."

Nobody's Yes Man

By

FORBES PARKHILL

Illustrated by William Molt

HE soared from the vestibule of the moving train and struck the station platform of Grubstake like the crash of a thunderbolt. After him came a battered suitcase which burst like an explosive shell.

"There's a job for the sawbones," I thought. But at that very instant he bounced to his feet. He spat from between bloody lips, tore off his sheep-lined coat, and charged after the puffing train.

The train was gathering speed, but he was faster. He lunged forward, clutched at the handrail, and swung back onto the steps of the vestibule from which he had shot so suddenly. But as he struggled to draw himself up, a long, tweed-clad arm reached out leisurely; a large slender hand placed itself on his tousled ginger head, and shoved.

"Stick to it, kid!" I shouted before I had time to think. "Attaboy, Ginger!" You'd have yelled, yourself.

I thought his neck would crack. But his grip on the handrail was unshaken.

Suddenly, however, he loosed his grip and clutched convulsively at the tweed-clad arm. I thought the next instant would see the two of 'em ground beneath the wheels.

He hung there for the merest instant. Then a long, golf-stockinged leg in tweed plus-fours shot out, and a heavy tan brogue caught him on the shoulder.

The leg straightened and he shot out into space. I gasped. This time he struck in the cinders beyond the platform. Not like the crash of a thunderbolt, this time—rather like a rider pitched from a galloping horse, bowling over and over.

He sat up. Angry, flinty eyes flashed fire as he glared at the receding train. Both hands still clutched the tweed coat-sleeve, which had parted from the owner's coat at the shoulder. He looked at the sleeve, and grinned.

Suddenly there shot from the train vestibule a comet-like streak of white. It struck the cinders, rolled, yelped shrilly, and finally resolved itself into a no-longer-white wire-haired fox terrier.

The leg straightened and he shot out into space, like a rider pitched from a galloping horse.

"Ya-a-ah!" jeered the redhead, defiantly. But it was lost on the enemy, who was now beyond hearing distance.

He scrambled stiffly to his feet and waved the empty sleeve triumphantly, like a captured battle-flag.

"C'm here, pup," he said to the terrier, wiping the blood from his mouth with the back of his hand. Seemingly oblivious of his audience—the baggage-smasher, the deputy sheriff, the two girl hashers, and me—he began to brush the cinders from his threadbare maroon-and-black checkered shirt.

The terrier approached stiffly, with much dignity. Carrot-top stooped and patted him.

"If you ever see that guy again," said the man to the dog, "you got my permission to take a chunk outa his leg. The blankety-dashed excuse for a cock-eyed blinkety-blankety ding-dong dash—"

"Hey, there, young feller!" cut in the baggage-smasher. "Pipe down on the cussin'. Dontcha see them ladies?"

The redhead turned, and for the first time beheld his audience. I smiled reassuringly. But his startled glance swept past me to the two hashers standing by the waiting-room door. He colored furiously beneath his make-up of gore and grime.

"L-ladies," he stammered. "I—I sure want to—to apologize. I just got so da—so cussed mad at that big stiff when he kicked the pup, that I up and pasted him one. And then—then he knocked me for a row of passenger-coaches, and I didn't have time to look around and see who was watching or listening. I—"

"Aw, that's all right," broke in the henna-haired hasher, the older of the two. "Guess if we never heard nothin' worse'n that over to the lunch-counter, we mighta been shocked. Eh, Moyra?"

But the younger hasher, the one with

the chestnut bob, was staring soberly at the grimy, blood-masked newcomer.

That was when the deputy sheriff put in his oar. Nobody asked him to. But he's one of the kind that always pushes himself into the middle of everything. He stomped up to the brick-top, announcing:

"I'm the dep'ty sheriff here in Grubstake. I want to know how come yuh land in our midst so unceremonious."

His distrust was evident as he eyed the newcomer up and down. And believe me, the object of his inspection looked like something Tabby had dragged in.

Rebellious rusty hair sprinkled with cinders. Eyes, recently blazing, now flinty blue, and cold. A nose that looked as if some one with good aim but without good judgment had taken a poke at it sometime, and dished it. A jaw just the merest bit undershot, and dripping blood.

Face red and lean, with a million or so freckles struggling to be seen beneath the dirt. Of medium height, but wiry, he was, moving as if through the impulse of steel springs. A tough customer to tangle with, you'd say.

For a moment he looked coolly at the deputy. Then, stooping, he picked up the worn khaki coat he'd shucked so hastily.

"I said," went on the deputy, who seemed to me a little sore because the carrot-top hadn't cringed before him, "we aint accustomed to such hilarious arrivals in Grubstake. Bums git the choice o' jail, or the first train out, so—"

I figured it was time for me to have my little say.

"Hold on, Jim," I remarked to the deputy, stepping forward. "I've got a hunch I know something about this young gent. I came down from camp to meet a new chainman, shipped us by our Denver employment office to join up with the Vulcan Power and Light surveying gang. Let's see. I ought to have the card in my shirt pocket. . . . . Yep; here it is. If he's our man, his name should be S. Barr. But the huskies of the Vulcan gang, I'll bet you a slick nickel, wont call him by that name!"

THE youngster grinned at me. "I'm your man." He ran his fingers through that brick-top thatch.

"You guessed it. My friends,"—he stressed that word, "—my friends call me Ginger. Here's the ticket from the employment office."

He thrust a hand into a pocket. Again he reddened as he withdrew it, empty. Hurriedly he searched his other pockets.

"Must have lost it somewhere in the scuffle. Had it before I got thrown off the train. Maybe it's somewhere in this junk."

He turned to the exploded suitcase. It lay in the midst of its erstwhile contents: woolen shirts, thick socks, a dozen huge printed kerchiefs, a few simple toilet articles. All cheap, and most of the clothing patched and worn.

A flash of sunlight glinted from some shiny, metallic object in the midst of the scattered dunnage. He seemed to catch the glitter at the same instant I did. He darted forward suddenly, seized the shiny object and thrust it inside his shirt.

He glanced about from one to another. His face, coloring still again beneath its blood and dirt, wore an unmistakable expression of guilt. It was none of my business, but I couldn't help wondering—

He threw the other articles into the suitcase pell-mell and sought to close it. But both hinges were broken, and he was forced to carry it under his arm.

"Nope," he announced at length, turning to me. "It must be lost. But they told me somebody'd be here to steer me to the camp."

"Fair enough." I extended my hand. I was struggling between a hastily formed liking for the youngster and a faint suspicion born of his odd behavior of the moment before.

"My name's Colman," I went on. "Draftsman. D'you want to wash up and grab a bite to eat before we start? It's twelve miles, horseback, to camp."

"Sooner we get started, the better. I'm ready—"

"Hold on," interrupted the deputy. "Yuh aint through with *me*, yet! Who was this feller yuh fit with, which threw yuh off'm the train?"

"Never saw him before, Sheriff. He wore city clothes, with boy's knicker pants, slicked his hair back and looked like he thought he had the world by the tail with a downhill drag. But for all that, I'm here to say he sure packs a wallop—"

Now, it's a tough job these days to get anyone at all to leave the bright lights of the city for a job such as the Vulcan surveying gang offered: too tough a job to take a chance on another one getting in jail. It was a hard bunch of roughnecks

we had. And I'll say most of 'em had been on the inside looking out, at one time or another. I knew old Gohegan would give me sizzling blue blazes if I let Jim slam this baby in the cooler, what with being short-handed anyhow, due partly to bullets and partly to yellow streaks.

"Now, Jim," I broke in, "no one made any complaint against this lad. And there weren't any witnesses—"

"Witnesses?" sputtered the deputy. "Witnesses? Didn't we all see him get heaved off the train? Didn't—"

"We only saw half the battle," I argued, smiling pretty, although I'd liked to have taken a poke at him. "How do we know there weren't mitigating circumstances—you know, self-defense, or something like that?

"If you throw him in jail, it'll cost the county a heap for his room and board, 'cause you know these birds always land on a new job flat broke, and can't pay a fine. Turn him over to me, Jim, and I'll be responsible for him. If anyone brings charges against him, I'll promise to deliver him to you."

"Oh, well—"

I turned to Ginger. "Beat it over to the lunchroom," I told him, before the deputy could change his mind. "Wash that mug of yours and patch it up the best you can, wrap yourself around a big feed, and be ready to leave in thirty minutes."

He winked at me and beat it.

"I dunno whether I oughta let him go," remarked the deputy. "The office got word this mornin' to be on the lookout fer some young feller who escaped while he was bein' taken to the Big House at Cañon City to serve a stretch fer highway robbery.

"Stuck up a auto stage, it seems. Ditched the guards while they was changin' cars at Denver. But an escaped convict wouldn't have a suitcase an' ticket fer a job on a surveyin' gang; an' besides, the description don't read much like this kid. But you know them descriptions don't amount to—"

"Oh, say, Jim, why don't you charge him with murder and be done with it?" I grinned when I said it, because you can kid a bird like this deputy when you can't get heavy with him.

At the same time, I was afraid if I talked with him long enough, he'd think up something else suspicious. So I told him I thought I'd grab a bite to eat myself, and started to the lunchroom in the wake of the two hashers.

"Say, Moyra," I heard the henna-haired one say to the one with the chestnut bob, "didja ever see anyone blush like that? I been dealin' 'em off the arm for two years, an' I never seen a man turn that color before. I kinda like it."

"I know he didn't see us when he—when he cussed," Moyra returned thoughtfully. "And they were *clean* cusswords, if you get what I mean." For the space of twenty steps she said nothing, and then: "I wonder what it was he grabbed so sudden?"

"Gee, Moyra! Didn'tcha see? A photograph. Pitcher of a swell blonde dame in a silver frame."

Ginger looked quite decent by the time he'd slicked himself up and stuck his feet under the lunch counter. That is, as good as anyone with a mug like his could look with a puffed eye and a skinned cheekbone.

Henna-hair horned in and got his order. But I noticed Ginger kept his eye on the hasher with the chestnut bob.

That's the way with these birds. They carry a girl's picture with 'em, and then try to start something with a new girl in every town. But I should worry, as long as they can drag a chain.

CHAPTER II

"BUT why," asked Ginger as our plodding horses neared the top of Scramble Hill, "did your message to the employment agency ask for a chainman who could use a gun?"

"Did you bring one?" I asked. Ever since we'd left Grubstake I'd been giving him the up-and-down from the corner of my eye, trying to figure out whether he's one of those birds you've got to boss with a pick-handle, or whether you could treat him like a human.

"Nope. Don't like to pack a gun. 'Fraid it might go off and hurt some one."

"If I hadn't seen what happened when you got off the train, I'd have said you weren't exactly spoiling for a fight, Ginger."

"Fight? Not me! That is, unless it's necessary. Now, when some one treats a dog like that—"

"Did that knickerbocker lad happen to say where he was going?"

"Say, Colman, that's the 'steenth question you've asked about that bird since we left town. He didn't say, but if he had, what difference would it make?"

"I've got a hunch, that's all, Ginger. You see, young Harlan Skinner, only son of old Papa Skinner, multimillionaire owner of the Vulcan Company, from whom you are about to draw your pay, has been disowned by the old man recently.

"Called him a five-pound dumb-bell, according to the word that seeps through to us, because Papa wouldn't adopt some of his fool ideas of how to run the business.

"So the old man kicked him out, and Mr. Harlan is supposed to have come West to make a fortune of his own, or something of the kind. There's so few wear knicker pants around these parts that I thought your friend the enemy might be young Skinner. If he is, I hope you knocked him loose from his aspirations, because I've got no use for a rich man's son."

"Sorry," said Ginger gravely. "He didn't give me his card. But if he's the lad you think, I've made a swell start on this job—taking a poke at the boss' son."

"If that's young Skinner, he's in no position to do you any dirt," I assured him. "Unless he and the old man kiss and make up, you should worry what the young fellow thinks of you. With me, you couldn't have a better recommendation than the fact that you slammed him one."

"Yeah, but what's the big idea, Colman? I can't figure out yet whether I'm hired as as a chainman or as a gunman."

"We-e-ell, this aint exactly a tea-party you've been invited to, Ginger. Big Bill Brennan wouldn't say so, even if the bullet wound in his jaw has healed enough so's he could talk. Neither would Spider Garrity, whose leg was broken in an—er—accidental landslide. Neither, believe me, would a few of the R. M. & P. gang who, according to the latest reports from the hospitals, are equally indisposed."

THE terrier had run a chipmunk into a hole in the rocks somewhere back in the trees, and was barking to beat the band. He'd barked and chased for an hour, but nary a chipmunk had he got.

"Trouble with that pup is," Ginger remarked philosophically, "he barks too long before he's ready to bite. No wonder he's no 'count as a chipmunk-hound. Guess I'll name him Comet, 'count of the way he looked when he came shooting out of that train.

"You were speaking of tea-parties, Colman. Well, I prefer fists to gun-play. You can always buy a new set of teeth. I'd hate to think I'd punctured some one with a bullet beyond repair. Here, Comet! Colman, what d'you think of that fool dog, that doesn't know his own name?"

I hooked a knee over the pommel, and rode sidewise for a while.

"Fists don't do much good when a bullet comes zinging out of the pines on a dark night," I told him. "Fists wont stop a landslide when it comes smashing down through the timber."

"For the matter of that, neither will bullets. A mob will face gun-muzzles. But it melts before a fire hose."

"Sure, I know. But just the same, Ginger, let a bunch of those R. M. & P. boys get you cornered in a tight place, and you'll give all the fists in the world for a good pair of six-guns."

Ginger laughed shortly.

"What's the big idea? How come these R. M. & P. lads are such everlasting scallywags? —Shut up, Comet! That isn't a chipmunk. It's only a pine-cone."

We drew our horses to a halt for a brief rest as we reached the clearing on the saddle that marks the top of the Scramble Hill road. I proffered Ginger my tobacco and papers, and when he declined, rolled and lighted a cigarette for myself.

"There's the answer," I replied, with a sweeping gesture of the hand that held the tobacco sack. The gesture took in the whole of the basin before us, from the timbered slope at our feet across the valley to the giant wall of the Yore Range on the west.

"Papa Skinner and the Vulcan Company crave to turn that basin into a huge reservoir, impounding enough water to irrigate a good many hundred thousand acres in the valley beyond the Yore Range, and to furnish enough hydro-electric power to operate all the machinery and lights this region'll see in the next century.

"Now, that doesn't suit the R. M. & P. —Rocky Mountain and Pacific Railroad— a little bit. It wants to build through the basin and through Yore Cañon, which you see over there, cutting through the Yore Range.

"That would give it the shortest transcontinental route across the United States, because the other railroads are forced to

"I caught you an ambusher, boss!" cried Ginger.

find passes far to the north or south. And the shortest route naturally would get the bulk of the nation's through freight. See?"

"I get you. If the railroad builds through the basin and the Cañon, that means the dam and the reservoir can't be built. If you dam the Cañon and turn the basin into a lake, naturally the railroad plan is blocked. That it?"

"That's it, Ginger. And Yore Cañon is the key to the whole situation. The outfit that makes the first filing in the Government land office at Glenwood Springs has the biggest kind of an advantage, because Uncle Sam, if it comes to a battle in the courts, usually gives preference to the first to show intention of developing any undeveloped area."

"And the R. M. & P. hasn't made its filing yet?"

"Not yet. You see, we've reached a sort of a deadlock. The R. M. & P. gang has worked up the Cañon from the other direction. They're camped somewhere near the head of the Cañon. If they can beat us to it with their survey before we finish ours —well, the Vulcan Company and Papa Skinner stand to lose a good many millions, and we stand to lose our jobs. Got a match?"

"What's to prevent us from finishing our survey?"

"Nothing, much, except the R. M. & P. gang. You see, they happen to hold the Pinnacles, which form the key to the whole situation. See those two big shoulders of rock, one on each side of the entrance to the Cañon? Those are the Pinnacles. The top of the north Pinnacle, which you can see is the higher, contains a regular little fortress. And the fortress contains R. M. & P. gunmen. They might as well be sitting on the top of the world, because we can't do a lick of work, or get within three-quarters of a mile of the Cañon, so long as they're there."

"How long's our gang been on the job?"

"Eight weeks. And if we don't shake a leg, the snow's going to catch us before we finish."

"Well, I s'pose the first thing done was to survey the dam-site. So now there's nothing to do but close the contour line, I take it. —Comet, cut out that yapping. That bluejay's making a fool out of you."

"The dam-site surveyed? Not by a damn' sight! Our level gang started with Station Number One above the north Pinnacle, and then worked around the basin along the high-water mark contour. Now we're ready to close the gap."

"You said you're the draftsman, didn't you, Colman?"

"Yep. Why?"

"Because I'd like to say a few things about the double-iron, back-action, self-adjusting bonehead of a chief engineer who's bossing your outfit!"

Ginger looked about him, and spat.

"I wish I was boss of this job for about a week!" he exclaimed impatiently.

"A lot of good it would do you. As long as the R. M. & P. gang holds the Pinnacles, we're plumb out of luck."

"Yeah, but we've got 'em blocked from coming through the basin, haven't we?" Notice he said "we"? Showed he figured himself one of the Vulcan gang, already.

"Well, maybe you can dope out the answer, son, to your question about whether you've been hired as a chainman or as a gunman. We've got one chainman with the transit gang, and two with the level gang. And if you should ask me, what with most of the real surveying already finished, we could get along well enough without the fourth chainman. We're 'bout through with the pig-tail flagman, and we could have set him to dragging chain if necessary. But old Larry Gohegan thought we needed another hand. And here you are."

"Larry Gohegan, I suppose, is the chief engineer?"

I nodded. I was looking for him to give the boss a skinning, but he didn't. I had finished my cigarette, so I ground it into the gravel with my heel, tightened up the cinch, and climbed aboard my old crow-bait again.

"Say, Colman," the redhead asked after we'd ridden on a ways, "what do we get if we win?"

"We get hell if we lose," I told him.

"Fair enough," he said—and grinned.

CHAPTER III

OLD man Gohegan was the only one who had a tent to himself in the Vulcan camp. I was paired off with that flat-faced transitman Kiscus Dorchak. He wasn't my choice of a bunky, but—well, Kiscus and I were the only ones who might be entitled by rank to live apart from the roughnecks in the main bunk-tent.

The outfit was divided into two gangs, and old Gohegan was the boss of 'em both. When they were in the field, Gohegan was in charge of the level-gang, and Dorchak the transit-gang. So you see Dorchak was a sort of second in command. Me, I stayed in camp at my drawing-board, where the draftsman belongs. But you understand it isn't everyone that can be a draftsman, so I was sort of ranked with Kiscus.

Ginger bunked in the main tent with the rodmen, the chainmen, the flagmen and the stake artists. The day I brought him to camp, old man Gohegan says to him:

"Have ye ever drug a chain before, me lad?"

"Yeah," says Ginger.

"How would ye run a contour line around this rezevoir site, now?" asks the old man to test him out.

"A damn' sight different than you're doing it," says Ginger. "I—"

"Git the hell outa here!" roared the old man. "I aint the one to be insulted by a smart-Alec chainman. When I want ye to run this outfit, I'll ask ye!"

So Ginger took his broken suitcase to the bunk-tent. I thought the old man would lay him out to a fare-ye-well after he'd gone, but he says:

"Colman, that lad'll bear watching. I wisht we had more av thim like him, instead o' these snivelin', grumblin' double-crossin' so-and-so's."

The roughnecks in the bunk-tent, as usual, started to give the new hand a razzing. Now, I never knew a redhead that wasn't as good as the next one at kidding or fighting. This one showed 'em his wits were where they were supposed to be, and finally threw one roughneck out of the tent on his ear, and then they were all pretty good friends. There was more laughing and not quite so much grumbling after that. By the third night, when Gohegan sent him to Grubstake with three horses to get supplies, anybody could sense the change in the atmosphere of the camp.

The old man gave him a gun when he started, and says:

"Me lad, I'm trustin' ye to see that nobody don't monkey with that grub. If ye have to use that cannon, don't hesitate."

Ginger's freckled map wrinkled up into a sort of squinty grin.

"I 'spect you can count on enough grub for breakfast," he says, and drops the gat into his pocket.

He didn't get back till pretty near morning. I didn't learn what he'd been

up to until our next trip to town. There were three of us that trip—Ginger, me and Pedro, a spick axman who had thrown up the job and was heading back to Denver.

Pedro had a yellow streak a yard wide. He'd stuck his yap up from the midst of a bunch of rocks to find out what the R. M. & P. outfit was doing. He found out. A copper-jacketed bullet burst on the rock alongside his head.

Now, if you know anything about high-velocity shooting-sticks, you know a copper-jacketed bullet flies to pieces the instant it strikes anything hard—bone or stone. That's why it makes such an ugly wound. Well, this bullet bust alongside Pedro's head and peppered his face with tiny bits of lead and copper.

Pedro wasn't any beauty to begin with, but after that—well, what right has an axman got in a bunch of rocks, anyway? If he'd stayed in the timber where he belonged—but anyway, the outfit didn't lose anything when he lost his appetite for the job.

This time Gohegan sent Ginger along to Grubstake to bring back Pedro's horse and to wire Denver for another axman. Why he sent me along, I don't know, unless it was to watch Ginger—or maybe because he knew I'd sort of taken a liking to the redhead.

"It's a wonder the old man didn't send Kiscus instead of me," I said while we were saddling up. "He knows the flat-face is pretty sweet on the Grubstake hasher."

Ginger looked at me sidewise, kind of funny, his eyes narrowing. He started to say something, and then thought better of it, and swallowed it.

The road to Grubstake forks just this side of Scramble Hill, where Ginger and I stopped to rest on our way to camp. The main road keeps on along the top of the ridge north of the basin, climbs the Yore Range and drops down on the far side amidst half a dozen big cattle-ranches, of which the biggest is the Turkey Track, owned by Grizzly King, who's what the story-books call a cattle baron.

These ranchers, by the way, are all for the railroad and against us, because they figure a through road means lower rates for their cattle, and a reservoir means their ranges will be cut up into small tracts for sod-busters. They can't see their land will be worth a dozen times as much when the dam's completed and they can get water on it.

The R. M. & P. bunch used this main trail over the range. It's a good wagon-road, and an auto can make it, all right. But our branch down into the basin is nothing more than a pack-trail. From the forks on into Grubstake we all used the same trail.

So just before we reached the forks, I ordered a halt, and sent Ginger ahead to reconnoiter. I did that because a week previously we'd lost a whole pack-train of grub when some one took a pot shot at Kiscus, who had been alone in charge of the supplies. The horses had bolted, and when they found 'em the next day, of course they'd scraped off their packs and panniers. I'll never forget how Kiscus dashed into camp, grabbed a rifle, and dashed off into the darkness again, swearing he wouldn't come back without the scalp of at least one R. M. & P. man. He came back, but without the scalp.

WELL, would you believe it? Ginger showed up again within five minutes, a captured rifle in his hands, kicking a man ahead of him at about every other jump.

The man was my own flat-faced tentmate Kiscus Dorchak!

"I caught you an ambusher, boss!" cried Ginger, so mad he was red in the face. "What shall I do with him?"

"What's the big idea?" I asked. Kiscus started to say something, but Ginger hauled off with his fist, and Kiscus shied like a horse and kept his trap shut.

"I found this," Ginger grunted, jerking a thumb at his captive, "crouched in the aspens alongside the other fork of the trail. He was just drawing a bead on a fellow riding up from the other direction. What I did to him shook him up considerable, and made him drop his gun."

"Dey shoot at me," Dorchak whined. "I shoot at dem."

"Not while I'm around, you don't," Ginger barked. "We can't help it if the other side is low-down and crooked. But we *can* see there's no dirty play on our side!" You'd have thought he was boss, to have heard him. "I've a good mind to bat your brains out, you big stiff!"

"It's easy to talk like dat, when you have de gun," snarled Dorchak. "You wouldn't dast, if—"

"Oh, wouldn't I?" Ginger was madder than ever. "Here, take this," he said to

me, and thrust the weapon into my hands. "Now, you big Polack, I'm going to whittle you down to my size, and teach you to fight fair the next time!"

Ye gods, what a scrap that would have been!

But I stopped it, because I was in duty bound to preserve discipline—and because of the rumors that had drifted around camp, as such things will, that Dorchak always carried a knife in a sheath beneath his arm. I had no relish for pulling a knife out from between Ginger's ribs, or for shooting the Polack—which I'd have had to do if he'd knifed the youngster.

GINGER wanted to argue the matter with me. I might have had a fight on my own hands if Eric Bergen hadn't stepped out from behind the aspens just then.

"Seeing as how I'm the intended target and hence the start of the fracas, I figured I had a right to listen in on the argument," he announced, slapping his boots with an aspen switch. "The way you two were bellowing, I guess you wanted the wide world to know what it was all about."

"Who are you?" cried Ginger, bristling. "And what's it to you?"

He was for all the world like the terrier pup. Honestly, I couldn't help laughing at him. Here within two minutes he'd been wanting to lick Dorchak, and then me, and now he was ready to take on the man whose life he'd just saved. Anyway, my laugh broke the tension, and everybody grinned except Dorchak.

"I'm the boss of the R. M. & P. surveying gang," said Eric softly. Of course, I'd seen him before, but this was the first slant Ginger had had at the leader of the enemy.

Eric looked like my idea of a Norseman. Not that I ever pictured a Norseman wearing riding-breeches, boots and a Norfolk jacket, but I guess you know what I mean. He was a tremendous fellow, with pale blue eyes and yellow hair and a close-cropped yellow mustache. When he talked, he looked right at you, and his glance never wavered.

He was dressed like these chief engineers you see in the movies. But don't get the idea he was one of these la-de-da boys, because he wasn't anything like that. He spoke softly, but he had a fist like a ham, and I bet when it landed on some one's jaw, that bird knew he was socked!

"You," he went on, speaking to Ginger, and talking sort of slow, as he always did, "you're the chap that got thrown off the train, aren't you?"

"I am," answered Ginger, reddening a bit. "And what of it? Who told you about it?"

Eric smiled a little. "The chap that knocked you off," he said. "He's working for me, now."

"Oho, he is, is he? Well, now, I wish you'd tell him I've got a sleeve of his I'd like to give him. And tell him I hope we meet again right soon, so we can continue the argument. And who did you say he is?"

"I know his name, and I know he does his work," answered Eric. "That's all I want to know about any man who works for me." He gazed at Ginger oddly for a moment, and repeated, with the slightest emphasis on his words: "That's all I want to know about any man who works for me."

He drew forth a packet of cigarettes—tailor-mades, they were—and after we'd all refused 'em, he lighted one and trod the match into the ground. He looked up at Ginger again.

"You're the sort of a chap I'd like to have on the R. M. & P. gang. I'll pay you ten a month more than you're getting on the Vulcan outfit."

Things were going a little bit too far. It was time for me to put my oar in. I couldn't stand by and see a good man hired away from the Vulcan gang by the opposition.

"Now, look here," I interrupted; "I wont stand for—"

But I needn't have butted in.

"I wouldn't work for an outfit that shoots men from ambush!" Ginger burst out hotly. "You can take your lousy job, and jump in the lake with it."

Eric raised his brows, and glanced at Kiscus. I could tell, and so can you, what he was thinking.

"Very well," he said, without any show of temper; "if you change your mind, let me know."

But before he started back to where he'd left his horse, he turned again to Ginger, and added:

"By the way, I owe you something of a debt for what you did." He jerked his head down the trail toward the spot where Ginger had spoiled Dorchak's ambush. "I wont forget it."

CHAPTER IV

A CROWD at a lunch-counter reminds me of a bunch of pigs at a trough, and yet—well, some lunch-counters have attractions other than lunch. Moyra's station included the first eight seats, next the kitchen door. Somehow, I always sort of drift back there when I come to town.

But this time the henna queen was the first to spot me.

"Hello, kid," she chirped. "How's tricks? Didja bring our sorrel-topped friend with you?"

"Howdy, girlie," I returned. "Yep. He'll be along pretty quick. I left him over at the telegraph shop, sending a message. Why? Are you craving to see another battle?"

She laughed, showing a gold front tooth.

"Fightin' aint the only thing that boy's good at," she smiled, with a sidelong glance at the chestnut bob, who was swabbing off the counter in front of me. "I'll tell the cock-eyed world he's a fast worker."

I was trying to figure that out when Moyra smiled at me—didn't say a word, but she didn't need to.

"Hello, Miss Moyra," I greeted her. I can't tell you just the reason why, but you would never think of calling the little chestnut bob "girlie."

"Hot roast-beef sandwich, coffee and pie?" she asked me. I always come to town primed for a big feed, but when it comes to ordering, a hot beef sandwich is all I can think of. Moyra knows that, so I don't have to order.

"Ginger's coming in a minute," I told her. "Set something next to me before the train-time mob swarms in and hogs all the seats. I'll order for him. Let's see. Guess he'd like a—a hot beef—"

"Oh, forget it!" she spoke up. "That stuff would kill him. I know what he wants, Mr. Colman. You leave his order to me."

"But it's all right if it kills *me*, is it?" I asked, pretending to be indignant.

SHE colored a bit at that, and trotted off to the kitchen without answering. Pretty soon she was back, tidying up the knives and forks and paper napkins on the counter, like she was setting a table in her own home. Then she stood back, looking right past me, absent-like, through the window. After a minute I chirped up:

"What's the matter? Has the price of marcels gone up? Or have the Spriggs Opera House movie films for tonight been delayed by a train wreck?"

That didn't draw a smile out of her. She hesitated just a moment, and then decided to confide in me.

"I'll tell you, Mr. Colman," she said, coming over and speaking so no one else could hear. "It's about Mr.—about Ginger. There's been some—some mighty ugly rumors floating around town since he came. First the deputy sheriff starts talking, and then your big transitman, Dorchak.

"The trouble is, they don't come out and say anything. They just hint that—hint that—Ginger—"

"I can guess what they've been saying," I interrupted, seeing she was having a hard time getting it out.

"I just thought, Mr. Colman, that maybe—maybe you might—might know something about him. Who he is—where he comes from—whether these reports—"

"Miss Moyra," I cut in again, "let me slip you a little tip. Don't you swallow any of this dirt about Ginger. I'll tell the world neither Jim, the deputy, nor that flat-faced Dorchak has the nerve to say anything like that to his face. And it's a safe bet never to believe any of these whisperings you hear floating around behind some fellow's back."

"I—I know. But I thought maybe you *knew*—"

"I don't know anything about Ginger, except that he seems to be a square shooter. He's a hard worker. He's the best man we have in the Vulcan gang; I'll say that. I wish we had more like him.

"But, you understand, we don't care much about who a man is, or where he came from, so long as he can deliver the goods. No one ever asks about a man's family history, and it's mighty seldom he volunteers anything. I can't say I know anything about the personal history of any man on the job.

"I'm telling you this, Miss Moyra, to show you that it doesn't necessarily mean anything because Ginger doesn't shout out his life-history from the hilltops. If I were you, I'd take a man at his face value until it's *proved* he's something else."

She heaved a little sigh, and said:

"I'm glad to hear you say that, Mr. Colman. But—"

"And now, young lady," I broke in

again, "I'm going to slip you a little fatherly advice, free gratis. And remember, I'm not speaking about Ginger, or anyone else in particular. But it's a pretty safe bet for any honest-to-goodness, wholesome girl like you, to lay off these roughnecks like you find on these surveying gangs.

"Now, I haven't got a better friend in the Vulcan outfit than Ginger. I wouldn't say a word against him, and I wouldn't stand for anyone else to say it, either. But if I were you, Miss Moyra, I'd not let things get too serious until I knew a little more about—"

JUST then the whistle of the night train sounded, cutting me short. Before I had a chance to go on, she said, with her red lips curling the faintest bit:

"I see. Take a man at his face value. But if he's a member of the Vulcan outfit, make him prove himself first. Is that it?"

I saw I'd got myself into a jackpot, all through trying to do this girl a favor. She'd made me feel mighty ashamed of myself. Yet—what would you have done?

"I'm afraid you've got me wrong, Miss Moyra," I retorted. I thought it sounded sort of apologetic, though I wasn't intending to hedge a bit. "Understand, this fellow Ginger is my best friend. But—"

"It's a fine friend *you* are," she shot at me. "If a person were *my* friend, he'd be my friend for always, without reservations, without questions about his past. I—"

And then she broke off sudden, for Ginger himself breezed in.

"Hello, Moyra," he greeted her with studied casualness.

"Your order will be up in just a minute," she returned, very businesslike.

Their air was too darned casual to pull the wool over *my* eyes. The way they looked at each other—any blamed fool could see which direction the wind was blowing. And him with a framed photo of another girl in his suitcase!

"Did you send the wire?" I asked him when Moyra had gone for our chow.

"Yeah. And I added some stuff that'll frizz their hair when they get it. I'll bet they don't send us any more Pedros."

While I was whistling my disapproval, Moyra brought in the grub. The clanging of a bell bespoke the arrival of the train.

"Don't you think that's going a bit strong?" I asked him. "Did old man Gohegan say to burn 'em up?"

"Say, old 'fraid-of-himself, the trouble with this outfit is that some one hasn't raised a little hell with the Denver office. Look at what we've got—outside Gohegan and you!"

Just then the crowd from the train began to surge into the eating-house. We both turned to look. Ginger gulped and choked. I turned, and saw him change from white to red and back again.

I followed his eyes and saw, believe me, the classiest-clad dame that ever stumbled into Grubstake. I'm no great hand at describing a woman's clothes, but this queen had on some sort of a gray flannel sports outfit, a lemon yellow scarf flung over her shoulder, gray chiffon socks and satin pumps.

She came into that eating-house like a leading lady coming up front center. Pretty tall, for a girl, with imperious blue eyes and a tilted chin. And shingled gold hair. At that, I couldn't see anything for Ginger to go red and white over. He sat there looking at her with his mouth open, like a yap.

Behind her came an older woman, angular and haughty, plainly disdainful of the eating-house. This I judged to be mamma. Then a bronzed old codger with a long beard, a cap in his hand, wearing quilted cowboy riding-boots.

And last of all, Eric Bergen!

The queen swept the room with a glance. It swept right on past us roughnecks at the counter, and then swung back, like it had been attracted by a magnet, and came to rest on Ginger.

She started. Her expression changed by a shadow. For the merest fraction of a second she hesitated. Then she marched forward with outstretched hand, smack up to that staring pal of mine!

"Why, who'd have dreamed of finding *you* here!" she cooed.

Ginger seemed to have gotten a grip on himself as he rose and formally acknowledged her greeting. You should have seen the yaps in that restaurant stare!

Mamma took in Ginger's sheep-lined coat, and sniffed. But she bowed rather stiffly, like she'd known him before, but was trying hard to forget it. While Ginger was presenting me to the girl, Astrid Bellamy, the old boy with the beard stepped forward. We learned he was old Grizzly King, the Turkey Track cattle baron, whose ranch the queen and empress were to visit for a week or two. He was

the first and only cattle baron I ever saw who wore a beard and a cap.

"And this is Mr. Bergen," went on Astrid, sort of cooing, as she presented the big blond boss of the R. M. & P. "He was brother Eustace's chum at Boston Tech, you know. We were *so* pleased when we learned he was out here building railroads or something—weren't we, Mother?"

had missed any of this. The last thing I heard before I joined Ginger at the door was: "Gee, Moyra— did ya lamp that jane? Gee, kid, she's the one in the pitcher Ginger carries around in the silver frame!"

Which added to the mystery which already had me guessing.

I made Ginger pay for a meal at another restaurant. He didn't volunteer any

"Hold the pup, Colman," called Ginger. I grabbed Comet.

Ginger told her we were acquainted with Mr. Bergen. Eric smiled.

"You'll join us at our table, of course?" Astrid invited, with what I thought was the slightest tinge of patronage.

I don't mind admitting I was mighty curious about this girl who could make Ginger turn pale. I got as far as, "With plea—" when Ginger's hobnails crushed down on my toe.

"Sorry, Miss Bellamy," he hastened to cut in, still very formal, "but we've just finished, and we've got to get back to camp." And that with our untouched meal on the counter!

There were a few more remarks; then the queen and her party found a table and Ginger strode to the cashier to pay for our untasted meal.

Now, don't think Moyra and henna hair

information, and of course I didn't question him. He'd lied, of course, when he'd told the girl we had to get right back to camp. He told me he was going to the movie at the Spriggs Opera House. He didn't invite me to go along.

I knew what was in the air, so I spent the evening at the Silver Dollar pool-hall, trying to figure things out, and getting more muddled the longer I thought. It didn't appear to me, somehow, that the blonde's appearance at Grubstake was as accidental as it seemed.

All the way back to camp Ginger was glum, so I doped it out that maybe Moyra had been a little cool. I don't suppose he even dreamed she knew about the picture in the silver frame.

When we got back to camp, we learned old man Gohegan had been shot.

CHAPTER V

OUR boss was in a bad way. He had a bullet-wound in the right side, just below the floating ribs. It wasn't bleeding, which worried me. I don't know much about anatomy, but I do know a bullet-wound through the abdomen, puncturing the intestines and bleeding inwardly, usually means curtains. This was pretty high for such a wound, but not quite high enough to penetrate a lung, I thought.

The old man wasn't coughing blood, but you could see it hurt him to breathe or talk. He'd try to talk without taking a deep breath. That made his words come in a sort of monotone, which wasn't like the old man's style, at all.

" 'Twas a low-down, dirty trick, boys," he told us when we joined the group crowded around the bed in his tent. " 'Twas jist like thim sneakin' rascals of the R. M. & P. I was comin' back down the—ugh—the trail, whin *'zing!'* came the bullet whinin' out o' the scrub pines. . . . . Git me another dipper o' water, will ye, Kiscus? Thanks.

"I niver knew I was hit, at first. I drew me gun an' charged at the ambush, showerin' down on 'im as I ran. An' the nixt thing I knew I was here in the tent with the boys bendin' over me."

He burst out in an explosion of good old-fashioned profanity that ended with a groan.

"Shut your mouth," snapped out Ginger brusquely. "Gabbin' wont get you anywheres. Hasn't anyone sent for a doctor? You, Gregor, take my horse and ride hell-bent for Grubstake—"

"D'ye think I'm a dom fool?" the old man queried in that odd, breath-saving drone. "Bill has gone fer the doc this tin minutes. Most of the boys are out searchin' fer the skunk that plugged me. But I can still boss this job—ugh—from me tent here, unless—unless I croak."

"You're too tough to croak," spoke up Ginger again. "You'll be up and around again in a few days—unless you talk yourself to death this night."

SUCH brusque talk struck me dumb, under the circumstances, until I saw its effect on the old man. It brought the shadow of a grin to his gray lips. A little rough talk was exactly what he needed. But—any blamed fool could tell he wouldn't be up on his feet in any few days.

Ginger ran all the roughnecks out of the old man's tent and back to their bunks. Then he and Kiscus and I sat down to wait for the doctor.

"Roll me a cigarette," ordered the old man in that curious, languid drone. "It's dyin' fer a smoke, I am."

"I will not," says Ginger. "One drag would put you out for keeps."

"Who's boss of this outfit?" came back the old man with a trace of his old assertiveness. "I say, roll me a cigarette."

"I will not," repeats Ginger, clipping his words short. "You can take that, or leave it."

The old man took it without a peep.

The doctor looked Gohegan over, and within two minutes issued orders he was to be removed to Grubstake.

"I wont go!" The old man bristled. His voice was quite a bit thinner than it had been a few hours before. "What will happen to the job? The gang will go to pieces without me. How—ugh—how can the boys expect to—"

"You'll go to the hospital now, or to your grave within two days. Your job's none of my affair, but I don't see how it's going to help any if you persist in dying. I left my car up where this trail joins the road. I intend to load you in it and take you back to town."

THE doctor stayed with Gohegan while Ginger, Dorchak and I had some coffee and flapjacks. When the three of us returned to the tent, the old man said weakly: "Boys, it's out of the game I am, for the first time in me life. Some one's got to run this shebang till I git back. The man I leave in charge—ugh—that man will prob'ly have the backing of the main office for keeps. Of course—ugh—of course, they may send a new man to take charge. I can't say as to that. In the—ugh—in the meantime, the job needs some one with guts and horse sense. Ah-h!"

He was having a pretty stiff job to bite off those groans, was the old man. I was pretty much a-tingle, because it sounded more like me than Kiscus.

"And so," he went on, pretty faintly by this time, "I'm pickin' a bird who's nobody's 'yes' man. Ginger is the new boss."

Now, I'd sort of been counting on that job myself, and this took me like a jolt alongside the ear. I swallowed once or twice, and then came to long enough to step up and shake the redhead by the hand.

And would you believe it, the youngster blushed and stammered like a school-kid!

Kiscus grew red in the face, but he stepped up, anyhow, and did the proper thing. I knew he'd been counting on the job at least as much as I. And it's a lucky thing for Ginger that the flat-face hadn't got the job, after what had happened the evening before!

WITHIN ten minutes I was leading the gang carrying the old man on a home-made litter up the trail to the doctor's car. Ginger sent one of the men to Grubstake on horseback with a telegram to the Denver office telling of the shooting of Gohegan and asking 'em to send another chainman to replace the one promoted to chief engineer. That was rather cocky, I thought, for it assumed Ginger himself was to remain permanently in charge.

On the way back to camp from the forks of the trail, on Ginger's orders I looked about the scene of the ambush to see if I could find any footprints. Not that it would have done us any good if we'd found the prints, plain as day, leading back to the R. M. & P. camp. The sentry we kept posted day and night claimed he had seen nothing.

I found a million or so prints, where our boys had tramped around gunning for the fellow. And I found something else which, while it had nothing to do with the shooting, set me to thinking again.

Washed up in a tiny cove in the creek I saw a torn fragment of white cardboard. I turned it over, and saw it was a piece of a photograph which had been torn in quarters. I could see some shingled blonde hair and one blue eye. But I'm ready to take my oath as to what picture it was, and what silver frame it had come from. Into my pocket it went, while I was, figuratively speaking, patting the hasher with the chestnut bob on the back, all the way to camp.

There I ran smack into a peck of trouble, the result of Ginger's first attempt to exercise his new authority.

"I'll take charge of the level gang," I heard him remark casually to Dorchak. "You follow up with the transit gang to your last set-up. Work up as far as that open timber, and then stop. Drop your gang back around the shoulder of the hill five hundred yards and start burning the slashings our axmen left. See that they watch so the fires wont spread to the timber—"

"D'ole man, he say never to burn no slashings where R. M. & P. men on Pinnacles can see smoke," Kiscus Dorchak retorted sullenly.

Ginger went right on, giving orders to his rodman as if he hadn't heard Dorchak's protest.

"I don't want to get my men shot up," Kiscus continued. It seemed to me he was deliberately trying to force trouble, because anyone could tell the transit gang would be shielded from the R. M. & P. riflemen by the shoulder of the hill.

Still no word from Ginger.

"By golly," Kiscus continued,—bolder now—"I don't t'ink I take my men in danger." The men, sensing mutiny, stopped work to see what their new boss would do.

GINGER took off his hat and sent it sailing through the open flap of his tent, which had been Gohegan's.

"Step up here, Dorchak," he ordered, quite calmly, "and we'll decide here and now who's boss."

I saw anticipation gleaming in the eyes of the flat-face. Then I knew he had planned it deliberately, this showdown with the new boss.

Dorchak wasn't particularly liked among the men, but he was an old-timer, and Ginger a newcomer. I knew Kiscus was relying on the feeling of resentment because the youngster had been jumped over the heads of 'em all.

If he could thrash the new boss—well, I knew, and he knew, and all of us knew Ginger's authority would be gone for all time. And Kiscus was a huge gorilla of a man. I was worried, mighty worried.

Kiscus advanced crouching, arms extended, hands open, like a wrestler sparring for a hold. Suddenly there was a streak of white, and there in his path, snarling and bristling, fangs bared, was Comet.

"Hold the pup, Colman," called Ginger. I grabbed Comet and squatted over him, one hand gripping his collar.

Dorchak rushed. Ginger sidestepped. There was a smack like the crack of an ax on a surveyor's stake as the redhead's fist slammed home just under and in front of the flat-face's ear.

It didn't faze him. He rushed again. He wasn't trying to hit Ginger. Instead, he was reaching out with those gorilla arms.

I'd never seen Kiscus fight before. But

I'd heard the boys tell of his system. Once his adversary came within the grip of those tremendous arms, the flat-face would crush the breath out of him, slam him to the ground, sit on him and beat him to a jelly.

Ginger danced away again. Once more he lashed out. But the flat-face ducked his head again and hunched his shoulder, and Ginger's blow glanced off his arm.

Dorchak kept boring in. The gang gave way before Ginger's retreat. Once more the redhead turned loose with his right. Once more the hunched shoulder fended off the blow.

I groaned as I held the struggling pup. I thought I saw the end in sight. If Ginger couldn't penetrate his guard, it was but a matter of time until those clutching arms would close upon him, and the battle would be ended.

Comet, wriggling and snarling, gave me a battle all my own, and I didn't see the blow that followed. But I heard the grunt it knocked out of the big transitman. And I did see Ginger's body swinging low, out and back from the hips. I judged the wallop had caught Kiscus in the breadbasket.

Well sir, that's the story of the next three minutes of one of the most delightful little scraps I've witnessed in years. It hadn't taken Ginger thirty seconds to find the weak point of the flat-face. It was just like that—*one, two; one, two;* feint with the right to the face; sock 'er home to the body with the left.

Kiscus, thick-witted gorilla that he was, could have stopped it in ten seconds if he'd had anything inside that thick skull of his. If he'd kept his guard down, protecting his body, and taken 'em as they came on that concrete block, Ginger could have slashed away all day without hurting him.

But instinct raised that guard when he saw that fist coming. Ginger's feint to the face brought up that hunched shoulder. Every time. And left the vulnerable short ribs exposed.

Suddenly I gasped, and cursed the wiry boss for a prize bonehead! What did the idiot mean? Plunging right into Dorchak's trap!

Abruptly he'd changed his tactics. Retreat was abandoned. Instead he met rush with rush. Dived right into those clutching arms. They closed round him.

But Ginger's arms kept going. Fast, fast—so fast I couldn't see 'em! Short-arm blows. Triphammer blows. Beating a tattoo on those vulnerable short ribs.

And slowly Dorchak's clutch relaxed. His knees buckled. His head dropped on his chest. He wilted—wilted on his tracks—slipped to the ground like a coat Ginger had discarded.

The fight was over. Dorchak wasn't out, if you understand a man isn't out until he's unconscious. He was on hands and knees, like a great bear. He struggled to rise, but couldn't make the grade.

He toppled sidewise. And there he sat, one arm behind him for support, mouth agape, trying to figure out what had happened. If you've ever had the wind knocked plumb out of you, you'll know exactly how he felt. And how he looked.

"Anybody else want to know who's boss here?" Ginger inquired coolly, looking around the group.

There was no answer. If he hadn't been boss, they'd have rushed up and patted him on the back. But you don't just do that to your chief.

And no one doubted, now, who was boss. The roughnecks grinned, and turned again to their preparations.

"Time we were getting on the job," announced the new chief. "Let's go!"

CHAPTER VI

FLAT-FACE couldn't get it through his skull why Ginger didn't fire him. Dorchak's own idea of things was to kick the stuffing out of an enemy, once you got him down.

In response to his sullen question, Ginger had told him of course he wasn't fired—that so long as he did his work he could keep his job. Dorchak went out at the head of the transit crew. This time he didn't question Ginger's orders.

The redhead, without explaining why, took me along with him on the level crew. Things began popping almost before we got started.

Our first intimation of the surprise attack of the R. M. & P. outfit was when we heard the danger signal of three shots from the rifle of our sentinel. Then there was a burst of shots from off toward the head of Yore Cañon. Then that quieted down to be followed by intermittent firing from our sentinel.

Ginger sent three men, in charge of Dor-

chak, back with the instruments, with instructions to guard the camp. The rest of us took off through the timber to the sentinel's post. We found him ensconced in his nest of rocks, contentedly popping away in the general direction of the cañon —and not a man in sight.

"They all bust outa the cañon, twenty of 'em, mebbe, every man jack of 'em with a rifle," he informed us. "I could see 'em make their first transit set-up right there. The rest of 'em spread out, fan-shape, into the timber. They're spread out down there now, on all sides o' the transit crew."

Now, we knew as well as the R. M. & P. gang themselves that their railroad survey must follow the banks of the stream through the valley. It was slow work, something that couldn't be done in a day, because the timber in the valley bottom was mighty thick, and their axmen would have a job cut out for them. The railroad gang consisted of a transit crew only, as they didn't need levels, but used approximate angles.

I admit I was a little excited at the prospect of a real battle. Being as how a draftsman always works in camp, I'd never packed a gun, and had none now. Neither had Ginger.

"There's just one thing to do," I said to the redhead, "and that's to spread out and meet 'em face to face, and drive 'em back into their hole. If they've got twenty, we're outnumbered. But when it comes to a battle of sniping in the timber, we can sure make it hot for 'em."

Ginger just looked at me, absent-like, and said nothing for a minute or so.

"Yeah, but I think that's just what they're banking on," he remarked finally. "You, Ed," he said to the sentinel, "stick where you are, but don't shoot unless they try to drive you out. If they try that, don't try to fight, but beat it back to camp and join the others there."

Then he led the whole crew of us off north through the timber, parallel in a general way with the enemy's supposed fighting front. I couldn't figure out what he was up to, and he didn't explain.

THAT was the funniest rifle battle I've ever seen. For three hours, while we were swinging up on the north side of the basin, there wasn't a shot fired.

The north wall of the basin—that's the south slope of the hills—is thinly timbered, like most of the mountains thereabouts. The heavy timber is in the valleys or parks, and on the north, or shady slopes. Our gang had started the survey at the Pinnacles, or proposed dam-site, and had swung around this region, which would be the north edge of the reservoir, the very first thing. We worked right up, almost to the foot of the granite barrier of the Yore Range, before they spotted us. We were maybe a mile north of the cañon. Then I began to see Ginger's plan. It was a flank attack, designed to cut the enemy off from his base.

It was their sentinel on the summit of the north Pinnacle who spotted us. He fired four or five times, but not at us. It must have been some kind of a signal. We could barely hear the shots, but they must have been plain to the enemy in the basin, for the wind, sweeping from the west as it always does, would carry the sound a lot farther than they were. Pretty soon the whole outfit of 'em came scurrying, pell-mell, through the thinly timbered rocky flats at the head of the cañon, carrying their guns and instruments, with their tails between their legs.

We let fly at 'em a dozen or so times, but they were so far away our bullets were harmless. But we were within range of their sentinel on the Pinnacles. We were back in the thick timber by this time, and he couldn't see us. But he knew about where we were likely to be, and his bullets came whining over our heads every thirty seconds or so. A man on a high point, shooting into a depression, almost always will overshoot.

Well, that's all there was to the battle. Not much of a battle, when you come to think about it, with not a man hurt on either side. But we spoiled their sortie and drove 'em back into their hole, if we didn't cut 'em off. Outsmarted 'em, and showed 'em that if we couldn't storm the Pinnacles, at least we could keep 'em from invading our basin.

Ginger cussed considerable when we failed to cut 'em off. Personally, I considered we had won quite a victory. On the way back to camp he started asking questions concerning the lay of the land in Yore Cañon: where the enemy's camp lay, how they got from the camp to the summit of the Pinnacles, if we made our way to the south Pinnacle, couldn't we smoke 'em out of the other?

It was easy enough to see what was on his mind. And I could see what was com-

ing as well as if he'd told me. But as a matter of fact, no one could give him much information.

When we'd started our survey, we had been working out of the same camp in the middle of the basin, because that was about equidistant from all parts of the survey. We'd had no occasion to go down into the cañon. We didn't know if there was a trail from the Pinnacles to the bottom of the gorge. We didn't know whether the R. M. & P. camp was ten chain-lengths or ten miles from the head of the cañon: or whether it was in the cañon or on the rim-rocks—although it was a pretty safe bet it was in the cañon, as near the head as possible.

We did tell him, though, that the south Pinnacle was too low to be of any strategic value—that the north Pinnacle dominated everything, and was the key to the whole situation.

"How about the power-line survey?" demanded Ginger, scowling. "C'm here, Comet! If you used some judgment, instead of working at random, like some surveyors, you might catch a chipmunk now and then. Colman, our plans call for a power-house to be built just below the dam, and another ten miles down the cañon. Hasn't that survey been made?"

"Gohegan figured the most urgent need was to complete the reservoir survey," I told him. "After our filings had been made with the land office and the State engineer, then we could survey the power-line at our leisure, he told me."

"Uh-huh! How many guns have we got in camp?"

"I guess everyone's got one, maybe two, except you and me and the cook. We can probably dig up one the old man left, if you want one."

It was too late by the time we reached camp to get out on the job again that day. Ginger looked around, and said to me:

"That cook-tent's too near the trees for safety. One little spark in that brush could raise hob with us, right now."

"It's easy enough to move the tent," I told him. "We'd better wait until after supper, though, or we'll delay chow."

He didn't answer me, but called to Kiscus.

"Get this whole bunch to work," he told him, "clearing a forty-foot space around the cook tent. Trim the trees after you cut 'em, and pile the brush over there, out of the way."

I THOUGHT Ginger was going plumb cuckoo. But I took it out in thinking. Four men could have moved that tent and everything in it in thirty minutes. Instead of that, he puts a dozen to work chopping down good-sized trees and clearing underbrush. Can you beat it?

I was just about worn out after having been up all night and then putting in a good many hours in the field, and was figuring on turning in and grabbing off a little sleep before chow time. But Ginger up and orders me to ride to Grubstake and see if there's an answer to his wire. I'll tell the world I didn't fancy the prospect of that ride to town and back, when I might have been pounding my ear.

"Will it need an answer?" I asked him.

"If it needs an answer, answer it," he replied without even turning to look at me. I was about to ask him what to say, but decided I'd better not bother him just then.

"When you get those trees cut," he was saying to Kiscus as I started to saddle up, "take 'em and build me a good, stout platform, about twelve by twenty, out of the rough logs."

I rode away turning to figure out what the devil he wanted with a log platform in a surveying camp. I thought he'd probably tear off a little sleep himself, seeing as how he'd been up all night too, but the last I saw of him he was leaving camp with a fishing rod.

I found the telegram waiting at Grubstake. I was glad he'd told me to send an answer if one was needed, because otherwise I'd have felt I shouldn't have opened it. And I admit I was mighty curious to see what the Denver office had to say.

They said plenty.

"S. Barr, acting chief of crews, Vulcan Power and Light Co., Grubstake, Colo.

"New engineer will arrive Friday to take charge of Yore basin survey. Meanwhile do nothing to jeopardize success of undertaking. Urge upon you vital necessity of taking no chances. Suggest abandonment of all field work until arrival of new engineer. In view of situation believe no additional chainman necessary.

E. H. Hill,
Vice-president and general manager.

EVIDENTLY the Denver office didn't think much of the capabilities of the youngster they'd sent up a few days before as a roughneck chainman.

The wire was plain enough. They might as well have said: "Sit tight and do nothing until some one with some sense arrives."

And that last line, "no additional chainman necessary"—that looked bad for Ginger. Seemed like he was to be reduced to the ranks, and the rear ranks at that.

Well, I figured that message didn't need an answer. So I dropped over to the hospital to see the old man. They wouldn't let me in, but told me he'd probably pull through because he was so tough you couldn't kill him with anything short of a machine-gun.

Then I made my way to the eating-house to wrap myself around a beefsteak,

Ginger was waving at me and yelling. His words were swept away in the roar of the fire.

but somehow got sidetracked on a hot beef sandwich again. But I took three pieces of pie, because I was pretty hungry.

Moyra gave me a toss of the head, and seemed right cool.

"Just for that, young lady," I said to myself, "I sha'n't give you this torn hunk of photograph in my pocket—nor breathe a word to you about finding it."

But after a minute she loosened up, she was so darned eager to hear how Ginger was getting along as big boss. She was as proud over the redhead's promotion as a mother over her baby's first tooth. The news was all over town by that time. I hated to think how she'd take it when Ginger got bounced out of his new job.

The more I thought about that, the mushier I began to feel. I felt so sorry for her I forgot all about the advice I'd given her about falling for roughneck surveyors, and gave her the torn photo and told her where I'd found it.

She smiled, but acted like she wasn't a bit surprised. I wonder if the little devil had put the screws on him and made him do it?

When I got back to camp and handed Ginger the wire, he read it and observed: "Friday. M-m-m—and this is Wednesday."

CHAPTER VII

AFTER leaving Dorchak in charge of both crews with instructions to carry out the orders of the preceding day, Ginger, taking me and Comet along, struck out the next morning northward through the timber.

"Hadn't you better take a gun?" I asked him, noting he was unarmed.

"I'm afraid to," he told me. I thought at first he was kidding me, but then he explained how come.

"I don't want to get shot. I don't want to shoot anyone. When two armed men go on the warpath, they're going to shoot. Chances are, one or both of 'em will get hurt. "But if an armed man clashes with an unarmed one, he'll seldom use his gun. And the unarmed one has none to use. So they settle their war with their fists. If you lose some teeth, you can buy new ones, but it's blamed hard to vulcanize a bullet-hole in a man's hide. That's why I don't pack a gun."

Just the same, *I'd* as leave have had a gun. By golly, if I'd known what was in store for us that day, I'll tell the world I wouldn't have stirred from camp without some sort of cannon.

"I've appointed us the intelligence service of the outfit for today," Ginger grinned. "Comet, you'll have to put the muffler on that bark if we get anywhere with my plan.

"We're out to get the lay of the land, Colman. All I know about our battle sector is what I learned Tuesday evening when I went fishing. I worked my way almost to the head of the cañon, but all I got out of it was a couple of beautiful Lochlevens."

So he'd been scouting when he set out with his fishing rod! Well, even so, I believe he could have done his reconnoitering at some time when he wasn't half dead from lack of sleep.

"We've got to find out just where the R. M. & P. camp lies. We've got to figure out the best way to capture the Pinnacles, if we expect to put one over on those fellows and finish the job before the new engineer arrives."

"Then you don't expect to follow the orders in the wire and sit steady until the new boss comes?"

"Not so you could notice it! I want to be able to tell 'em the job's finished, that the filings are on their way to the land office, that the opposition's licked to a fare-ye-well."

"But the telegram?"

"To blazes with the telegram! I'm getting paid for doing something, and by George, I'm going to do it! Comet, anyone would think you were getting paid for chasing chipmunks, you little idiot."

"But the new boss is due tomorrow!"

Ginger grinned; then he became stern.

"Yeah. And we've got to finish our job before he comes."

WE swung out north and west, following somewhat the same route we had taken the preceding day, except that we followed the sector of a much wider arc. It brought us at length to the crest of the first ridge of the Yore range, two or three miles north of the Pinnacles.

We were almost at timberline, where the limber pines were twisted and gnarled in the face of the ever-present western winds, and where Comet now and then could flush a covey of ptarmigan just beginning to change from their brown summer plumage.

The ridge became steeper and steeper as we followed it toward the Pinnacles. We could see the marksmen on the top of the stronghold could command an immense area—that it was useless to attempt to storm the Pinnacles from the north.

"We'd be out of luck if we attacked from here," Ginger commented. "Keep behind these boulders, Colman, and we'll work our way along until we can swing around to the west of their sentinel and get a look down into the cañon."

After a while we stumbled upon a new, faint trail, which I reasoned was the one leading from the enemy camp to the sentinel's post. Comet, as usual, was pursuing his unsuccessful chipmunk chase, but this time he stirred up bigger game. As we reached the trail he began barking furiously, as if he had treed his quarry. An instant later two men armed with rifles appeared round a bend in the trail. They were as surprised as we. But they had rifles, and we hadn't.

A moment later, while we were reaching for the sky at their suggestion, I felt like saying to Ginger:

"I told you so! Now don't you wish we'd brought our guns?"

"Don't make a break," he whispered to me. "It's no use."

And when Comet nipped the heels of one of our captors, the redhead called him off, meek as you please. In less time than it takes to tell about it, we were being marched down the trail with the two rifles at our backs.

IT'S no wonder Ginger got red at our humiliating entry into the R. M. & P. camp, when you realize that Astrid Bellamy and old Grizzly King were visiting the camp when we arrived. Eric was just help-

ing Astrid, trim and out of place in boots and riding habit, into the saddle when our captors prodded us into the scene. The old Turkey Track cattle baron grinned through his bushy gray whiskers when he saw us. Astrid was startled, and looked from Ginger to Eric doubtfully.

"Some o' that sneakin' Vulcan gang we stumbled acrost, snoopin' around the Pinnacles trail," was the explanation of our captors.

Eric didn't even smile.

"Very well, boys, that will do," he said to the men. "Leave 'em here with me."

Then what do you suppose he did? Stepped forward to Ginger with outstretched hand!

"Congratulations, old chap," he said in greeting, as if Ginger had been paying a social call. "I hear you're the new chief of the Vulcan crews."

"Yes, thanks to your boys," Ginger responded dryly, grasping the outstretched hand. "How do you do, Miss Bellamy?"

Eric bit his lip at that crack. Astrid muffed it. You couldn't blame her, either. She hadn't been on the ground long enough to learn of all the sniping and ambushing that prevailed in our best surveying circles. But old Grizzly chuckled. He knew what was what.

"Miss Bellamy and Mr. King rode over from the ranch to have a look around," Eric explained to us. "We're going up to the Pinnacles to take a look over the basin. Then we'll head back down the cañon, over our survey. I'd be mighty glad if you chaps would come along?"

Wouldn't that knock you flat? Inviting us—*us*—to be his guests while we did our scouting! It was too good to be true. I figured he had something up his sleeve.

"Why, thanks, we'd be mighty pleased to go," Ginger replied, "—at least as far as the Pinnacles. We just dropped in to look things over."

"Dropped in!" That sure was good. I heard old Grizzly chuckle again. No outsider hearing our drawing-room chatter would have dreamed that here were the leaders of two armed gangs of roughnecks, each thirsting for the gore of the others, men who for weeks had been carrying on armed warfare.

I'll bet that was the first time in her sweet young life Astrid had ever seen men stuck up at the points of rifles, in earnest. She just couldn't seem to get it through her head, at first. Her rules of social conduct didn't provide for the manner of procedure toward fellow-guests, invited to join the party at the muzzle of a gun. But she took her cue at last from Eric, who seemed to be treating the whole affair as a friendly social call.

"Oh, yes. *Do* come along. We'd be *so* pleased," she chimed in, beaming on us. Eric turned and ordered a couple more horses saddled up.

"Miss Bellamy is deeply impressed with our country—what she has seen of it," Eric observed as we waited.

"Oh, yes. It's so—so tremendous, so different, so new, so wild," she smiled. "And just to think—within a year or so it will be just like the country back home. Eric says it's only a matter of months until railroad trains will be running through this tremendous gorge."

There, Ginger, was one for *you!*

"Yeah," he came back, quick as a flash. "*We'll* need construction trains to haul materials for the dam we're going to build between the Pinnacles."

There was something mighty funny about the attitude of Ginger and this hothouse city girl toward each other—funny in view of the fact he'd landed in Grubstake with her framed picture in his suitcase. And yet—maybe not so funny, after all. Their relations were strained, all right—maybe more so on his part than on hers.

I figured it out they must have been pretty close friends at one time, and that they'd split up over something, maybe something mighty serious. And she, I guessed, was the one who'd caused the split. As I doped it out, Astrid now seemed to be holding Ginger as a sort of ace in the hole, to be played if necessary.

ERIC led the way up the trail to the north Pinnacle. It wasn't exactly a city park bridle-path we were following, and he went to some pains to point out the inaccessibility of the Pinnacles—more for Ginger's benefit than Astrid's.

"But why," she asked with a puzzled air when we had reached the summit, dismounted and climbed the barricade under the watchful eyes of the sentinel, "does this man carry a gun?"

Eric hesitated the fraction of a second and then, unsmiling, replied:

"He's protecting himself against wolves. Don't be alarmed. They aren't dangerous. Besides, we seldom see them except at night."

Again came the chuckle from the grizzled cowman.

"*We* haven't been so fortunate," Ginger put in gravely. "Several of our boys are laid up as the result of attacks by these night prowlers."

"Oh!" gasped the girl, with a frightened glance at the timber beyond the barricade. "Wolves? How terrible! Aren't you tremendously frightened?"

Both men smiled. "If we didn't have something to liven things up," Eric remarked dryly, "the job would get mighty monotonous."

"Here," spoke up Ginger boldly, indicating the narrowest point in the gorge, between the Pinnacles, " is where our dam is to be built. We'll start work on it next spring." He turned and indicated the basin with a sweeping gesture.

"Can you picture that as a gigantic reservoir, supplying water for thousands of farms, providing power for vast industries, and light for cities hundreds of miles away?"

"I say, old chap," broke in Eric, smiling, yet with an odd note of resentment in his voice, "who's conducting this tour, anyway?"

"Beg pardon," Ginger grinned. "I didn't intend to butt in."

THE girl must have been pretty dumb if by this time, she failed to sense the rivalry between the two. Her next words led me to believe she was doing her darnedest to foster the rivalry.

"But he has such a wonderful imagination!" she said to Eric. "One must have vision to look into the future and see such things."

"A remarkable imagination," Eric agreed, and then went on: "The view from the Pinnacles is really extraordinary." He was looking at the girl, but I knew his words were aimed at Ginger. "One can see almost every foot of the basin from here. We keep men up here continuously, day and night."

"Why?" came the innocent query from the girl. Or was it so innocent? I wondered.

"Oh," Eric began, casting about for a convincing reply, "to look for—well, to look for forest fires. And wolves."

Ginger walked to the brink of the chasm and peered down. Meanwhile I was getting an eyeful, trying to map out the best approach for a night assault on the R. M. & P. citadel. Eric looked at us and smiled. *He* knew what was in our minds.

"Please note," he said to the girl, raising his voice slightly so Ginger could hear, "that no one can approach from any direction without being seen. In fact—"

Without warning the sentinel's rifle cracked. Astrid started, clutched at Eric's sleeve, emitted a little shriek. I whirled about. My eyes followed the sentinel's rifle. I saw three or four thin white columns of smoke rising from behind the shoulder of a hill.

Ginger turned in time to take it all in. He glanced at his watch and remarked to me: "Dorchak's slow in burning those slashings. He should have started an hour ago." Eric frowned and bade the sentinel hold his fire.

"Goodness!" Astrid exclaimed, with an inquiring glance at Eric. "I knew you frightened away wolves by shooting at them, but I didn't know that's what you do with forest fires!"

Eric offered us the use of his horses to ride back to camp, but Ginger thanked him and declined. I still thought our release was some trick on Eric's part.

I couldn't see, at first, how it was possible for him to show us the whole R. M. & P. layout, and then turn us loose. But as I milled it over on the way back to camp, it began to appear more plausible. For one thing, it was up to him to put up a front before the girl of being the generous captor, who freed his prisoners because he held their opposition of so little account. Again, he probably believed he had staved off an attack upon the Pinnacles by showing us his stronghold was impregnable.

I wondered if Ginger had set out deliberately with the intention of being captured, so he'd have a chance to inspect the R. M. & P. layout at first hand. And I wondered if he'd planned for Dorchak to burn the slashings at a time calculated to distract the attention of the R. M. & P. sentinel, thus aiding our approach.

I decided he was pretty sore at Dorchak for being late with his fires, because when we got back to camp he ordered him to spend the night on sentinel duty.

CHAPTER VIII

FIERY orange-red was the sun as it rose through the haze which filled the basin. Acrid, yet faintly sweet was the air as I

breathed it in after being aroused by three shots from our sentinel.

I could hear the cook's alarm clock as I stuck my head through the tent-flaps and sniffed suspiciously. Flat and lifeless seemed the air about me; yet as I glanced above, I saw faint, wraithlike streamers scudding eastward through the haze above the treetops.

I cussed. Man, how I cussed! For I knew the meaning of that haze, that acrid odor, that deadly calm in the timber while the thin smoke flew overhead!

And then I was overwhelmed with pity – pity for the courageous young redhead whose castle of cards seemed about to go up in smoke, as if Eric had touched a match to it. Poor kid! I know what it means to have your highest hopes, your fondest dreams shattered and crushed. Failure on the first big job—how it takes the very heart out of you, leaving you timid and fearful forever after, forever fearing failure, forever afraid to take a chance! I know, for once I myself—but that has nothing to do with this story.

A tousled brick-red head popped out of Ginger's tent. It took things in at a glance, fizzed and sputtered a moment like a bomb about to explode, suddenly bit off a "damn" in the middle, and vanished.

A minute later Ginger appeared in undershirt, breeches and unlaced boots, and strode to my tent. He wasn't cussing any more. He was pretty pale. It seemed to me his lower jaw stuck out just a trifle farther.

"Dorchak must have been asleep on the job," were his first words. His voice was low and hard. "The sentinel should have been better able to see the fire an hour ago than now. It's a sweet time to be giving the alarm!"

"Maybe," I ventured, struggling to draw my shirt over my head, "it'll burn itself out—"

"Fat chance, with that wind overhead!" he interrupted. "It'll sweep the whole basin, or I miss my guess."

HE turned and gazed off toward the west. Here and there through the treetops the rugged crest of the Yore Range was visible through the haze, which was noticeably thicker there than overhead, revealing only too plainly where the fire had been started.

"A shrewd move on Eric's part," he commented calmly, as the excited men began pouring out of the bunk tent. "He figured the fire would sweep us clean out of the basin. Bet you two bits I know where he got his idea."

I remembered Astrid's remark about forest fires. But I didn't say so.

"Maybe we can cut a fire line and stop—"

"No chance!" He grinned mirthlessly. "Well, he's saving us the trouble of cutting the timber in the basin before we flood the reservoir."

Never say die! I could have hugged him for that—even though I knew a hundred men couldn't stop the fire in the face of that wind.

"What's your plan?" I asked.

"First of all, a good hot breakfast. The Lord knows when we'll get another square meal. When you get those boots laced, I wish you'd hop over to the cook-tent and see that Cooky gets a wiggle on."

He turned and started back toward the bunk-tent, Comet prancing in front of him.

"Well, pup," I heard him say, "we've got our work cut out for us this day!"

I wondered what he meant by that. Was the determined young idiot actually going to try to fight the fire? I watched him walk to the bunk-tent, and saw the near-panic which had gripped the men vanish at his approach.

By the time I'd put the fear of God in the cook and started back for further orders, I found Ginger calmly shaving in front of his tent.

Some of the boys were dragging the log platform down to the edge of the stream. Others were lugging transits, levels, chains, rods, flags and other equipment from the bunk-tent. I couldn't quite get the drift of the platform stunt. But I figured the equipment was being made ready to break camp, so we could beat it out of the basin ahead of the fire.

Suddenly I was gripped by an idea.

"It may not be as bad as it looks, boss," I said to Ginger eagerly. "We can move camp to the north ridge. From there we can pepper the R. M. & P. bunch if they try to run their line in the wake of the blaze."

"Yeah, but"—he flipped a gob of lather from his razor—"remember, Colman, this timber's got to be cleared before our reservoir can be flooded. It may as well be now."

"How about Dorchak? Shall I send for him?"

"He's in no danger—yet. He'll be back, quick enough, as soon as the fire draws near."

"Speed is one of the biggest elements in fighting a forest fire," I reminded him tactfully. "If we're going to fight the fire, the quicker we get started, the better."

"Yeah. I know. What's the cook going to have for breakfast?"

THAT was Ginger all over. I'd have given a month's pay if he'd taken me into his confidence and told me his plan—if he had any plan. Breakfast dragged. I was too excited to eat much. So were the men. Ginger took his time. When his last flapjack was finished, he lighted a cigarette and turned to the cook.

"I wouldn't bother with the dishes," he said. "I'll want you along with us."

That was the moment the deputy sheriff from Grubstake chose to come riding into camp, lickety-split.

"What's coming off here?" he shouted. "Don't you bohunks know enough to be careful with fire? A fine job we'll have putting this thing out!"

"Hullo, Sheriff," Ginger greeted him cheerfully. "You must have gotten an early start. Wont you sit down and have a bite to eat? We're way ahead of time with our breakfast this morning."

"Eat?" sputtered the deputy. "Eat? Why, you poor idiot—"

"Keep your shirt on," Ginger advised calmly. "Can't we clear this reservoir site of timber without you getting all het up?"

The deputy was flabbergasted.

"What?" he demanded. "Yuh mean to say you started this here fire a-purpose—"

"Not exactly. I fancy the R. M. & P. gang can tell you more about how it started. But if they hadn't started it, we would have, sooner or later.

"You see, Jim, it isn't the best practice to flood a reservoir in a valley filled with thick timber, without first getting rid of the timber. We're ready to finish our survey and make our filings right away. So it would have been but a matter of a short time until we cleared the basin, anyway."

Well, would you believe it, in five minutes the redhead had talked the deputy into believing the forest fire was nothing but a matter of course, a minor affair not worth getting het up about. He persuaded him the fire couldn't jump the ridge and get out of the basin, so who should worry?

"I didn't know you could see the smoke in Grubstake," he commented finally.

The deputy started as if he'd suddenly remembered something.

"You couldn't when I started," he admitted. "I'll bet they can now. But that wasn't what I came out here about. I've got a warrant to serve."

"A warrant?" I fancied Ginger grew a shade paler.

"Yep, a warrant. Assault with intent to kill. Against your man Dorchak. I reckon yuh know what it's about."

"It's news to me," Ginger admitted. "I suppose it's sworn out by some of the R. M. & P. gang?"

"I *thought* yuh knew about it," the deputy grinned.

"I shouldn't think you'd fall for a game like that, Sheriff. Can't you see what's behind it? You know the situation here. You know how anxious the other outfit is to cripple us. Why, if I wanted I could get warrants against half a dozen of that bunch for sniping our men!"

"The district attorney issues the warrants. I serve 'em. I want your man Dorchak. Where is he?"

The haze was growing thicker, the odor of burning pine more acrid. And I was growing more impatient. And here sat those two, leisurely talking about a warrant as if nothing else in the world mattered!

"He's not in camp, Jim. I'd hate like thunder to lose him today, when we've got so much work cut out for us. Can't you let the warrant slide a day or two if I guarantee to deliver Dorchak to you, safe and sound, and then see he's released on bond?"

"Old stuff! I've heard that before. I want my man, before he has a chance to skip. An' I'm agoin' to git him. Where is he?"

"To tell you the exact truth, Sheriff, I don't know. He was on sentinel duty during the night, but I suppose the fire drove him out. He might be almost anywhere in the basin."

"If yo're tryin' to stall me, let me tell yuh it don't go. If yuh don't intend to tell me where he is, I'm agoin' out an' look fer him."

"Luck to you, Jim! If I can help you, let me know."

The deputy sniffed. "Guess I know the lay of the land hereabouts. I know what you surveyin' fellers been up to. I know

'bout where yuh keep yore gunmen planted out in the timber. I'll step out, an' I betcha I have Dorchak safe in jail within four hours."

"By the way," smiled Ginger, "if you find him, I wish you'd tell him not to worry—that we'll go on his bond as soon as we can get to town."

The deputy grunted suspiciously and rose to go.

Just then one of the men came running with word that the tool-chest containing the axes was locked, and that Dorchak had forgotten to leave the key. Ginger took charge, tried several of his keys, borrowed mine and the deputy's, and finally, when none could be found to fit, gave orders to smash the box open.

For a second he seemed to hang in midair. Then the sapling straightened, and Ginger was catapulted through the air.

"Well," said the sheriff, preparing to swing into the saddle, " 'spect I'll be back soon—with my man."

He leaned toward Ginger, and added significantly:

"An' when I git back to Grubstake, I'm agoin' to have another prisoner—the escaped convict who broke loose down Denver way last week."

I looked quickly at Ginger. His expression didn't change.

"Luck to you, Sheriff," he said. "So long."

And he turned to the spot where the men were shoving the log platform into the creek. One of the boys, the tool-chest smashed, returned the three bunches of keys to Ginger. He thrust his own in his pocket and handed me mine. Jingling the other in his hand, he gazed at the timber where the deputy had vanished and remarked:

"I wouldn't mind being pinched by an officer as absent-minded as that. He'd probably go 'way and forget me. Well, he'll probably be back when he finds the keys are missing." He dropped them in his shirt pocket, turned to the men, and said:

"Load all your equipment and your rifles on the raft, and lash 'em fast."

The raft! At last it trickled through my skull why Ginger had ordered the trees around the cook-tent cut, and had directed the building of the "platform."

But what was he planning to do with it? Tow the stuff upstream away from the fire?

Presently he called me aside, and said:

"Colman, I wish you'd hop out and start a line of back-fire across the basin from north to south, parallel with the front of the main fire. When you've finished, come back to camp and turn loose the horses. They'll find their way out of the basin all right. When that's done, follow the creek downstream until you find the rest of us."

"*Down*stream?" I thought I'd misunderstood. "Did I get you right? Did you say *down*stream?"

"Yeah. We'll be as near the breast of the blaze as we can get."

"Man, are you plain cuckoo?" I asked him, utterly amazed. "Don't you know we'll all be trapped between the main fire and the back-fire? Do you realize—"

"I know what I'm doing." He clipped his words short. He half turned to where the men were loading the raft. "It oughtn't

to take you more than three-quarters of an hour. Make it snappy, Colman. I don't want to have to wait on you. It may jim up my plans."

TRAPPED between two fires! Not so good. Freak ideas were O. K. when nothing more important than a detail of the day's work was at stake. But to imperil the lives of more than a dozen men just because of some fool theory—that was something else again. I opened my mouth for another roar. But Ginger was back by the side of the creek, superintending the loading of the raft.

I started out, figuring that if he could stand it, I could. I don't believe I'm exactly yellow, but—well, it took about all the nerve I could muster to head back downstream after I'd started my back-fires and turned the horses loose.

By that time a sickly yellow pall had replaced the thin blue haze overhead. The sun had vanished behind the thick blanket of smoke. Off to the west you could see the smoke rolling skyward in tremendous billows.

Not blue as it had been before. But yellowish black—black and dirty, edged with dirty sulphur yellow. And you could hear the fire—hear it roaring like a ravenous grizzly. A terror-stricken rabbit bounced past me, oblivious of my presence. Long before I reached our rendezvous the sparks were dropping all about me like fiery flakes of snow.

At last, above the crackling roar of the flames, I heard the sound of voices. Terror tinged them—stark terror, and anger, and mutinous rebellion.

"Fair enough!" came the voice of Ginger. "If you don't want to go with me, you don't have to. Stay here and burn—there's fire in every direction!"

CHAPTER IX

OUR raft was beached on a sandy shelf in a bend of the stream. The men were huddled about it, fear plainly stamped on the face of everyone. Some were pallid beneath their tan.

Two who had been standing in the shallows splashing water on each other as a protection against falling sparks had desisted just before I pushed through the willows on the bank.

One had just lighted a cigarette with trembling fingers, and had flicked the match carelessly to one side. Another, through force of habit, stepped on the match—with the whole forest ablaze a few hundred yards away!

Man, let me tell you there wasn't a man there worse scared than I! I knew my face was white. Try as I would, I couldn't banish the sickening chill that centered in the pit of my stomach. But by George, I wasn't going to let 'em see I was afraid! I strode toward Ginger, and with as casual an air as I could force myself to assume, I reported: "Everything's O. K., boss."

"The back-fires are lighted clear across the basin?" he asked. He was standing on the little beach with one foot resting on the edge of the raft.

"Clear across the basin."

"You turned the horses loose?"

I nodded.

"See anything of Dorchak?"

"Nope. No sign of him when I left camp. Guess he must have pulled out as soon as he gave the alarm. The sheriff might as well look for a needle in a haystack."

"Colman," said Ginger, his voice raised above the growing roar of flames, "we're going to let the fire burn itself out. We've got more important things to do than fight a fire which we'd have started ourselves, anyway. We're going to capture the Pinnacles, and finish our job.

"You and I, and any of the rest of the boys who want to join us, are going to float downstream through the fire, and shoot the rapids. We're going to take the R. M. & P. gang from the rear, when they aren't expecting it. Those who don't care to go with us are at liberty to do as they please. I've told them there's fire on every side of us now—that the only way out is by shooting the rapids through the fire itself."

So that's why he had caused the raft to be built! Not, of course, because he had foreseen the fire, but because he had planned to shoot the rapids anyway, to land below the R. M. & P. camp, to take 'em by surprise!

I'd seen those boiling, churning rapids from the summit of the Pinnacles. Ordinarily you couldn't have dragged me into 'em on a flimsy raft for all of Papa Skinner's fortune. But now—well, I could see how it offered a bare chance, the only chance, to escape from the flames which encircled us.

"But," protested the leader of the mutineers, a slant-browed Hunyak, "it be almos' death, for sure, if we shoot those rapid'."

"It *is* death, for sure, if you stay here," Ginger grinned. "But take your choice, boys. If you don't want to come with Colman and me, speak up. I'm not going to force you to do anything against your wills."

A burning branch plopped into the water at my side, sizzled and floated away. A little peninsula of underbrush below us suddenly burst into flame. Comet broke into a terrified howl.

Lots of men can be heroes when the alternative is death. And I say that, knowing *I'd* never have dared the rapids if it hadn't been for the hungry flames.

"All right, boys," cried Ginger at the instant the men seemed wavering. "Let's go! First of all, lie down in the shallows and get yourselves soaking wet. Then soak those blankets. That's the stuff!"

I followed him into the water. The men looked from one to another doubtfully for just an instant. Then one, imbued with the courage born of fear, followed us. And in thirty seconds the whole blamed bunch was splashing in the stream like a lot of kids at the swimming-hole.

"Attaboy, Jim!" Ginger called. "Now heave your blanket on the raft."

My teeth were chattering as I waded toward the edge of the raft. The water, fresh from the snowbanks of the continental divide, was like ice.

"Here's a blanket, Colman," cried Ginger, thrusting a dripping mass in my arms. "Grab that pole there—I'll want you to help fend us off the rocks.

"You, Gregor, keep off that raft until we get her off the beach. Everybody ready? All right! Heave! Jump aboard, everybody. Wrap yourselves in your blankets. Grab hold of the lashings, and hold on as you never held before. All aboard for Hellfire, the Pinnacles and points west!" And he grinned cheerily at us.

We swung off into the current. Ginger was the last to clamber aboard.

The stream was comparatively placid through the length of the basin. As pretty a stream, ordinarily, as you'd ever want to whip with a royal coachman.

But when it entered the cañon! Squeezed in between narrow rock walls, tortured with boulders that had fallen from the heights; boiling, writhing, foaming, roaring—that was something else again. I hated the thought of it.

And before we reached the rapids, the raging inferno of the blazing forest. Not so good—not so good!

"Up to the front end with your pole, Colman," Ginger shouted as we swung into the center of the stream, turning slowly. "When we reach the rapids, we want to keep her from smashing all the rocks out of the water. Let 'er swing if she wants—there's no bow or stern to our liner."

I scrambled over the transit and rifles, wrapped in blankets and canvas and lashed to the logs. My pole was the trunk of a slim lodgepole pine, limber and springy. Ginger posted a couple of others with poles at the sides of the raft. He took his place at the back, looking for all the world like an Indian warrior in his blanket.

"The Pinnacles or bust!" came his war-cry. I caught something of his elation, something of the joy of approaching battle.

A gust of air like a blast from the mouth of a furnace swept down on us, and left me gasping. And yet I was thankful. It's hard to be courageous when your teeth are chattering.

The wind was tearing along through the tops of the trees. We, sliding along the opaque surface of the stream, were in a comparative calm, except when a sudden, searing breath would swoop down on us momentarily. A crown fire, this, with the flames sweeping through the tree-tops.

WE swung around a bend in the stream. It was as if some one had flung open a gigantic furnace door before us. For the first time we beheld the fire itself. Through the thick curtain of smoke it glowed cherry red, like the coals of a forge.

As we floated nearer and began to pierce the smoke-curtain, the cherry red merged into orange. No longer was the fire merely a glow. Now we could see the snapping, crackling flames—voracious flames, licking their chops, waiting for us—waiting!

Sparks were raining all about us, like a thundershower, with drops of molten metal pouring down on us in place of rain. They sizzled as they struck the water, and vanished.

Another blast, withering in its intensity, burst upon us. I lowered my head, for I could not bear the searing heat upon my eyes. I raised my arm to protect my face. A moment later I peered out through

streaming lids. I could see no more than twice the length of the raft. At times one bank or the other would be wholly obscured by smoke.

I heard a shout, and turned. Ginger, blanketed, pole in hand, was waving at me and yelling. His words were swept away in the roar of the fire, ripped from his lips like the torn wraiths of smoke.

Most of the others, wrapped in their soaked woolen armor, were prone on the raft, clinging to the lashings. Comet had retreated from his position in the center. He crouched close to Ginger's legs now, his defiant bark silenced. But if he was whimpering, I couldn't hear it. Ginger dropped to his knees, and motioned to me to do the same. He drew the terrier under his blanket.

I became conscious of the odor of burning cloth mixed with the acrid smell of burning pine. I found my blanket, dried out across the shoulders within a few moments, was smoldering from a spark which had dropped upon it, unnoticed.

I splashed water over my shoulders. The water, icy cold a short distance upstream, was perceptibly warmer here. I dashed water on those of the crew nearest me, although none of them was burning.

NEAR the surface of the water the air was much better. Even so, it was sufficiently permeated with smoke to cause me to cough and choke occasionally. I caught the attention of several of the boys, and showed them how to stuff water-soaked kerchiefs in their mouths to filter the air.

Looking up, I was amazed to see the whole flaming forest apparently whirling round and round. I wondered if I was losing my senses. And then, suddenly, I became conscious it was the raft that was spinning.

We were working into an eddy at the side of the stream. I rose to my knees and frantically poled my end back toward the main current. I had no stomach for being trapped in an eddy in the midst of that blazing inferno!

Again I felt the current tugging at the raft. I was mighty glad to feel its grip, I tell you. I looked at Ginger. The raft had switched ends, and he was at what now was the bow.

His face was blackened with soot, except for his eye sockets, from which two steel-blue eyes gleamed exultantly. His sandy brows and lashes were gone. He grinned and flung me a gesture of encouragement. I drew a long breath, and waited for the worst—the rapids.

But instead we moved slowly into an area where the roar of the flames lessened perceptibly. The water was becoming rougher, too. I grabbed my pole, for I knew the time was near for me to do my stuff.

I shot a glance sidewise. The solid wall of flame had vanished. Instead I beheld row on row of gaunt, black tree trunks. There was fire yet—plenty of it, but only in spots. The wind seemed to have shifted, too.

And then I realized we were entering that area just above the head of the cañon, where the wind sweeping down the gorge swirled back on each side in great eddies as it burst into the open.

The dense black smoke gave way to a misty blue haze again. For an instant I caught a glimpse of the Pinnacles towering above us. If we could effect a landing—

And then our raft tried to ram a hundred-ton boulder out of the stream. We shot down into a churning, foaming channel. The smashing roar of the rapids was far greater than the roar of the fire had been.

The cañon walls closed in above us. I staggered to my feet, flung the sodden blanket from my shoulders, seized my pole as if it were a giant lance, and fought those clutching rapids like a madman.

CHAPTER X

STARTLED by the crash, which almost jolted him loose from the raft, one of the men glanced up with terror in his eyes as we swung around the boulder. His lips were moving. But whatever sound came from them was blotted out by the roar of the rapids. He ducked his head, drew his blanket over it, and clung to the lashings with a veritable death grip.

A streak of flying spindrift whipped me across the face. The raft was bucking and sunfishing like a bronco. Ginger, his blanket discarded, no longer seemed like an Indian, but rather like a jousting knight.

We rushed down upon another boulder. He met it with his pole. Instantly the raft spun around. I found myself at the bow again, fairly dizzy with the whirl of it.

Abruptly we rose on the surging water

and were flung sidewise, as if by some giant hand, against the sheer cañon wall. The shock of the impact hurled me headlong.

I managed to keep my grip on the pole. One corner of the raft had been crumpled like matchwood. The lashings on that side had been ground away in one or two places, and were frayed in others.

wrench was sickening. I could feel the logs grinding under my feet. My pole was snatched from my fingers, I never knew how or by what. I was too busy clutching at the lashings to worry about the pole.

My heart skipped a beat as I felt the rope give beneath the strain. My fingers slipped along the wet surface. I felt the clutching water was about to drag me down.

And then we spun about and, for the space of seconds, floated into a stretch of

The cook heaved the stove-hook. Ginger ducked and slammed him one that took the fight out of him.

The load had shifted. The raft was listing slightly. The ropes which lashed a theodolite were loosened and slipping. I kicked the instrument free, and rolled it into the foaming water.

The whole raft shook and trembled as we slid along the granite wall. I feared it was going to pieces beneath our feet. Then suddenly the current jerked us back into the middle of the torrent.

I scrambled over as best I could, so my weight would help balance the bucking raft. I motioned to some of the boys to do the same. One essayed to do so, and finally managed to work his way over. The rest were helpless with terror. They'd no more have loosed their grips on the lashings than they'd have dived overboard.

We shot down the center of the stream, spinning as we went. I dropped to my hands and knees. There I clung, unable to get to my feet, fearful every instant that the next would see our frail raft smashed to splinters.

At last we struck again—head on. The comparatively calm water. I dragged myself back over the edge of the raft and lay there panting, wondering how much longer it would hold together.

I struggled to my feet again. Why, I don't know, because without my pole I was helpless. I felt a log give beneath my feet, and became aware that that last smash had just about knocked our raft galley west.

It was square no longer, but shaped like a diamond. Two or three logs on one side had been sheared clean off, but were floating alongside because the cargo lashings were still wrapped about them. The raft had become a mere mass of loose logs, held together only by the ropes which bound our equipment on them.

Another smash like the last, and we'd all be struggling in the rapids in the midst of the wreckage. I was about ready to take a header into the water and trust to luck to get ashore—until I saw the reason why the water had become more quiet.

It was backed up behind a natural dam about ten feet high. Years before, a few

thousand tons of granite had split loose from the cliffs above and had plunged down into the bed of the stream. Now the water poured over the jagged top of this little dam. I, for one, preferred at that instant to go over the edge aboard the remains of the raft, to being sucked over, struggling in the grip of the current.

I glanced at Ginger. He waved cheerily. I saw he still gripped his pole.

And then we swung end for end again, while squarely in our path loomed a jagged splinter of rock. It protruded not more than two feet above the surface. Yet it was on the very brink of the falls. If we smashed into it, I knew it would slice our raft in two like a giant knife-blade.

Ginger saw it too. Like an ancient knight he raised his pole, braced himself, and waited for the shock.

The current swung us a trifle to one side —just enough so we bore down on the jagged blade at a slight angle.

Ginger's lance struck the rock, slipped, and then caught in a crevice.

I could feel the raft quiver when the pole found its mark. I saw the slender lodgepole sapling bend beneath the pressure. Slowly the raft began to swing clear of the rock. The sapling bent more and more. I felt it must surely snap.

Snap? Not so you could notice it! Those lodgepole pine have sinews bred of centuries of battling mountain winds!

But something had to give. It did. When the pressure became too great, Ginger simply rose from the raft into the air. The raft swept on beneath him. For a split second he seemed to hang in midair.

Then the sapling straightened, like a bow when the archer frees the arrow. Ginger, kicking and struggling, was catapulted through the air.

I didn't have time to see him hit the water. At that instant the raft, fended off the knife-edge by Ginger's heroic effort, swung sidewise to the brink of the falls and instinctively I jumped—harder and farther than I ever expect to jump again.

There was just one thought in my mind: To put as much distance between me and that mass of logs as I could. I had no time to dive. I turned over once in the air. At least, I can't figure how else I caught an instantaneous glimpse of the old raft as she shot over the brink.

And the rest of the gang was jumping, just as I had done. Even as I turned in the air, it struck me funny, that sight—like a lot of fleas hopping down Comet's back before he was swept into the water!

I STRUCK doubled up on my side in the quiet water just beyond the maelstrom at the foot of the falls. It just about knocked the breath out of me. I was gasping as I went down—which didn't help matters.

After what seemed an interminable period my head shot above the surface. I was sputtering and choking and fighting for air.

I saw calm water ahead, and struck out for it. As I swam, I looked back under my arm. I saw a churning mass of logs tossing and tumbling at the foot of the falls, and logs and struggling men in the quieter water just beyond. I wondered if Comet had been caught beneath the falling raft—if Ginger would be swept over the brink into that heaving mass of logs.

The water may have been warm on the surface as we passed through the fire area. But here it was icy cold again, so cold it was almost paralyzing. I swam for the edge of the huge pool. Even though the surface of the water was comparatively calm, I could feel a powerful current tugging at my legs. I was carried past the little tongue of graveled beach which protruded into the water. I found myself on the edge of a mass of driftwood which had collected in a sort of backwater at the lower edge of the pool.

And there I was up against it. The driftwood was floating on the surface. There was not enough of it to bear my weight. When I tried to climb upon it, it sank beneath me. I was growing numb with cold. I felt my strength ebbing fast. I knew it was physically impossible for me to swim back against the current and make that little tongue of sand.

Keeping myself afloat by dog-paddling, I turned and looked about. And it was lucky I did, for one of the logs from the raft was floating into the driftwood jam, and was less than a yard from my head as I turned.

I ducked my head and dived. As I did so, I wondered if I'd ever come up again, if I had a chance against that dragging undercurrent. I failed to make any headway. But at least I held my own, and the log passed over me and lodged against the edge of the driftwood.

I came up in the same spot I had gone down. The log was on the other side of me, now. I grasped it, and believe me,

I was glad to grip something that would sustain my weight.

That log proved a lifesaver. I rested for a moment, but feared to cling too long because of the numbing cold. I worked my way along the log until I reached the jam which had caused the driftwood to collect. And then it was but a matter of climbing atop the jam and crawling across the tangled mass until I reached the shore.

My teeth were chattering. The muscles in my legs were woefully weak and I sat down because I couldn't do anything else.

Three of the gang were clinging to a single log, slowly revolving in the pool beneath the falls. Several were swimming hand over hand for the little cove where I sat, too exhausted to lend them aid.

Of all the bobbing heads in the pool, not one was red!

Presently my strength came back sufficiently for me to clamber to my feet. At once I was in action again, I was almost as good as ever, except a bit sick and weak.

The three men and their log drifted into the jam, and they clambered out, none injured. A length of rope was still attached to the log. We threw it out and towed one or two others to shore. One fellow's arm dangled uselessly at his side.

Even Comet had made the shore and was now shaking himself vigorously.

JUST then I gave a shout, for I saw that ginger top plowing through the water. Out from the foam at the very foot of the falls he came. I wondered what was slowing him up, until I saw he was dragging some one by the hair. We heaved him the rope as soon as he was near enough, and towed the two of them in.

The rescued man was unconscious from a crack on the head, besides being full of water. We rolled him over a log and strapped a temporary splint on the arm of the other casualty.

Ginger was as odd a looking creature as ever you saw. His brows and lashes and forelock were singed off. The rest of his hair was plastered close to his head. One cheekbone was skinned and bleeding. The soot was washed from his face in streaks. Somehow his shirt had been torn clean off him. He stood there, panting and grinning, bare to the waist.

"Everybody accounted for," he announced. "That was a good start. Now if we have as much luck, we'll have the Pinnacles within an hour."

CHAPTER XI

THE PINNACLES! I gasped. After what we'd just gone through? Enough was enough! This up-and-at-'em stuff was fine enough, but there's a limit to everything.

I looked over the dripping, shivering men. As I said, it's a tough job to rouse courage in a man when his teeth are chattering. They looked from one to another. The slant-browed Hunyak who had led the mutineers scowled and hunched his shoulders.

"You t'ink we be crazy too? Our guns, dey be down in bottom of pool. How we do it, huh? No gun, no level, no transit, no—"

"And no guts!" Ginger interrupted contemptuously. What an ending for his plans!

The Hunyak shrugged.

"Maybe so. Jus' same, we no be bunch of crazy mans. Wit'out guns—"

"Guns? There's plenty of guns in the R. M. & P. camp. All we've got to do is to take 'em! Their gang is all up top, watching the fire."

"Tha's right. They all up top, we all down here. They see us, we no see them. Bang! Maybe me dead, maybe Gregor there. Bang! Another Vulcan man kick off. Guess again, crazy man."

Ginger snorted. Then he opened up on us. Cuss? It's a gift that man had. Ripped us up one side and down the other. Peeled the hide off, he did. Words that cracked like a lash—and stung when they hit. Words that made your hair curl—even when it was wet, like ours. Words that crackled like an electric spark and burnt like lightning. Oh, it's a gift, it is. I felt myself growing red behind the ears as he whirled about and limped off up the gorge, alone. Once he spat.

I knew how the Hunyak and the rest of 'em felt. I knew, because I felt that way myself. But I couldn't have stayed behind after that—not if a regiment had opposed us!

"C'mon, you birds," I chirped up. "Let's not be a bunch of quitters."

But that's all the good it did. The Hunyak shrugged and turned his back. The others looked uncomfortable, but they never stirred, never spoke.

I turned and took out after Ginger. Comet, wet and shivering, was trotting ahead of me. Once he turned and growled.

You can't tell *me* he didn't know what was going on!

I WAS feeling pretty chesty, and was expecting some attaboy stuff when I caught up with Ginger. But he bawled me out because I hadn't kept my tobacco dry. I felt better right away, because it showed me he wasn't worrying. The little fightin' fool never doubted that the two of us could put it over on the whole R. M. & P. outfit.

"There's smoke pouring out of the cook-tent stovepipe," he commented as we neared their camp. "Otherwise the place looks deserted. Like as not the cook's the only one that isn't watching the fire and laughing to think they've driven us back to the far end of the basin."

There was no use trying to sneak up on the camp, because there was no place to hide. So we walked into the place as if we owned it. As we rounded the rear of the cook-tent, there suddenly burst out such a clanging and a clattering as you never heard before. The sound filled the gorge, echoing and reëchoing from wall to wall. My nerves were on edge, and I jumped as if I'd been shot. My first thought was that we'd set off some sort of a burglar alarm.

But it was the cook, pounding with a stovelid-lifter on a big steel triangle in front of the tent.

"Howdy, cook!" said Ginger, amiable-like.

The cook jumped and whirled about, and with almost the same motion he heaved the stove-hook at Ginger. Ginger ducked and slammed him one alongside the jaw. That took the fight out of him.

"Where's everybody?" asked Ginger.

"Go to hell," mumbled the cook, nursing his jaw.

Ginger hauled off as if he were going to clout him again.

"Up there." The cook didn't waste any time in answering.

"If he only hadn't seen us in time to give the alarm," I exclaimed. "Now we sure are out of luck."

"Alarm?" Ginger laughed. "He was ringing the breakfast gong. You've forgotten we had our breakfast at dawn, two hours early."

"What's the odds? It'll bring 'em all back to camp, just the same!"

Ginger winked. "Get some rope, and we'll tie this cook so he wont make any trouble. I've always had a grudge against cooks, anyway."

I pushed aside the flap of the nearest tent, and ran smack into old Grizzly King, the cattle baron, who'd been getting an earful. Right away I saw he didn't have a gun, so I said:

"Get me some rope, quick. Enough to tie you and the cook."

The old boy chuckled.

"How do you get that way?" he asked. "I don't belong to this outfit. Just dropped in, so's Miss Bellamy could look at the fire. Didn't feel like going to the top of the rock to watch the fire, until I'd had some breakfast. It's none o' my lookout, your trouble with these boys."

"How many more are there in camp?"

"Find out for yourself. I just told you your troubles are none o' my lookout. I'm not going to help yuh or hinder yuh."

"How about it, boss?" I called to Ginger. "Shall I hogtie this baby?"

"Search his tent for guns. Then we'll leave him inside, and if he shows his nose outside the flap, we'll pot him," snapped Ginger.

"Fair enough," grinned the old man. I think he got a kick out of the whole business, because we left him chuckling.

"Now," directed Ginger when the cook was bound and the old man was in his tent, "let's search the camp for guns. We want enough to arm every one of the boys down the gorge."

I thought it was pretty poor judgment to talk like that in the hearing of the others, because it tipped off the fact that our outfit was in their rear, and was unarmed.

But I didn't say anything. We went through that camp like a cyclone, but all we found was one rifle. Then we returned to the cook-tent and helped ourselves to some hot coffee and oatmeal. Believe me, it put new life into me!

"Now," said Ginger, giving a last tug at the cook's bonds to make sure they were tight, "we'll be ready to show these R. M. & P. lads a thing or two. Come on, Colman, let's get going. The boys are waiting for us."

"But—" I started to protest, but cut it short when Ginger winked again.

HE led the way back down the gorge, laughing and bragging about what we'd do to the R. M. & P. boys. But when he was out of hearing of the camp, he changed his tune.

"You double back, and follow the trail up to the north Pinnacle," he directed, thrusting the rifle into my hands.

"Keep to the trees, so you wont meet the R. M. & P. bunch coming down to breakfast. Let 'em pass you. Keep out of sight. Chances are, when you get to the top, you'll find no one there but the sentinel. He'll be watching the fire. The last thing he'll be expecting is an attack from the rear. You ought to have an easy time with him. Then wait till you hear from me."

"But what are you going to do?"

"I'm going to the Pinnacles too, but by the back stairs."

"You mean—"

"I'm going to climb the face of the cliff. Just in case something goes wrong at your end, understand? So long. Don't make any noise when you pass the camp."

"But it can't be done," I protested. "Are you crazy? No man can climb the face of that cliff! And you haven't even a gun!"

"Shut your trap and don't waste time arguing. If the R. M. & P. outfit should get back to camp before we get started, it's all off! So make it snappy."

"But—"

"Shut up!" He gave me a shove, and started off on a dog-trot back along the bank, followed by Comet. I retraced my steps, passed the camp on the opposite side, and plunged into the pines in the chimney through which the trail wound to the summit of the north Pinnacle.

I'd barely gotten out of sight when I heard the voices of the R. M. & P. boys on their way down for breakfast. I reasoned they must have spent part of the night on the summit.

Pretty soon I heard a commotion in the camp. When I reached the next clearing, I looked back and down, for by this time I was high above the bottom of the gorge. It was filled with a blue haze from the back-draft of the fire, but that didn't prevent me from seeing 'em running round in circles. I took one look and kept right on keeping on.

I was two hundred feet higher, puffing but going strong, when I next looked back. Before I knew it I let out a yelp of delight.

The poor fools were starting out in a body—not up the trail after me, but *down* the gorge!

Then the realization of Ginger's strategy began to seep through my skull.

The cook, and perhaps old Grizzly, had heard us talking about rejoining the boys down the gorge. They'd heard us leave, heard us start in that direction. And so now the whole R. M. & P. bunch, never dreaming that the Pinnacle, the key to the whole darned situation, was endangered, were whooping it off down the cañon to capture the helpless Vulcan gang!

It was almost too good to be true. It was pretty rough on the rest of our boys, but I guess they had it coming. If they hadn't been yellow—

I TOOK things a little easier after that. If you've ever tried to run up a twelve-hundred-foot slope in an altitude where the air's so rare a can of beans almost explodes when you punch it with a can-opener, then you'll know I was puffing and wheezing considerable.

As I neared the top, here came Comet tearing through the timber. Ginger must have reached the bottom of the cliff and started climbing, I reasoned. When the pup found he couldn't follow him, he had taken after me. I picked him up and carried him under my arm, for I couldn't take any chances of falling down on the job at the last minute because of his idiotic chipmunk chasing.

Well, it was like taking candy from a baby! I crept up right to the barricade of rocks. I eased my head up between two boulders, and saw the sentinel. He was sitting, hands clasped behind his head, against one of a number of pretty big boulders. His rifle lay at his side. He was looking out across the basin, but there was blame little to see except rising billows of yellowish-black smoke.

I oozed over the barricade and crept up behind him. Then I rose, dropped the pup, stepped around the boulder, and threw down on him with the rifle.

"Stick 'em up, Jack!" I ordered.

He did. He almost swallowed his chew of tobacco, he was that surprised.

Comet let out a yelp and grabbed him by the leg. Then I recognized him. He was the bird who had knocked Ginger off the train! When Comet nipped him, he let out a roar that could have been heard clear across the basin.

I stepped on his gun, and tried to call the pup off. I finally had to belt him one to make him let go—and I took my time, for I thought he was entitled to a little revenge.

"Lie down and roll over," I said to my captive, "while I tie your hands and feet. —Quit your growling, Comet."

I knelt on the fellow's back, and lashed his hands with his own belt.

"I know you," I told him as I started to work on his feet. "And I could be pinched for what I think of you. Don't imagine you're getting away with any incognito stuff around here. I've got your number. You might at least have had the decency to go to work for some one else besides the outfit that's fighting us, you lowdown, ornery, no-'count—"

"I say, old man," he grunted, "don't give me away, will you? I don't want anyone to know—"

"Give you away? Of course I'll give you away! I'm sittin' on top of the world, and I'll tell that same cockeyed world just who you are and how ornery you really—"

Just then some one stepped from behind the boulder and knocked me cuckoo with the butt of a rifle.

CHAPTER XII

WHEN things stopped whirling I opened my eyes and saw Eric Bergen bending over me. My hands and feet were bound. I was trussed up as neatly as the sentinel himself, who still lay at my side.

Eric was giving me the once-over, not smiling like you might expect, but sort of puzzled. I'll bet it gave him a start to have his man captured as slick as that! And I'll bet he was wondering how come.

"I don't know whether to send for the sheriff and have you thrown in jail," he said to me, "or to heave you over the cliff."

That started me thinking about the deputy who'd been in our camp early that morning. Had he captured Dorchak? Had they both succeeded in escaping the fire? But I didn't have time to worry much about them, because I had some worries all my own by that time.

I'd gotten myself into a pretty pickle. Not only that, but I'd thrown away the last chance to whip the R. M. & P. bunch, just when it had looked like I'd had the world by the tail.

I groaned, not because my head was aching fit to split, but because I knew I was the prize dumb-bell of the universe. Why had I taken it for granted the sentinel was the only one left on the Pinnacle? Anyone ought to have had more sense than that!

"Guess I'd better have you taken down to camp," Eric was saying, more to himself than to me. "I can hold you as a hostage, and decide later what to do with you."

With that he walked over to the edge of the Pinnacle nearest his camp and fired his rifle in the air. From where I lay I could see the basin side of the Pinnacle—all that wasn't obscured by smoke—but I couldn't get a downstream slant at the gorge.

But I didn't need to. Eric's eyes reflected what was happening, as if they'd been mirrors. He was plumb astonished, and showed it. I knew he could see his men hot-footing it down the gorge, and couldn't figure out how come.

It was enough to astonish anyone. He'd been sitting there chuckling, I suppose, at how lucky things had been breaking for him, when along I come, apparently from nowhere, and nab his sentry. And then Eric turns round and sees his whole gang apparently retreating down the gorge. He couldn't see our miserable, shivering, yellow gang cowering somewhere farther on, so it's no wonder he thought his own bunch was retreating.

Well, if his signal didn't get a response from his camp, it did from the Pinnacle. Up pops a glorious shingled blonde head from behind one of the boulders. A pair of blue eyes stared at him, scared-like. And a pair of red lips asked:

"Of course I'll give you away! I'll tell the world just how ornery you really—" Just then some one knocked me cuckoo.

"Oh, Eric! Did you fire that shot? What's the trouble? Is there going to be some fighting?"

He glanced at her over his shoulder. Seemed to me he was annoyed.

"You stay there, and I'll be back with you in just a moment," he told her. "No, there isn't going to be any fighting."

"Oh, *isn't* there?"

It was another voice, this time, coming from the edge of the cliff. Eric whirled about as suddenly as if the voice had been a rifle-shot. His gun was trained upon Ginger as the redhead scrambled up over the edge of the cliff and rose to his feet, panting.

I think I told you what a scarecrow Ginger was after he had emerged from the rapids, shirt gone, cheek skinned, brows and lashes singed, face streaked with soot.

Well, besides that, his bare chest and his stomach were dripping blood now, from scratches he'd accumulated climbing the cliff. No wonder the girl shrieked. Ginger, limping, started forward.

"Halt," snapped Eric, "or I'll shoot!"

"That's just what's puzzling me," Ginger retorted, grinning horribly. "You can see I'm unarmed. I've sort of had a hunch all along that you aren't the kind of a bird that'd order his men to ambush ours in the dark.

"Now we'll see whether I was right or wrong. I'm going to keep right on coming on, Bergen. If you shoot, then it'll show you're the kind that will order his men to pull the dirty work they've been doing.

"If you don't shoot, it'll show my hunch was right—that you're a square shooter—that the crooked stuff wasn't pulled with your authority—that you're willing to stand up and fight it out with me, here and now, man to man!"

FOR the fraction of a second Eric hesitated. Ginger's glance shot past him, rested upon me and the bound sentinel, leaped to Astrid where she stared, horrified, from behind her boulder, and then came back to Eric.

I could see the back of Eric's neck reddened. "Oh, hell!" he said wearily. Then he

walked over and laid his rifle beside mine and the sentinel's, and shucked off his coat.

"Five bucks on my boss!" cried the sentinel, tugging at his bonds.

"Make it ten!" I came back, tugging at mine.

Eric leaped forward, determined to make short work of the redhead. Astrid shrieked, and buried her face in her arms.

Eric struck out. Ginger sidestepped. The blow glanced off that skinned cheek. The blood began to ooze.

Ginger came back with a left hook to the ribs. It seemed to lack steam.

"I'll take you!" yelled the sentinel. "Ten it is!"

Comet couldn't stand the strain any longer. Snapping and snarling, he rushed into the fray. His teeth closed on one of Eric's boots. But they could find no grip on the tough leather.

Eric, never taking his eyes from Ginger's, kicked out backward. Ginger shouted, ordered the pup away. Comet, quivering with rage, obeyed.

Eric rushed again. He lashed out with a straight left. It clipped Ginger on the same cheek. This time the blood fairly spurted. Ginger gave ground.

"Wow!" yelled the sentinel, bucking like a bronco as he strove to shake off his bonds. "Smash him, big boy!"

"Fifteen bucks!" was my retort.

"You're on," the sentinel cried. "Soak him again!"

It was too much for Comet. Forbidden to attack his master's enemy, he rushed again at his own, the sentinel. He nipped him on the arm and sprang back to stand, stiff-legged, snarling in his face.

"Get away from there, you little devil!" I shouted. The pup backed off, growling.

"Thanks," said the enemy. "Boy! Did you see that wallop?"

I looked. And groaned. Wallop was right! It had caught Ginger under the ear, lifted him clear of the ground. He came down sidewise, sprawling, floundering.

Eric rushed forward to end the battle.

Ginger scrambled to his feet. But instead of giving ground he plunged forward, into a clinch.

He was in bad shape. Anyone could see that. His eyes were glassy. He was shaking his head, trying to shake the cobwebs from his brain. You know, if you've ever connected with a near knockout.

Eric wrenched and swung, and beat with his fists on Ginger's back, trying to shake him off, to beat him off, to swing him clear so he could land the blow that would finish the fight.

"Twenty!" yelled the sentinel. "Twenty bucks on the big boy!"

I was silent. I thought I saw the end of the battle. This was no Dorchak fight. This fellow had heft, reach, nerve, science, brains—everything! Everything that Ginger had—and more.

THEN Ginger grinned—grinned as he stared out toward me from beneath Eric's arm, grinned a horrible, toothless grin, a blood-smeared, ugly grin. But still a grin. And while there's a single grin left in a redhead, there's hope.

"I'll take you!" I shouted. "Twenty bucks!"

It was loyalty said that, not judgment. A good big man against a good little man. And the little man bleeding, exhausted from battling a forest fire, a rapids, a brawny cook, a twelve-hundred-foot cliff! Just one answer to that. And yet—

"Twenty-five!" I burst out. "Twenty-five on the little shrimp!"

It was just like throwing that much over the cliff, I thought. Yet—what would you have done?

Once more Eric wrenched and swung. This time Ginger loosed his grip. He was flung ten feet. But he alighted like a cat, on his feet.

He shook his head, like a swimmer emerging from water. The glassy look was gone. Eric rushed again. Ginger gave no ground. He met him with a smash that rocked the big fellow's head.

Like a flash he followed it up. A hook to the ribs, a hook to the jaw. Ah, *there* was steam!

It was Eric's turn to give ground. But he was far from groggy. Ginger's unexpected comeback had made him wary.

"Thirty!" I shouted in the sentinel's ear. "Thirty on the redhead!"

He kept his trap shut this time.

Ginger kept boring in. Eric was holding off—playing him along, I thought. Waiting for a chance to finish him off. Well, if it was to be Ginger's finish, it was to be *some* finish!

Eric slammed one home on Ginger's cheek. It made me wince. Right on the same spot. Bleeding raw, now, dripping blood. Skin and flesh gone. The bone laid bare. I shuddered.

Ginger was back, crouching, weaving,

feinting, watching for an opening. It came. His fist shot out. The blow caught Eric in the short ribs—knocked a grunt out of him, this time. Steam? Ginger's boilers just seemed to be getting well het up!

Like a flash the redhead was under the big fellow's guard, following up with triphammer stuff. Short-arm jabs on the floating ribs. Blows so fast you couldn't count 'em. And then—

They broke. Ginger danced away. Eric seemed a little heavy on his feet.

"How about it?" I shouted at the sentinel. "Thirty bucks!"

He shook his head. I laughed.

BUT I laughed too soon. Eric wasn't whipped—far from it. Ginger came boring in again. But the big fellow had solved his style. This was what he had been waiting for.

Out shot that brawny left. Ginger stopped dead, as if he'd been hit by a piledriver.

Eric was no fool. He too knew when to follow up. And follow up he did. My gallant little boss crumpled under a shower of blows, and went down.

Down, but not out. An instant later he was back on his feet. One eye was puffed, and swelling. Blood was trickling from one ear.

You, if you had hopped over the barricade at that instant, would have said he was out on his feet, bleeding, staggering, beaten to a pulp. And Eric hardly marked!

Eric plunged forward, to finish him off. I groaned. Ginger ducked, came up under his guard, both arms working. Triphammer stuff.

Eric grimaced. He wedged a forearm under Ginger's chin, shoved him away.

But Ginger, even as he fell back, lashed out again. His bare knuckles seemed to skid along Eric's jaw, and left behind a streak of dripping red. It was the first mark of consequence Ginger had scored.

Then he changed his tactics. In-and-out stuff, now. In—one, two—out. Blows that found their mark. But not without terrific cost. For every blow he landed, he took as good as he gave—and more. Punishment? Man, you or I'd have gone down under half what either of those boys was taking!

In—one, two—out. Blow for blow. The big fellow began to give ground. Ginger was forcing him back. Taking terrific punishment, yes, but driving him back. Back toward where the sentinel and I, helpless onlookers, lay.

Again Ginger changed his tactics. He reverted to the rush, the triphammer stuff at close quarters. Eric stepped into a tiny crevice, lost his balance. Together the two crashed to the ground, Ginger on top.

They were within two feet of the rifles. Ginger saw 'em. I could see his bloodshot eyes, one almost closed, fastened upon 'em. He could have reached forth a hand and ended the battle in an instant.

But he didn't—and not because, at that moment, Eric rolled over and caught him with a backhand swing that knocked him endwise.

And now the rifles lay within Eric's grasp. It was for him to choose. Now it was *his* chance to reach out for a weapon, to end the fight there and then.

He staggered to his feet and rushed at Ginger, armed with nothing but his skinned fists.

"Attaboy, big fellow!" I called out. Right there my opinion of Eric changed a lot. A bird like that *must* be a square shooter. Like Ginger said, not the kind to stand for any of this ambushing stuff.

Ginger lambasted the big fellow an awful one alongside the ear. I heard a shriek. I'd clean forgotten about the shingled queen.

Seems she'd been just pretending when she'd buried her face in her arms. She was looking at the fight, now, taking it in with the rest of us. But for the life of me I couldn't tell where her sympathies lay.

She was tiptoeing along behind her boulder. Pretty soon she was over near us. I didn't like the look in her eyes. The lids were narrowed. Her face was hard.

Her eyes were resting on the rifles. My heart leaped. What was she about to do?

Ginger and Eric each in turn had had a chance to use a rifle to end the fight, and had scorned it. But they were men, honest-to-God men, both of 'em. And she—well, she was a woman.

CHAPTER XIII

I DON'T mean that as a reflection on women. Maybe it's to their credit. A woman will do things a man would never dream of doing—when a man's involved. They have another way of looking at things, that's all. Here was this girl,

probably never before farther from a city than the paved roads go. Here she was, reduced to the elemental, watching her men fight. Ready, maybe, to do murder that one of 'em might win.

But which one? I admit she had me guessing. She halted, her eyes on the rifles as if she were hypnotized. And Eric and Ginger oblivious at the moment of her existence, fought on, battering each other unmercifully.

Presently she shuddered, and turned from the weapons, but not because she had abandoned her plan to take a hand in the fight. No such luck. Merely a more ladylike way of accomplishing her end, a way that wouldn't soil her hands.

She reached in her vanity case and drew forth a tiny gold penknife. She opened it, and turned to us. Instantly her plan flashed upon me. She was going to liberate one of us, believing that thus she could end the fight.

Before the incident of the rifles, there'd have been no doubt as to what I'd done if she'd have cut my bonds. I'd have ended the fight there and then, and let Ginger cuss all he pleased afterward.

But after both Eric and Ginger had refused an unfair advantage when each had had the opportunity—after that, well, I determined if she loosed me, I'd drop before I'd raise a hand to interfere.

Yes sir, I'd see Ginger whipped to a frazzle, if necessary—see the reservoir, the Vulcan Company, the hopes of the farmers who'd come after us, see 'em all go to smash before I'd stir a finger to butt in.

But this other bird—well, a man who'd mistreat a dog like he'd done Comet—I'd hate to trust him in a pinch. I had a hunch that if she cut the belt from his wrists, the fight would end right quick—and it wouldn't be our side that won!

And that's what that shingled she-devil had up her sleeve. She bent over the sentinel, knife in hand. I was helpless, couldn't move except to hunch myself along the ground, an inch at a time. But thank God I wasn't gagged.

"Here, Comet!" I called. "Come on, boy. Sic 'em, pup. S-s-sic 'em!"

He did. Like a little white meteor he came. Straight for those dainty silken ankles.

Astrid shrieked and ran, with Comet nipping at her heels until I called him off. Poor pup. He wanted so much to bite somebody, to get into the fight himself. And every time I had to go and bust up his pleasure!

The girl scurried along the edge of the cliff—and then she shrieked again. Nope: it wasn't the fight this time, nor yet the pup. She was gazing, horrified, into the smoke-filled basin. I think I told you that from the sentinel's post, where we lay bound, we could see out across the basin, as far as the wall of smoke would permit.

Just beneath us, on each side of the stream, was a sort of undertow of air. The force of the west wind sweeping down the gorge was broken by the towering Pinnacles. The wind eddied and swirled and carried back some of the smoke against the giant breastwork on each side of the stream.

But it wasn't the black, opaque smoke that billowed above the blazing timber, but merely a light, almost transparent blue haze.

There, twelve hundred feet almost directly below us, were the figures of two men. They were hurrying, stumbling and staggering, toward the head of the cañon. It was their only hope of escape from the fire which, fanned by the eddying winds, was curling back, moving toward them slowly but relentlessly.

But the odd thing about their stumbling flight was this: their wrists were linked together with a chain of steel!

I strained my eyes to pierce the haze and discover who they were. Their faces were blackened by soot. But that one with the lumbering, gorilla-like carriage—yes, that was Dorchak!

And the other, of course, was Jim, the deputy sheriff, for they were the only ones left in the fire area. And the chain that linked them together—the deputy's handcuffs.

Jim had caught his man, finally. But the two were almost trapped. They'd have to make better time than they were making if they gained the head of the gorge before the fire!

I ROLLED over again to watch the fight. Both Eric and Ginger seemed on the verge of exhaustion. Their breathing was labored. Their blows lacked their former swiftness.

I had time for but a glance when Astrid screamed again. Her shriek was followed by a violent exclamation from the sentinel, whose eyes were still glued upon the drama below.

Again I rolled over. The deputy was prone on the ground. Dorchak, slightly bent because of the handcuffs which still linked their wrists, was standing over him, a pistol in one hand.

"The chunky one grabbed the gun from the other fellow's holster," the sentinel cried, "and plugged him. Plugged him from behind—through the head!"

I shuddered. Dorchak bent over the body of the officer. With his free hand he was running hurriedly through the dead man's pockets. Suddenly he leaped to his feet, straightened as far as the handcuffs would permit, and glanced about him wildly, like a trapped animal.

And then, abruptly, I remembered—that the deputy had lent Ginger his keys early that morning, and then had ridden away and forgot them!

Dorchak had slain his captor with the officer's own gun, in the belief he could get the keys to the handcuffs from his body, unlock his shackles, and escape!

And the keys—I had seen Ginger drop them in his shirt pocket. And his shirt was gone—swept away during his battle with the rapids!

There stood Dorchak, anchored in the path of the fire by the body of the man he had murdered.

He lunged forward, dragging the body of the deputy. But anyone could see he could never make it, handicapped by the dragging body.

I turned away, sick and horrified. When I looked again, billows of black smoke had swept in, obscuring the final act of the tragedy from our view.

Astrid had fainted. She was lying, limp and white, perilously near the edge of the cliff.

AND the fight? Man, what a fight! No rounds, no breathing-space—just fight, fight, fight until one or the other was out. Batter and smash, hammer and slug, slam and rush!

But it couldn't last forever. Flesh and sinew and bone couldn't stand up under such punishment much longer.

Eric seemed to have taken the greater punishment. His breath was coming in short, wheezing gasps. After each blow his arms seemed to drop for an instant from sheer weariness.

And Ginger? That little redheaded fightin' fool was near bruised to a pulp, his face mashed to a gory, horrible, unrecognizable mass of red. And yet those wiry arms drove in and in and in, mercilessly, relentlessly, like pistons.

Stamina! Where did the little fellow get that reserve store of energy? Sheer grit, perhaps. Will-power, maybe.

Is the result in doubt, now? Do you wonder I shouted frantically at the sentinel: "Forty bucks! Forty on the redhead! Fifty! Sixty! Hundred!"

Do you wonder he didn't take it? Can you see those two standing there slugging, too weary to dodge?

Can you see Eric as his knees begin to buckle under him—slowly, oh, so slowly? Can you see the agonized look on his face as he sinks to his knees—that horrible grimace through the blood?

Not agony of body, for his senses long since had become deadened to pain. But agony of soul as he realized his muscles no longer would obey his will. Such a grimace as a marathon runner gives as he calls upon his last ounce of reserve strength to drive him across the finish line—and fails?

Man, can you see that redhead, too weary to grin at his triumph, swinging puny blows, blows from which almost all the steam is gone, in a last terrific effort to put across the finishing punch?

Can you see him swing himself off his unsteady feet? Can you see him crawl toward Eric? Can you picture the two of them, facing each other on their knees?

Can you see Ginger make his last swing —see Eric's arms, too utterly weary to guard—see the puny blow topple the big fellow over—and out?

Ginger sank back until he was sitting on his heels. His hands lay outspread, palms up. His bloody chest seemed to cave in, his weary shoulders to collapse. His head drooped, but did not fall.

For a long time he sat there, weaving slowly, gazing dully from his one good eye at his fallen foe.

I thought he was going to drop across the unconscious Eric. But no. Presently he stirred, and made as if to rise.

But wabbly legs no longer could support his weight. He fell once, and again, and gave it up. Wearily he began to crawl.

At length he reached my side; clawed at my bonds with bloody fingers. I felt them give. I was free. I sat up and flung an arm about his bleeding shoulders. His eyes wandered until they rested upon his foe.

"There," he muttered thickly, "is a *man*."

And then he went limp in my arms.

"You said it, Ginger!" I exclaimed, although I knew he could not hear.

"You said it!" echoed the sentinel.

And then—would you believe it?—along comes this golden-haired jane, her eyes overflowing with pity.

"She come round in time to see the end of the scrap," the sentinel told me.

BUT I saw through her game. Don't tell *me* she didn't know how much depended on the outcome of that fight! The girl knew on which side her bread was buttered. Maybe she *had* tried to throw the fight to Eric by freeing the sentinel. But now Ginger had won, she was all for Ginger.

"You get away from here," I told her, pretty rough. "Git!"

Rough talk, maybe, to hand a lady. But I didn't intend to have her mooning and cooing over him when he came to. Not after the stuff she'd pulled!

She drew back, one hand to her red lips, scared-like. I grabbed the sentinel's canteen and sloshed water over my little boss. But not all of it. I was saving some for the other fellow. I guess he had it coming.

I was hoping Astrid would go over and help Eric. But she was too slick for that. She kept fluttering around us. She wanted to be there with her sympathy and pride when Ginger came round.

Pretty soon Ginger opened his eyes with that "Where am I?" look. I propped him up against the boulder, untied my ankles, gathered up the rifles, hobbled over to where Eric lay, forced the mouth of the canteen between his lips, and then doused him with the rest of the water. It didn't bring him to his senses. He wasn't out for keeps, but he was out for a long nap.

When I looked round, there was Astrid, kneeling and cooing alongside Ginger.

"Hey!" I yelled. She turned, sort of frightened. I jerked my thumb over my shoulder. She understood. She got up and moved away.

"There's a spring down the trail half a mile," called out the sentinel.

I took his tip. "You," I said to Astrid, "if you want to make yourself useful, beat it down the trail and fill this canteen. These birds need water more than sympathy."

She gave me a dirty look, a mighty dirty look. But she went.

I untied the sentinel's feet for that. But I left his wrists as they were. I wasn't taking any chances. Then I strolled over to the edge of the cliff on the gorge side. I was just in time to see the first of the R. M. & P. bunch marching back to camp after capturing our boys.

I sent a couple of rifle-bullets pinging down in their path. They understood my message. They knew the Pinnacle was in our hands. They knew whoever was on the summit could pick 'em off as they came up the gorge. So they stopped right there.

And then I heard a booming voice calling from beyond the barricade:

"Hello, there! Who's in there?"

I whirled about with my rifle in readiness.

"Who wants to know?" I demanded.

CHAPTER XIV

"LET him in," croaked Ginger, clinging to the boulder and hauling himself unsteadily to his feet.

"Climb over the barricade," I shouted. "But remember, no funny business. Got my rifle trained on you!"

A stocky, broad-shouldered, red-faced fellow of about sixty scrambled over the rocks. He was wearing city clothes. There was something vaguely familiar about his face, yet I could swear I'd never seen him before.

"All right, boys," he boomed, "come on."

"Wait a minute!" I cried. "Ju-u-ust a mi-i-nute, please. One at a time, gentlemen. What's the rush?"

He scowled furiously, and his face got redder than ever.

"I was told you could see all over the basin from up here," he roared. "That's all I want—just to take a look."

"The scenery's fine," I assured him. "If you'll come back some other day, when there isn't so much smoke—"

"Damn it, man, they may be dying!" he burst out. "And you standing there cracking jokes like an idiot—"

"Who may be dying?" I broke in. "Tell me what you want, and act like a gentleman, and maybe—"

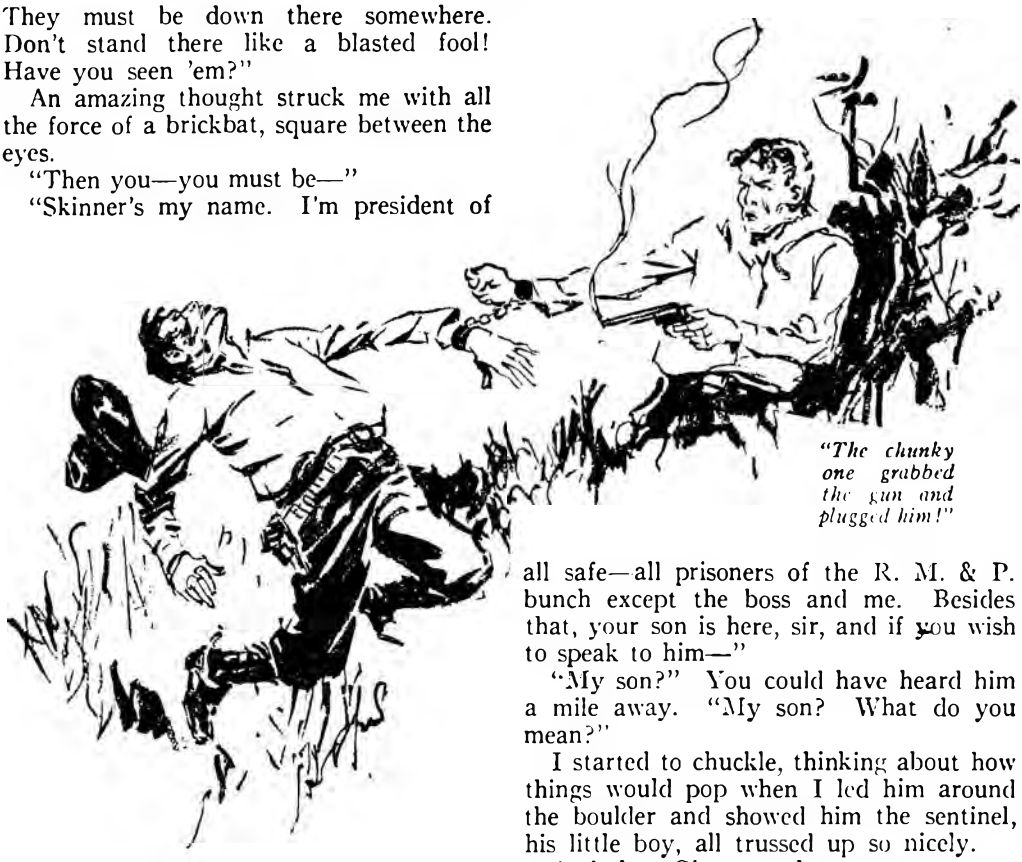
"The Vulcan crews," he boomed. "They didn't show up on the other side of the fire.

They must be down there somewhere. Don't stand there like a blasted fool! Have you seen 'em?"

An amazing thought struck me with all the force of a brickbat, square between the eyes.

"Then you—you must be—"

"Skinner's my name. I'm president of the Vulcan Light and Power Company. My engineers and I—"



"The chunky one grabbed the gun and plugged him!"

"Oh! Beg pardon, sir. You needn't worry, sir. Everything's all right. I'm Colman, your draftsman, and—"

"I don't give a damn who *you* are! Where's the rest of my crew? Speak up, man! Are you tongue-tied?"

Well, my first reaction when I learned the stranger was Papa Skinner himself, our own big boss, was just what you might expect. I was scared. I tried to smooth things over, to act nice, to sit up on my hind legs and speak.

And then I happened to think that my job wouldn't last more than a day or two longer, at the most—that if my guess was right, it wouldn't last five minutes longer after the way I'd talk to the old man, and that when he looked behind the boulder and saw what I'd tied up so neatly in a bundle, it wouldn't last five seconds. So I figured that so long as I was to be fired anyway, I might as well have some fun out of it. So I said:

"Our boss brought the crews through the fire by shooting the rapids, sir. They're all safe—all prisoners of the R. M. & P. bunch except the boss and me. Besides that, your son is here, sir, and if you wish to speak to him—"

"My son?" You could have heard him a mile away. "My son? What do you mean?"

I started to chuckle, thinking about how things would pop when I led him around the boulder and showed him the sentinel, his little boy, all trussed up so nicely.

And then Ginger spoke up.

"Hello, Dad," he said weakly.

For the first time Papa Skinner saw the blood-stained figure propped up against the boulder. He went white, and then red, and then white again. He stared, and gasped, and sputtered.

"What—what the—" For a moment that was all he could say.

But if it was a shock to him, can you imagine what a shock it was to me? Ginger, Papa Skinner's son? Impossible!

And yet—and yet one look at the two ugly mugs of 'em told me it was true. I knew now why Papa Skinner's face seemed familiar. He was Ginger all over again, only older and stockier.

Ginger, that is, as he had been when he came to camp. Not Ginger, the half-naked front of him covered with blood, a tooth gone from the Dorchak fight, one eye swollen shut. But if Ginger was young Skinner, who in time was the sentinel, the fellow who had kicked Ginger off the train?

"I—I heard you had gone on a hunting trip!" Papa Skinner sputtered. "Hunting trouble again, I suppose. And from your looks, you found it."

"I'll tell the world I found it," Ginger grinned. "I'm boss of the Vulcan crews, Dad."

"And you sure played hell," the old man grunted. "I had to bring my chief engineer and a couple of real surveyors to straighten things out. If you'll let them over the barricade with the young lady who was so kind as to guide us here when we found all the men in Grubstake away fighting the forest fire, we'll get busy and finish this job!"

At that, the rest of 'em climbed the barricade. The chief engineer, a gent with horn-rimmed, rubber-tired glasses, helped the girl over the rocks.

And the girl—have you guessed it?—was Moyra! She took one look at the bloody youngster, went white, made a funny moaning sort of sound way down in her throat, and then ran to him. He flung an arm about her shoulder while the old man glared. And she suffered it to stay, bloody as it was.

"Please, Moyra," he said, "I'm all right. And there's a fellow over there who really needs some help."

She looked Ginger over quickly, saw that nothing serious was wrong, and then, without a word, slipped from his arm and hurried to Eric.

Ginger gave the engineer and his aides the once-over. Then he said to Papa Skinner, low so they couldn't hear:

"Some more of your 'yes' men, I suppose."

"'Yes' men?" boomed the old man, loud enough for all to hear. "Sure, they're 'yes' men. What we need up here is a few 'yes' men who'll obey orders. Then we'll straighten out this mess. When you quarreled with me and left home because you couldn't have your own way, you bragged you were nobody's 'yes' man. You thought you knew more than I about running my business. And now just see what you've done!"

Ginger grinned and shrugged. He wasn't going to say anything. But I was. If I was going to be fired anyway, I figured I might as well have my say.

"Yeh. See what he's done!" I broke in. "Saved the Vulcan Company from the worst licking in its history! Straightened out the mess caused by your 'yes' men, your high-priced engineers who sat with their feet on glass-topped desks in Denver and made themselves solid by agreeing with every fool theory you advanced! Fought the thing through to a finish when the double-crossing bums you sent us from Denver lay down and quit, cold!

"Why, in twenty-four hours this survey will be finished, the filings will be safe in the land-office in Glenwood Springs, the job will be done! Why? Look at that bloody little redhead there, and you'll see why! Because, single-handed, he fought for the Pinnacles here, the key to the whole situation, and won! Because he was licked a dozen times in two days, but didn't know it!

"And now, when it's all over but the shouting, when the opposition are afraid to show themselves within rifle-shot, when Ginger's whipped their boss to a frazzle with his bare fists—you come along with your 'yes' men and try to hog the credit!

"That's all. I've said my say. And you can't fire me, because I'll beat you to it. I quit. Me, *I'm* going to get me a job of work under some one who's nobody's 'yes' man!"

PAPA SKINNER turned red and white and red again. He looked at Eric, who under Moyra's ministrations had begun to gasp and blink. He spluttered a moment. And then:

"Did you lick *him?*" he asked of Ginger. "The dirty, underhanded hound! I know the R. M. & P. tactics. I know they're a bunch of crooks, a lot of—"

"That's just where you're wrong!" chirped up Ginger sore as a boil. "You don't know what you're talking about. That fellow there is one of the whitest men I ever knew!"

And he told him why—told him how Eric twice had refused to use the gun when he'd had the chance, told him about the battle on the Pinnacle, and what Eric's fairness had cost him.

Papa Skinner stood with his mouth open. It had been many a year since anyone had talked to him like that. And when Ginger had finished, the old boy stood, swallowing, unable at first to say a word.

"Well, son," he grudgingly admitted when at last he'd found his tongue, "I reckon maybe you're right."

"Dad," said Ginger, breaking into a grin, "that's the first time in your life you ever admitted I was right in anything."

"Well," grunted the old man dourly, "it isn't going to be the last. Guess I need some one who thinks for himself to go

ahead and build this dam for me. And you," he said, turning to me, "here's your chance to keep right on working for some one who's nobody's 'yes' man—if you want to stay."

WOULD you believe it? Papa Skinner eating humble pie—admitting he was wrong! Maybe he was thinking of the days when he was Ginger's age—when he'd just begun to smash his way to fortune with his own two fists. I don't know. I didn't have time to think about it, because Eric had come round sufficient to talk.

"I I heard what you said," he said to Ginger. "Thanks. I want you to know I didn't—didn't sanction any dirty play, old chap. I fired three men when they bragged to me that they'd taken pot shots at your boys.

"And your man Dorchak came to me last night and told me he was the one who'd shot your boss, Gohegan, in the hope of getting his job; when he offered to double-cross you, to throw the fight to me by setting the forest afire—why, I just threw him out on his ear.

"I never dreamed he'd go ahead and fire the forest anyway. I suppose he reasoned that even if it cost the Vulcan Company the dam-site, it would mean revenge for him because you'd be kicked out and he'd be given your job. Of course, he'd have blamed us for starting the fire—no one would have dreamed your own man did it."

Ginger drew a long breath. Before he could speak, I butted in and told him what had been happening down in the basin while they'd been fighting—what had happened to the deputy, and to Dorchak. It hit them all pretty hard, and for a while nobody said anything.

"I notified the sheriff that Dorchak had admitted shooting Gohegan," Eric said at last. "He said he'd come after him with a warrant today. He also warned me he was coming to our camp with a warrant for one of our boys who, it seems, had escaped from his guards at Denver while being taken to prison. Asked me to hold him until he came. The man is over there where Colman trussed him up—my sentinel."

So that was that!

THE tale is almost told—all except the return of Astrid. She came back with a full canteen, accompanied by old Grizzly King.

"I heered some shootin' up here 'while ago," explained the old cattle baron. "Figgered I'd come up and see what it was all about, seein' as how I'm s'posed to be the official chaperon for Miss Bellamy here, who had come up to watch the fire with Eric while I waited at camp for breakfast. I met her at the spring just now."

Astrid took in the situation at a glance. She hurried to Ginger's side.

"You poor, poor boy!" she exclaimed, smoothing his ruffled hair. "Here, take a sip of this."

Ginger reached up and removed her hand from his head.

"I beg your pardon," he said, very solemn. "I—I'm expecting to be busy for a little while."

And with that he turned and walked toward Moyra. He helped her to her feet, and with an arm beneath Eric's shoulders, did the same for him.

BUT Astrid wasn't licked. Not yet. Sure, she'd missed the grand prize. But that wasn't going to keep her from grabbing the next best thing in sight. So she didn't lose a moment in tripping over to Eric.

"How I sympathize with you!" she purred, placing one tiny hand on his arm. "Poor Eric! Does it hurt so much?"

Eric reached out and gently removed her hand.

"I beg your pardon," he said gravely. Then, a little unsteadily, he led her over to where old Grizzly stood.

"Mr. King," he began, never cracking a smile. "As you are her chaperon, as you put it, I must turn Miss Astrid over to your care, because I—er—I expect to be busy for the next few moments."

And then she *knew* she was licked.

"Well, son," rumbled old Papa Skinner, "there's no use o' me staying here. Best thing I can do is to get back to Denver, so long's I have a good boss in charge."

"Wait a minute," broke in Ginger. "Colman, lend me your shirt. You wont need it, because you're going to stay on the job and see this thing through, with the help of these three men from the Denver office. I'm going back to Grubstake. Got some important business in town. Got to replace something that got lost in the rapids."

He turned to Moyra—and smiled.

He didn't need to tell me it was a silver picture frame.

Dynamite and Sinkers

This business experience of an ex-soldier who took a job running a sawmill in war-time has the flavor of veracity and is interesting indeed.

By

J. R. Mac Laughlin

I WAS in Chicago in 1917 right after Uncle Sam had decided to get into the big scrap. I was broke, with nothing much in my pocket except an M. D. from the British army. Over two years before, I had been on the way to England with some sawmill machinery and was three days out when war was declared. To make a short story of it, I had enlisted in John Bull's army. The war was over for me in about eighteen months.

Back in Chi, I was looking over the Help Wanted ads in a newspaper, and ran across one which called for a sawmill superintendent who was ineligible for Army service. I got the job.

The plant was in a Southern State, and the company owned the town, the plant and the narrow-gauge road over which we logged the mill.

The unskilled labor was mostly negroes, with a sprinkling of whites; these last were, as a rule, a hard bunch. The woods crew were the worst; a great many of them were ex-convicts or desperadoes who were just hiding away. Our woods superintendent handled them O. K. during working hours with little trouble, but he let them do as they pleased after working-hours, and refused even to try to check up on them. This policy finally led to trouble.

Our sawmill foreman was a long lanky Southerner who had been refused for Army service on account of a crooked right arm and lack of weight. He was a crack shot with a pistol and an expert with dynamite. He seemed to love the high explosive, and always crimped the caps over the fuse ends with his teeth. His name was Minter and he ruled his crew with an iron hand, was sudden in his fighting and never wasted any time in argument. All of the old hands knew him and liked him as a rule, but a new man whom I hired one day and

who was a tough-looking *hombre,* got in an argument with Minter and the latter promptly knocked him over with a cant-hook. While the doctor was patching up his head, however, the fellow seemed so repentant, and willing to admit he had opened up the skirmish, that Minter put him back to work again. Seemingly they were good friends, but he was on the job for a purpose and showed his hand a little later.

The negroes in this section had formed a lodge. I do not remember the exact name of it, but I think it was called "The Order of the Good Samaritans." One of the rules I knew well, however, because whenever a member died all the other members either had to go to the funeral or pay a fine of one dollar. Well, they all went to the funeral, for they only lost a trifle over the dollar and besides they had a good time. When there was a funeral, however, the mill was shut down for one day, so when this happened we usually spent the day in repairs and in getting up sinkers.

Sinkers were the logs which did not float in the pond. They would accumulate on the bottom of the pond, which was muddy. We could locate a bunch of them, then throw in a quarter-pound stick of dynamite, which would bring them to the surface long enough to get a pike-pole into them. Then they were tied to a flat-bottom boat and floated to the chain which took them into the mill.

ONE night old "Uncle John," who had been a slave on the very land the mill was on, told me that a darky who had lived on a farm outside of town was going to be buried the next day. Uncle John was drawing a pension as a porter around the office and wanted to get off for the funeral. I told him: "Sure, you might as well, because all the rest of them will be off anyway."

But he shook his head solemnly.

"I tell you, Cap'n, suh, I tell you, them niggers is all gettin' too much money now to lay off; 'sides, most of these new niggers belong to dat new lodge which been got up by dat white man Mr. Minter done knock in de haid one time. Dey calls it de Double-doubles Lodge."

I asked him if he knew where they were meeting and he replied: "Sure thing, Cap'n—meetin' in that old church over on the old highway. Had some meetin's already, and reckon to have another tomorrow night, when dey gwine to be 'dressed by a white gen'leman from Washington."

I got Uncle John out of town by sending him out that night with the truck-driver on a trip that would take two days. He was tickled to death to get the chance to go. Then I hunted up Minter. I told him I was going to get the sheriff and a strong posse, wait until the meeting started and pinch the whole bunch. But Minter talked me out of this.

"Maybe it is just a gambling outfit, and you will lose a lot of the crew for several days while you are getting them out of the hoosegow," he remonstrated.

His idea was for just the two of us to find out what was up and then take what action we thought was necessary. I agreed, and the next night we were there, but unseen. I felt sure, however, that it was something besides a crap-shooting affair, because we were making ammunition boxes for the Government and supplying the camps with a large amount of lumber. I know now that Minter was of the same mind, but he wanted to break it up without the sheriff having any of the fun—as Minter called it!

We hid our machine in a grove of pines and then walked up behind the old church. I was armed and felt sure Minter was too, because he never went any place without a gun on him.

Now the old church was on an old highway—little used since the Lincoln Highway had been made—and it was set back from the road about a hundred yards in a grove of pine trees. It had no windows at all in the front end, was on a stone foundation and was built entirely of oak timbers with rough-sawed pine boards for siding. It was nearly a hundred years old and the siding was beginning to rot in some places.

WHEN we peeped in through a small crack in the rear we saw about two hundred men, white and black mixed, in the meeting. All the light they had was from lanterns that some of them had brought along.

The speaker was a man of medium height, and of extremely unprepossessing appearance, but he sure had that bunch listening to him intently, and drinking in his harangue. We could hear shouts of, "Dat's so! Sure is! Yes suh!"

He was urging them to strike unitedly

for more wages and rights. Told them their wages should be double what they were, and that the Government was saving them to be sent over to France later as cannon-fodder. His ideas in regard to women were raw and he had some of his audience in a near frenzy. I was sure hostile and I was going to take a shot at him right then and there, and get a round up on the rest of them the next day, but Minter said:

"Just let me handle this, Mac; I got a cure for all this foolishness!"

I told him to do anything he wanted, but do it quick, because I wanted that speaker.

Minter grinned. "I'll bring him right out here to you," he assured me.

He fished out of his pocket a stick of dynamite, a cap and a piece of fuse. I protested that it would be wholesale murder to use that, but he replied:

"No, it will only shake them up a little, and scare them so we can grab the ones we want when they come out."

He crimped the cap over the end of a fuse,—about a thirty-second fuse,—stuck it into the stick of H. E., and lit it with a match. Then he dropped it under the church, and we walked quickly away.

When that H. E. let go, it seemed to lift one end of the building up into the air about a foot or more, and then let it drop back. The siding fell off in a shower. One man must have been sitting on the front steps as a sentry, because I saw him streak across the grove and into the road. Then that old church seemed fairly to vomit men! They did not jump out of the windows—they dived out, and when they started to run, if a tree got in the road, they tried to go through it first and around it afterwards.

I HAD my gun in my hand, waiting to see the man I wanted, but Minter was laughing and rolling on the ground absolutely helpless with mirth.

I looked around and saw my man already past me, running through the trees, and I realized he must have a machine parked there.

Telling Minter to hurry back to town, get out every reliable man, white or black, and arm them, I made for my machine and started after my man, who was now in his own machine and on the road ahead of me, though I don't think he knew anyone was after him. Now, we had made a log road which was a shortcut back to the main highway and it was a much better road than the old highway. I knew my man had to cross an old narrow bridge to get onto the highway and I easily beat him to the bridge.

When he saw me stopped at the bridge and standing in the road, he slowed up as any other motorist would, and I thought it was going to be easy to get him. But just as he reached me he threw in his clutch and tried to go around me. I jumped on the running-board of his flivver—it was a hired machine—and jammed my automatic in his side.

HE wilted at once. He sure was a wreck —his nerves were all gone, and he had been walked on in the get-away. I searched him for a gun, but he either had not had one or had lost it. I put my own in my pocket and told him we would shove his car on one side and go back to town in mine.

But he took a chance when I put my gun in my pocket and tried to climb the bridge rail—I suppose with the idea of jumping to the creek-bed and then getting away. I made a rush for him just as he had one leg over the rail. It gave with him and he fell over fifteen feet, onto the rocks in the dry bed.

I climbed down to where he was but he never opened his eyes again or spoke—he had broken his neck.

I started back for the mill to notify the sheriff by phone but met Minter coming out in another machine to find me. I told him what had happened but he insisted on going to see. He looked the situation over carefully.

"If we tell the sheriff about our part in this we will get out all right, but it will cause about one hundred arrests, shut down some of the other mills as well as ours—because a lot of those men were from the mills around here—and it wont bring this rat back to life," he said.

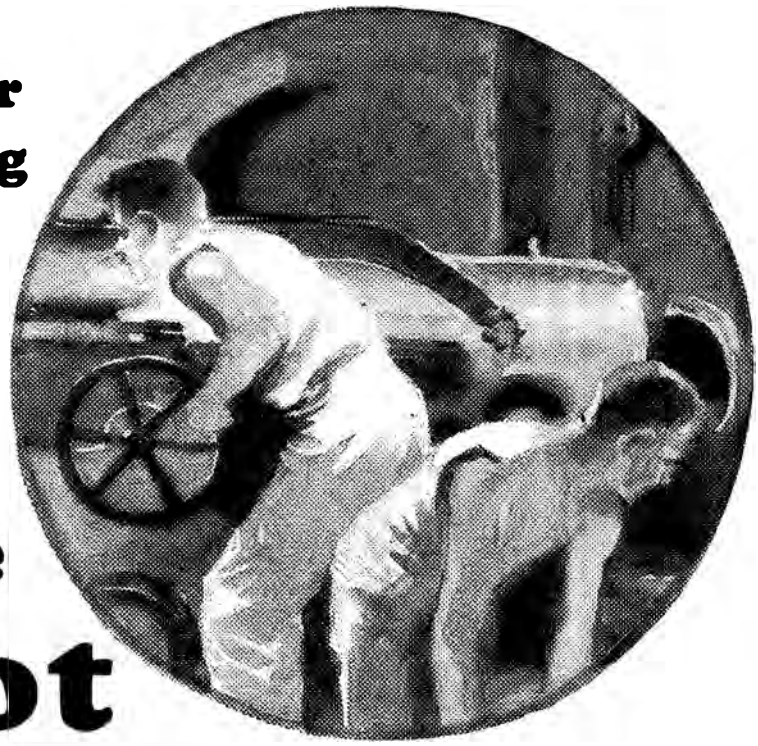
I agreed with him. Then we pushed the dead man's auto close to the bridge, put it in gear, and shoved it over.

His body was discovered the next day and enough evidence was found in the way of papers on him, and in his room in the city, to show that he was an undesirable member of society. The coroner's jury, of which Minter was a member, found that he had met his death through an accident, due to losing control of his machine on the bridge.

By

Spencer Gooding

This fine story of courage in a crisis is a worthy successor to Major Nairn's "The Misfit."



The Boot

WHY Daniels ever enlisted in the Navy remains a mystery to me. Probably his entire experience with water in any quantity was limited to those occasions when he gave his beloved mine-mules a bucket of the stuff. Anyway, he did sign on, and there are several of us who have good cause to be thankful that he did.

Even in war-time you'd hardly expect that a mine-boy from West Virginia would undergo a complete metamorphosis almost overnight and that his grimy chrysalis of coal-dust would hatch out a full-fledged man-o'-war's-man in less than a week, would you? Nor I either. Yet that is evidently what the Navy Department expected from J. Daniels, seaman 3|c. He had just four days in the League Island training-station before they shipped him out in a draft for the U. S. S. *Belgian Queen,* the transport on which I was serving as junior watch and division officer.

Something certainly went wrong with the hatching process—they should have let him incubate a lot longer. At any rate, he'd been aboard only a day or so before he was christened the Boot. In case you never did a cruise and saw the world through a porthole, I might explain that a "boot" in the Navy is like a "rookie" in the Army, only more so. Not remarkable, then, for a new man to be a "boot?" No, but to be known as *the* Boot in a ship's company of boys whose average length of service, excluding our sprinkling of old-timers, wasn't many months more than his—that's what I consider becoming famous pretty fast.

He didn't become either swell-headed or sore over his sudden rise to prominence. No reason why he should. That term was just one of a thousand seagoing expressions which meant nothing to him. When they called him it to his face, he'd just grin that enormous grin of his which went so well with his massive body, and wonder what sort of a language these boys were talking now.

A very amiable sort of giant he was, considerably puzzled as to why his mates didn't speak words that made sense, but doing his best to understand and to carry out any orders given him. His failure in this was astonishing.

FOR instance, he distinguished himself on the very first morning that Paddy Doyle, our grizzled old chief quartermaster, detailed him to the bridge to act as my messenger.

The *Belgian Queen* was at that time the flagship of our little convoy and we were just entering the submarine danger-zone. All the morning our signalmen were jumping to get off flag-signals of zigzags, courses, and the like, and the stiff breeze that whipped their flag-hoists wasn't making it any too easy for them. Noticing their difficulty, I ordered Daniels to give them a hand.

Absently I heard the signal officer pass the word to "break" some signal. Almost immediately I heard a roar from Chief Doyle. "'Vast haulin'!" I turned just in time to see the Boot give a mighty tug to one of the signal halyards. With his huge strength behind it, something was bound to give way. Unfortunately, the weakest spot was the pulley-block at the end of the signal yard-arm. Block, flags and halyards came down with a run, and Daniels stood smiling complacently in the midst of the tangle.

Doyle and his signalmen had the block rigged out again in record time, but a blue and sulphurous haze hung over the bridge for some minutes after the chief had run out of comments. It is remarkable what a choice collection of epithets can be the result of twenty-four years' earnest gleaning in a meadow that extends from Guantánamo to Nagasaki.

The Boot looked quite surprised at this outburst. My disgusted question as to his ability to hear an order to stop brought the reply that they had ordered him to "break it" and then, because he hadn't done it the first pull, they had asked for some "fast hauling." He felt that he'd done a pretty fair job. I couldn't keep a straight face after that, so I left him to Doyle's tender mercies. Some part of the chief's impassioned oratory must have been intelligible to him, for on his next trick I found Daniels studying that part of the Bluejacket's Manual which distinguishes between "avast" and "belay" and explains the subtle distinction of meaning in "smartly" and "handsomely."

NONE of this information seemed to take root, though. Some one of his shipmates was always taking advantage of his good-humored willingness to be of service by sending him on a long search for some absurdity like "an ozone-meter," "a gil-guy for a gadget," or for the "key to the chain lockers." He could never see why it wasn't all right to refer to the stack as the "chimbley," the lower deck as "downstairs," or to the bilges as the "cellar."

On the bridge he proved a constant source of amusement. Finally he gave up trying to learn the meaning of words and attempted to memorize orders or reports given to him syllable by syllable. As his memory was far from perfect, some of the twists he gave those syllables were wonderful.

He completely upset the navigator one night when I sent him forward to report a sounding I had just taken with the Kelvin. "Bottom at thirty fathom," was the message I gave him, but by the time it reached the bridge it had become "Cotton at thirty fellem." Commander Burton is still delighting the wardrooms with that story!

However, after announcing twelve o'clock and "thermometers ground" to the old man, instead of "chronometers wound," Daniels was banished from the bridge forever. Along with his caustic remarks about the Boot's lack of intelligence, Captain Curtis expressed a decided opinion of young officers who depended upon absolute idiots to carry messages and reports. Right then I decided that Daniels was likely to prove a valuable hand in the ship's laundry. And he was still scrubbing clothes when the Armistice was signed.

ALTHOUGH the influenza epidemic exacted heavy toll from our soldier passengers, we of the crew of the *Belgian Queen* escaped almost unscathed until after Thanksgiving. Then, a week out from Bordeaux, the disease struck us and struck hard. As a result, on the afternoon of December 5, 1918, more than ninety per cent of my division was on sick report. And that afternoon the executive officer informed me that we had received orders to shell and sink a derelict, reported almost in our path. I was to have my gun-crew ready for action on the next morning, when we were expected to sight her.

I had my division piped to quarters and mustered the few who responded. Out of my two crack gun-crews of twelve men each, only six were on their feet! Fortunately I had a pointer, a trainer and a sight-setter among those survivors. Five men, though not of my crews, had had previous experience with six-inch rifles. These I signed up at once, but I still lacked a tray man. It was out of sympathy for Daniels that I finally selected him for

that position—I couldn't see how he could do any damage at that unimportant post, and I really felt sorry for the poor Boot. He hadn't seen much of anything in the service but a lot of dirty soap-suds.

This makeshift crew turned to at the loading machine for practice, and in a remarkably short time were achieving really creditable loading time. Daniels surprised me by his aptitude for his job. His tray was always in position, covering the screw-threads in the breech-block and protecting them from being jammed by the smash of the hundred-and-twenty-five pound shell, without delaying the long swing of the first shellman in the slightest. In fact, after a moment I realized that I needed to worry less about the Boot than about my plug-man, who seemed nervous and excitable. I had to use him at the plug, though—there wasn't another man in the lot who had ever sponged a plug-face or inserted a primer in a lock.

I HAD Daniels come up to my room for a little talk after hammocks had been piped that evening. Over and again I explained the various commands, laying particularly strong emphasis on the order, "Silence!"

Every man who ever served a Navy gun knows the significance of that word, and I did my best to impress Daniels with its paramount importance. On instant obedience to it may depend the lives of the entire gun-crew.

There is practically only one accident to be dreaded with six-inch rifles, provided they are free from defect. And it rarely happens, except with an inexperienced gun-crew. When firing unfixed ammunition,—that is, where shell and powder are separate,—a spark or burning fragment of the bag may remain in the bore or on the mushroom face of the plug after a shot is fired. If another powder-bag is inserted before this spark is extinguished or removed, the powder will be ignited before the heavy breech-plug can be swung to and locked. In this case, the whole thirty pounds of cordite sweeps back out of the breech in a gigantic burst of searing yellow flame which licks eyes and faces from the helpless crew. This is the flare-back.

To guard against this horror, a blast of air is automatically blown through the bore to expel gases and sparks. The plugman, at the breech, sponges the face of the plug to remove any adhering residue. Should anything go wrong, or should any man or officer see a spark, he calls: "Silence!" Immediately every man stops dead in his tracks. Put an old-time gunner back on a gun with a Navy crew, let him get into the swing of the team-work and then call, "Silence!" and I'll guarantee you'll see a perfect imitation of a man turned to stone, even if that gunner hasn't been off his farm for twenty years.

All this information and more I drilled into Daniels; and when he left, I was confident that he fully appreciated the danger of the flare-back. I was right. I was even more confident that he would remember one command and its meaning for longer than twenty-four hours. I was wrong.

We picked up the derelict schooner, the *Joseph P. Cooper,* about ten o'clock the next morning. She lay very low in the water, almost awash, but every now and then a wave lifted her stern high enough for us to see the name painted across it. She was dismasted, and only her cargo and deck-load of lumber kept her afloat. A distinct menace to navigation, she wallowed there. It was imperative that she be sunk as soon as possible.

At about a three-mile range, we did a neat bit of work with our first three ranging shots. Our fourth burst right amidships, sending a shower of splinters high in the air. We were first on the target. The splashes from the shots of the forward gun, also in action, were still well away from the schooner. Triumphantly I ordered, "Commence firing," the command for continuous and rapid fire.

Four straight hits we made without a miss. We were rapidly blowing the derelict into atoms. The loading crew was working perfectly and evenly, without a hitch.

Of a sudden, Death swooped down on us!

THE eighth shell had been rammed home. The powderman had tossed the silk bag into the breech. The plugman had just started the sweep of his arm which was to swing the breech-plug closed. There was an unearthly yell from Daniels, standing at the left of the breech-block:

"*Whoa!*"

The plugman never halted. That was a command not in his repertoire. I whirled at the cry. The plugman had failed to sponge off the mushroom of the plug. Aghast, I saw a bit of burning silk cling-

ing to its face and swinging in toward the red, explosive end of the powder-bag.

"Silence!" I shouted, and leaped for the plugman's arm. Too late, now! His reaction was too slow to stop his swing. And at the first kiss of charring silk and the base of the powder-bag, we were doomed! Despairingly I hurled myself at the block. Though a split-second stop watch could not have caught the time of the sweep of the plug, it seemed a full minute to me that it described its arc. My own movement seemed even slower. I could never stop it, now. The flare-back was inevitable.

But the Boot was at the plug. He never hesitated. As in a dream I saw his hand go out, cover the ember and clench convulsively. Then the heavy steel mass crashed into the breech-block. There was a hideous crunching sound as the sharp, knife-like edge sheared through bone and muscle alike of the lad's arm. Yet there was no gush of fire. The Boot had saved us all. . . . .

He asked for me that night. As I stood beside his cot in the sick-bay, gray-faced as he was from pain and the shock of his amputation, he greeted me with the ghost of that disarming grin.

"Say, Mister," he whispered, "I should of hollered 'Silence,' shouldn't I? I jest now thought of the word."

"Never mind that, Daniels," I said chokingly. "We all owe you our lives. Is there anything I can do for you?"

His eyes twinkled. "Naw," he drawled, "lessen you kin git 'em to leave me go back to my job. A one-armed sailor aint noways any good, an' my mules need me. They're fat an' lazy."

It was on the tip of my tongue to say that I didn't think a one-armed mule-driver could be of much use, either, but I caught myself in time. Daniels seemed to read my mind.

"You don't need no hands to drive mules, Mister," chuckled the Boot. "You gotta talk to 'em. Talk United States, too. When you yell 'Whoa,' they know what you mean. You don't have to say 'Silence' to a mule—leastways, not to a four-legged one."

I hope *you* read this, Daniels. I've never seen you since the day they took you to the hospital. If you do, you'll know that one man still remembers and is grateful. Wherever you are and whatever you're doing—*good luck!*

The Riding Kid

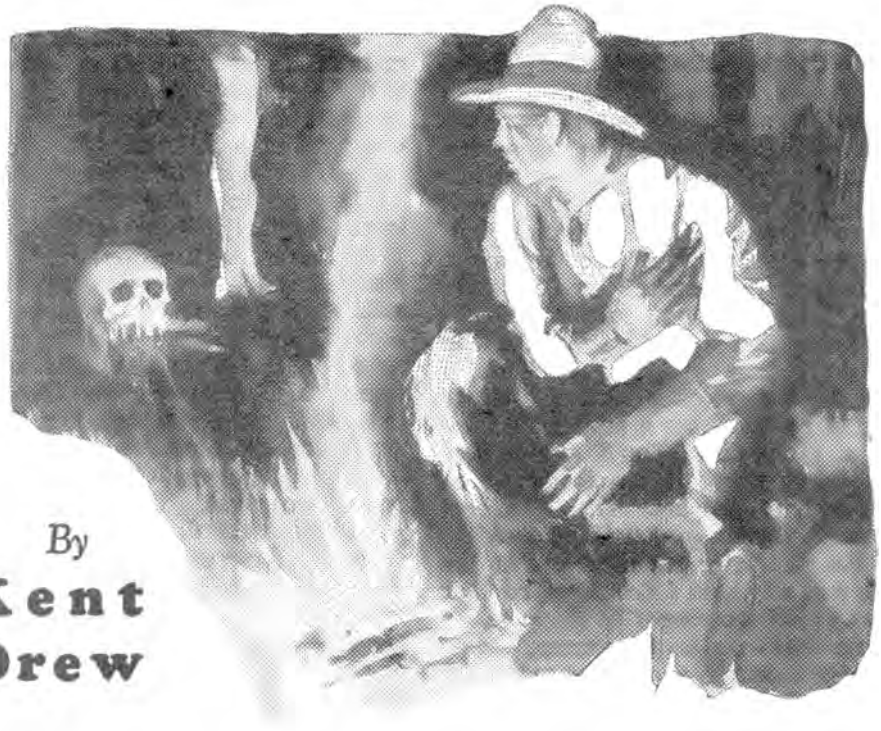
You'll get a good laugh out of this quaint confession of a kid cowboy and the demon who pursued him.

DID you ever make camp out on the prairie after night, all by your lonesome, and when you had made a fire to cheer things up, find out that what you had used for wood was human bones?

Well, yes—that's the way it affected me too, only a heap worse. You see it was drier than powder that year, all over Wyoming. Most of the creeks had dried plumb up. Just a water-hole here and there along the beds where there was ordinarily good runnin' water. That's how come I knew it would be dead easy to find those stray cayuses. It was a cinch they'd head back to the range they were raised on. So with only a few waterin'-places for them to drink at, I knew how to get 'em.

Course I didn't tell the pilgrim that. Professional secret, it was, like these here doctors and lawyers says. I was just a big fifteen-year-old kid at the time, but pretty well broke to range tricks. So when he found me that mornin' at Old Man Higgins' feed yard and asked me what I'd take to find them, I took out my pocket-knife and commenced to whittle; but I never let on I was anxious for the job. Finally he said he'd give me ten dollars apiece for 'em as a reward. Right then he got action!

Next mornin' I forked a pretty little pinto I'd been keepin' for a town horse. As Pinto was hog-fat and lathered easy, I



By
Kent Drew

took my time and stopped at the Double-D outfit for chuck, about noon.

Curly Mason was ridin' for that outfit then and as Curly and me were friends, I up and told him how easy I was making that twenty. More than half a month's pay for two days' ridin'. Curly agreed with me that seeing as how the pilgrims were taking the bread out of us poor punchers' mouths with them homesteading and fending all the range like they were it was fair to make them pay any way we could. He told me too that there wasn't any water-holes but one on Blacktail Creek, where those cayuses were raised. All the rest had dried up. So I knew for sure all I had to do was to ride to that water-hole. The first thing in the morning all the critters in that part of the country would be there to drink. Then I'd dab my loop on the two I wanted, snake 'em back to town and collect the twenty bucks.

Right after dinner I stepped up on Pinto's hurricane deck, yelled "so long!" to Curly and loped off, singing as I went, towards the Blacktail crossing, where Curly had said the only water was.

I knew right where this water-hole was. It was where the old Spotted-tail Trail crossed Blacktail Creek. Old Spotted-tail himself had been one of those noble old Sioux the books tell about. Seems like he, with his band of renegades, would trail through these parts on his way across to the Crow Injun country, his object being the gentle and pleasant pastime of killing as many Crow bucks as he could, and stealing a lot of good ponies and pretty young squaws.

Well, the soldiers caught them right there at the crossing once, after they'd got careless and killed some white folks over on the Gros Ventres. What Injuns the soldiers left alive was about enough to bury the dead ones, which same they did. Their way of burying was to just wrap the dear departed in a blanket or two and maybe some skins, if they happened to have any to spare, and tie them up in a tree. Usually they try to make a sort of platform in the tree first, by tying poles across the branches. In a prairie country where there aint so many trees, it's a common sight to see one or more bundles of weather-beaten rags a-flappin' in the breeze. Howsomever that never bothered me none about having to camp where so many of them were buried

that way. That is, it never did till about sundown. I just kept right on though, after I thought about it, and consoled myself with the thought of that twenty bucks.

IT must have been about an hour after dark when Pinto and me arrived at that water-hole. The first thing that made me sorta jumpy was the way Pinto snorted and shied at that particular bunch of cottonwoods. Made me feel kind of creepy, so I stuck the jinglers into his ribs pretty hard and he tamed down considerable.

As the weather was nice and warm and there was plenty of grass for Pinto, I pulled the leather off'm him and kicked around in the grass for a minute till I located a picket-pin. You'll always find picket-pins that way where folks have been in the habit of camping. Then I watered him and tied him good and solid to the pin. No joke to be left afoot out on the prairie that way, and I knew he'd be back in town before morning if he got loose.

All the time I had a sort of creepy feeling about that clump of cottonwoods. All around 'em and under 'em was darker than the surrounding country, and they kept rustlin' and squeakin' and sort of whisperin' to themselves. My throat seemed dry—even after I went down to the water-hole and drank a whole hatful of water.

As the moon wasn't up yet and I didn't feel sleepy for some reason, I decided to make some light. So I carried my saddle over close to the trees where I could get enough wood to build a fire. When I dropped the saddle on the ground there was a rustle and whirr among the trees. Sure knocked a jump out of me. My spine felt like a hound-dog's looks when he smells a wolf right close. Then I kind of laughed to myself and started to whistle, for I knew that it must have been a prairie chicken startled from his roost. But anyhow it seemed I wanted to get the fire started quick. I pulled some dry bunch-grass and buffalo-grass and picked up some sticks I could see right plain in the dark—and lit a match.

When the blaze got started and made a circle of light it sure seemed fine. But those sticks seemed sort of funny when I first picked 'em up—smooth, and heavier than ordinary wood. They didn't seem to burn like good dry wood either. They just kind of scorched at first and then began to stink—like bones. I bent over to give them a good look, and sure enough they was bones—human bones too! I could distinguish some leg-bones and two or three ribs. I looked around right quick to the place where I picked them up, just a few feet away, and sure enough there was a round white thing—the skull! It was kind of grinnin' at me. There was some of the long hair sticking to it. I expect my hat must have risen about three inches, for my hair was about that long.

By the light of the fire I saw some real honest-to-goodness wood. I snatched it up quick and chucked it on the fire in a hurry. Seemed like I wanted a lot of light right away. Then I saw I was under one of the trees. Right over my head was one of those dark bundles of rags flappin' in the wind; one end must have rotted loose as it was hanging down—that was where those bones came from.

Right away I decided to move myself *pronto*. I decided it wasn't right, fittin' nor proper to camp in a graveyard that way. Especially when they was them kind of graves! Maybe some of those Injuns might of had some kind of disease or somethin'. So I grabbed my saddle and hoofed it right smart out to where Pinto was grazin'. Just as I started, something up in the cottonwoods kind of wheezed and gurgled, like it was stranglin'. I heard a sort of scratchin' and scrapin' on the bark of the tree, so I hurried right pert.

Pinto was kind of sniffy too, but in about nothing flat I had the saddle in place and was up on the middle of him. That felt better. So I just loped off, slow-like, to show those danged dead Injuns I wasn't scared of them at all! But I kept right on goin', nevertheless, till I lost sight of the reflection of the fire. Then I stopped. After thinking it over, I decided to stay right where I was till morning, then ride back and rope those cayuses when they come in for their mornin' drink. Maybe things would seem different at the cottonwoods by that time.

So I pulled the leather off of Pinto again. It was pretty dark and I couldn't find a picket-pin. I slipped the end of the lariat through the fork of my saddle, then took a couple of half-hitches around the horn. After that was done, I wrapped my saddle-blanket around me and lay down real quiet. You see I figured that if anything came close, Pinto would get scared and yank on the rope, which would wake me up. So after jerkin' awake several times and listenin' to all the whisperin' in the grass, as

there always is out on the prairie at night, I finally went to sleep, dreaming about those bones.

SOMETIME later I woke up quick. Right there in front of me stood an Injun. A funny Injun too—a white one! Even his legs were white. I could see his long black hair blowin' in the breeze. The moon was up now so I could see him good. Then I realized those bones had got together somehow and was after me for revenge. I began to shake all over like the time I had buck ague. There that *Thing* just stood a-lookin' at me! I tried to holler, but my throat was paralyzed. I kept trying to think how I could scare It away. My bones felt frozen, my heart was bustin' and I couldn't move a muscle. I don't know how long I lay there; maybe only a few minutes—maybe it was hours. Then a coyote, off somewhere on the prairie let out one of those quaverin' yells. With that I jumped up, but fell right down again. The blanket had wrapped around my feet and tangled up with my spurs. I clawed it off and as I bounced up again I was yellin', and covered with a cold sweat.

My first idea was the same as any puncher: when he's in a tight jam, he wants his horse between his legs. My eyes fell on Pinto standin' there at the end of the lariat, all bunched up, like he was getting ready to leave. So I thought as how we both had the same idea. I cut loose with another beller and made for him. But that ornery cayuse let out a snort and started for Texas. Then that danged Thing commenced to chase me! I could hear it just behind. The harder I ran, the harder that cussed bronc ran too—and that Thing about two jumps behind me, gnashin' its teeth, and rattling its bones! I'd always heard that dead Injuns were good Injuns, but now I knew different. Every time I'd get an extry breath and speed up, that danged horse would do the same. Guess we'd have been in Texas before morning, all right. Leastways, at the rate we were going, we'd been clear out of Wyoming, if I hadn't stumbled.

With a triumphant rattle and jump the Thing was on my prostrate form. I tried to roll over, to grapple with it, but it grabbed me by the belt and turned me on my stomach. I shut my eyes and my breath quit me cold. I don't know how long I lay like that. I recollect hoping that Pinto would wander past the Double-D, so Curly would see him and come hunt for my mangled remains.

The danged Thing was sprawled all over the top of my carcass, just holding me down, and me a quiverin' all over like a day-old calf in a March blizzard! Part of it was pressed down over my face.

Then I began to smell something familiar. I'd been smellin' it quite a spell before I savvied what it was. Then I knew—it was the smell of stale horse-sweat! Right off my own saddle-skirt too!

I was pretty weak, but I managed to roll the saddle off of me and then unhook the curved horn from my belt. I sat up and looked around. There stood that danged Pinto, blowin' hard, sort of whistlin' through his nostrils, like all horses do when they're scared.

I BEGAN to laugh. I laughed so hard I near cried. What had been the ghost in the first place was just Pinto standing facing me. All of his breast and forelegs were white. His mane was just a horse's mane now, but a little while before it had been a dead Injun's hair. And that cussed thing that had chased me was my own saddle, pulled along behind me at the end of the lariat by the running horse! When I fell, the saddle-horn had caught in my belt and jerked old Pinto to a halt, at the same time turning me over. I'd been runnin' acrost the prairie between that locoed bronc and my own saddle!

Pretty soon I managed to find the makin's, and I built me a smoke. Then when my legs got strong enough, I slapped the ghost (my saddle) on Pinto and rode back to where the blanket was layin'. I don't know just how far it was; it took me quite a spell, though. Then I tied the rope to the saddle-horn again, wrapped the blanket around me, and was asleep in two shakes of a dice-box.

Next thing I knew, the sun was shining in my face. In less than an hour from that time, I had my loop around the neck of one of the cayuses I'd come for, with the other one tailed up to the first one and was lopin' back to town—and to the twenty dollars.

When Curly got curious and wanted to know what had scratched my saddle, I told him that Pinto had dragged it. Which wasn't a lie. Course I didn't tell him the rest of it! Curly's a mighty good friend—but there's so many of these here cowpunchers haven't any delicate feelin's at all.

By

Walter Butche

Post No. 3

An exciting story wherein a mystery of the battle-front—the continual loss of the sentry at a certain post—is solved.

EVERY World War veteran, if he took any action in France, generally believes that his division, particularly his own outfit, won the war.

Most of the casualties, misfortunes, hardships and deeds of valor, in their estimation, can be attributed either to their own division or directly to their respective companies.

That's "jake" with me. I relinquish the palm of victory to their outfit; however, I believe that my outfit, the Twenty-sixth Division, and especially my Company E, comes in for a share of the glory.

The General Staff plucked our division from a rest camp and rewarded us with a quiet sector on the St. Mihiel front. Company E was assigned to hold an important traverse, and it fell to our lot to keep three sentries on duty, day and night.

The very first night two of our sentries were killed at their posts by bullets. On three consecutive nights we lost either two or three men, all on the same post, all killed by rifle-bullets.

The whole company was in a state of apprehension. The officers as well as the men each offered plausible theories to solve this mystery. Every protective means and caution was used to shelter the sentries, yet night after night man after man met death at this "death corner." And as night drew near, each man began to fear that this day, perhaps, might be his last.

My squad, then composed of Corporal Fred Noonan, privates Billy Harvey, Tom Darnell and myself, were discussing a probable solution, when the first sergeant of our company shoved his head into our dugout.

A cold chill crept down my back and beads of perspiration covered my brow.

The top sergeant's appearance meant that one or two of us must stand guard on death corner.

"Harvey!" rasped the sergeant.

Billy Harvey was dumb; his heart was bursting to answer "Here!" I suppose, and yet his excitement apparently held his tongue speechless.

The sergeant swung his flashlight and spotting Billy, ordered: "Harvey! You relieve Harry Alexander on Post Number Three at ten tonight!"

NOBODY uttered a sound, though perhaps a sigh of relief was quietly exhaled by the other three of us. Then Billy broke the silence by asking for a cigarette.

Each of us eagerly gave what little we had to our comrade.

"Thanks, fellows—I wont need them all! Just a few whiffs." He spoke with entire serenity.

In the momentary flare of a match as we lighted cigarettes our glances met, and I'm sure all our thoughts were pretty much the same.

Billy fumbled in his pockets and pulling out a soiled envelope, passed it over to me.

"Here, Butche! Mail this to my sister if I should kick in. And here's thirty francs—treat the boys to some *vin blanc* or cognac, if you want."

"Billy—" I murmured.

"Don't say a word, buddy—it's all in the hands of the gods," he commanded quietly.

It was about seven P. M. when the "top-kick" informed Billy of his duty; now outside our dugout the corporal of the guard was calling:

"Hey, Harvey! Harvey!"

Good Lord, could it be possible that it was already ten o'clock? How fast the time had gone!

"Snap out of it!" hissed the corporal. "Shake a leg! Come on—get your gun. It's time."

My heart hammered painfully. Yes, it was time for Billy to go.

Billy grabbed his gun and then clasped my hand.

"So long, buddy! So long, gang! See you in church!"

And in the words and the tone of his voice he contrived to fling all the fortitude of his soul.

That was the last time we saw Billy Harvey alive.

EVERYTHING seemed drab, and life held no attraction for me after my pal's death. Therefore, when the captain called for volunteers to go into no man's land to cut some wire entanglements, I readily volunteered.

Tom Darnell and I were the lucky birds to be picked. We were supplied with ten pineapple grenades and a pair of pliers each.

Our captain gave us his radium-light wrist-watch and warned us not to be caught in the barrage that would probably be laid down from our side about eleven-forty-five P. M. He bade us "god-speed!" and in a short time we started on our way.

The first three hundred yards of our journey were uneventful; then a star-shell broke loose from the German line, followed by another. We flattened ourselves on the muddy ground.

The area around us became illuminated for a moment which seemed like eternity to me; then darkness again. We had begun cautiously to crawl, when we heard the rat-tat-tat of several machine guns. Bullets whined past our bodies, and from time to time, as we ran, crawled and flattened ourselves, other star-shells and rockets appeared from the enemy lines.

Stealthily as snakes, we wriggled ourselves to the enemy's barb-wire entanglements. Tom began to cut the German entanglements as calmly as if he were cutting wire for a power company, with nothing in the world to hamper him. What a cool and reckless devil he was!

I'm not sure whether it was five seconds or five minutes, but we quickly completed our task and started on our way back to our own lines.

Whing-whim! the whining enemy bullets hummed as they flew past our flattened bodies.

We lay facing our line, waiting. Then I saw a glimmer of light, just as if some one was holding a lighted candle. I strained my eyes; the light was stationary. A light on top of our trench! What did this mean?

Just then a star-shell burst in front of us, and in the path of light we unmistakably saw the silhouette of our sentry at his post.

LIKE a flash I grasped the meaning of the light. I called Tom's attention to this, and explained that the Germans had

planted either a piece of phosphorus or some other phosphorescent chemical on our trench, and at night, with the light as a target, peppered the small area with rifle or machine-gun fire, until eventually a chance shot killed our sentry. The mystery was solved at last, I was sure. What a clever trick!

Either Fate was against us or the enemy suspected our presence there; they now let out an intensive machine-gun fire and their star-shells became more frequent and numerous.

I felt a sharp pain in my side, then a hot, piercing prick struck my knee and I stumbled.

"I'm hit, Tom!" I cried.

"Where?"

"My leg."

He touched my leg and I gritted my teeth in agony.

"Leave me alone, Tom. Go back and report the light to the captain."

"No I wont! If you can't crawl, I'll carry you."

"No! No! Hurry, for God's sake, hurry! They are peppering at the light. Go! Moulton is on that post tonight. Let me be, and go pull him off!"

TOM would not listen. Grabbing me like a bag of sugar, he slung me over his shoulder, and then hustled, for dear life, for our lines.

The enemy either anticipated an attack from our side or were undertaking an offensive on their own initiative, because, as Tom was staggering along with me, hell broke loose from their side.

Shells and shrapnel whizzed, boomed, screeched, shrieked and whined. Tom dropped, blood trickling down his face. Once more he picked me up, and again he fell.

He arose, his right arm hanging limp. Without a word he grabbed me by my tunic collar and dragged me the rest of the way. With the last of his fast-failing strength, he pushed me into our trench and fell in after me.

I still had energy enough to make the report to our captain. The next time I awoke, I found myself in the Dijon Hospital. My first thought was about the light.

Gently the news was broken to me that Post Number Three was again safe. But Tom Darnell had given his life for his comrade.

My Last Fight

By

Clarence Johnson

WHEN I was twenty years of age, I lived in Modesto, California. In my spare time I would go down to the Athletic Club and work out with the boxers there, for I was big for my age, tipping the scales at one hundred and ninety-two pounds.

In a short time I was offered fifty dollars to fight with one of the other fellows in a curtain raiser. This money looked very big to me, as I was supporting myself—my folks living in Nevada—and I was ready for anything that offered me extra money.

Well, I won that first fight and several others following, all by the knockout route. One of these was seen by "Kid" Parker, an ex-prizefighter, at that time managing several Oakland fighters, one of whom was on the card that night. He was impressed with my showing and after a short talk, he had me signed up.

In Oakland I fought my first fight—a preliminary—shortly after I arrived. I won it in the second round by a technical knockout.

I won several more fights, all by the knockout route, and then I was given a special event. It was scheduled for six rounds, but as my opponent Morris did not answer the bell for the fifth, I was given credit for a technical knockout in the fourth. This fight was given quite a write-up in the newspapers, and I was

The sport in the prize-fighting game is largely for the spectators—as this curious history of a Western pugilist shows.

listed as one of the best heavyweights on the coast.

In less than six months after I came to Oakland I was signed for a main event with Tommy Moreno, an experienced boxer. I trained hard for the fight, as I knew that it would mean my chance for big money. Then just two days before the fight, I received word from my father in Nevada that my mother was very sick and asking me to come immediately. I sent him a telegram, telling him of the coming fight and that I would not be able to get there until after that. That was the first they knew of my fighting. Then there came a telegram from Mother, urging me to give up fighting and settle down to honest work. She was ill, she stated, and wanted me to come and see her. I wired her that if I lost this fight, I would quit the game.

I had eased up on my training and time lay heavy upon my hands as I roamed around worrying, greatly disturbed about the condition of my mother.

THE night of the fight came at last. The auditorium was packed. This was the fight which was to prove either that I was a "comer" or merely a "flash in the pan."

The first round was slow, neither of us trying to do any hard hitting. We were feeling each other out. The second round was different. I slipped in and staggered him with a hard left to the heart. Backing out, I took a right to the face. It started my nose bleeding. The crowd had seen the first blood drawn and started yelling.

My opponent now started to follow up, but I used an old trick which worked far better than I expected. I jumped in, sidestepped, and as he swung at me I shot my left in to his heart. It slowed him down and as he turned, I hooked my right to the jaw. He came weaving in and clinched. The bell rang before we were separated. The crowd was in an uproar, yelling for a knockout. For the moment I had forgotten my worries. I was intent upon stopping him in the next round.

MORENO'S seconds were working feverishly on him. He came out for the third round and started boxing me, trying to clear his head. This round passed slowly, neither of us getting in a solid blow.

In the fourth round I opened up. Two hard lefts to the heart had him groggy, and then, wanting to finish up, I rushed in. He met me with a wild swing which caught me flush on the jaw. I went down hard.

But as the referee said "eight," I was back on my feet. I clinched and got my senses clear. We broke, and I hooked a left to his eye. This opened an old cut.

The bell rang as we were trading punches in the middle of the ring.

In my corner, Parker told me that I had received a telegram from home. He would not let me see it, he said, until after the fight. I seemed to have a feeling that my mother had died.

The fifth round was all his. I was listless; my heart was not in the fight. Had Moreno known the truth, he could have finished me in this round, but fearing trickery, he kept away from me. The sentiment of the crowd had turned against me and they were now booing me. "Quitter, quitter!" they yelled. But I paid no attention to them—I was thinking of my mother.

I did not hear the bell ring for the sixth round, nor did I wake up, until my second had pulled the stool out from under me. There stood Moreno waiting for me.

IT happened in this round. Tommy led with a stinging left and followed with a right. I blocked it and crashed my right to his jaw. That was about the last I remember, until I came to my senses some fifteen minutes later, a doctor working feverishly over me. Tommy had hit me on the jaw with such force as to break it. He was standing near by, anxiously waiting, and seemed relieved when I opened my eyes. He complimented me upon the fight I had put up and hoped I would be all right in a short time.

Then I remembered the telegram which had lost me the fight. Parker read it to me; it was short and simple: "Mother on road to recovery. Wants you." It was from Dad.

ON the next day I was in Reno at my mother's side. I shall never forget the look on her face as I told her I was through with the boxing game.

As soon as she was able to travel, we moved out to the old homestead. There I worked hard and filled out to my full growth. My twenty-first birthday had passed and I began to grow restless, chafing at what seemed the monotony of life out on the ranch.

When Mother's recovery was complete and she was able to walk about, I told her that I was going back to Oakland and fight again. She begged me not to, reminding me of my promise, but I was obstinate. I knew that I could step into the ring with Moreno at any time and beat him.

I was packing my clothes, preparatory to leaving, when I heard Mother scream. She had surprised a bobcat in the chicken-house and it had attacked her. I rushed in weaponless, not knowing what was wrong, and saw it about to sink its teeth in her throat. Clenching both hands about its neck, I pulled it from her. It turned and with a dying effort, it slashed at my arm with its powerful claws. The bone of my right arm was laid bare, the muscles and tendons torn and cut. Throwing the dead body outside, I went back inside and helped Mother to the house. After she had carefully dressed my arm, I started unpacking my grip. In answer to her question, I told her that I had had my last fight.

Today my right arm is a maimed and crippled thing, too weak to lift itself above my head.

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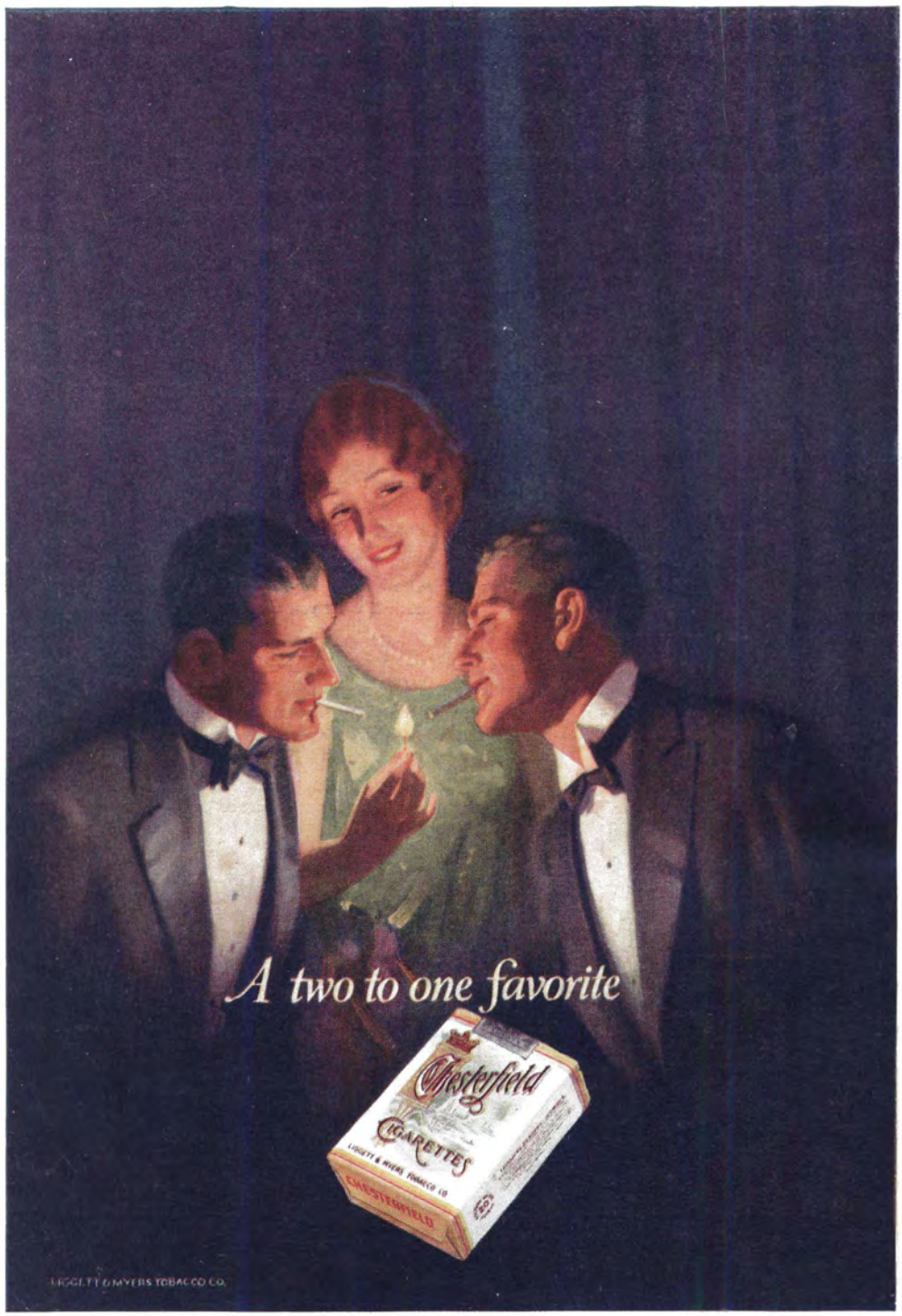
Neet

Ask your NEET dealer for IMMAC also. It's the white cream deodorant that rids underarm perspiration of odor—insuring personal fragrance.


A two to one favorite
Chesterfield
CIGARETTES
LIGGETT & MYERS TOBACCO CO.
CHESTERFIELD
LIGGETT & MYERS TOBACCO CO.