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AUGUST 1922

THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

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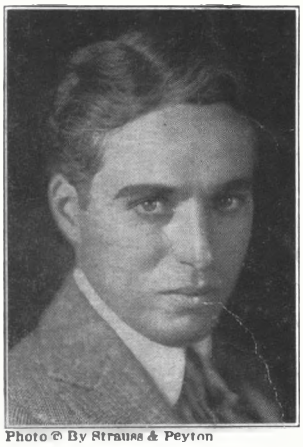

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THE BLUE BOOK

KARL EDWIN HARRIMAN, Editor

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A Thrilling Novelette

Twelve Remarkable Short Stories

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AUGUST 1922

DONALD KENNICOTT, Associate Editor

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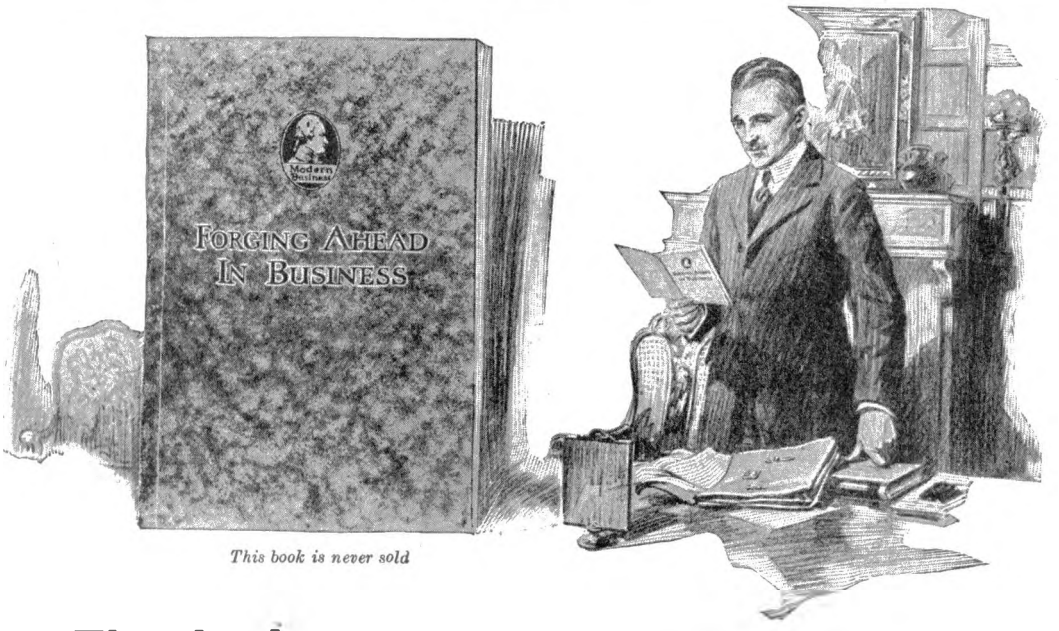

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THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE
Vol. 35 AUGUST 1922 No. 4

A Child of Hermes

The brilliant author of "The Luck-hound," "Tower of Jewels" and many another spirited story here contributes one of the most moving bits of fiction you have ever read.

By PAUL FITZGERALD

Time the cheat, and Space the chain that binds
Earth's children to the world-old road that winds
Between eternities! Behold the child of speed,
Who strives in blood and dust to serve our need!

—*The Thunder Gods.*

IN the village of West Bend, Illinois, there once lived a country surgeon and his wife, unto whom was given a son as the fruition of life's dream. It was not a child of their own flesh and blood, and the circumstances of its birth were discussed in the press and pulpits of the land.

There was a road-race, one of the very first sanctioned contests in the country, with clumsy, high-bodied cars very different from the slim steel thoroughbreds of today. West Bend marked the center of the ten-mile course, and on the day of the race, farmers drove in from miles around to see the latest triumph of man over his ancient enemies Time and Space.

Doc' Kingston, gray hair framing a round pink face, wore a white badge to show that he was one of the emergency staff of physicians. He parked his surrey in a favored spot to the left of the temporary grandstand, and from the front seat watched the hooded gods of speed roar by in a cloud of dust and castor-oil smoke. Ten times a gray car emblazoned with a white "9" thundered past in the lead; on the eleventh lap it was missing. Down in the numbered pits, mechanics leaned out, eyes turned to a distant curve.

The last car approached, and as it swept by, a goggled mechanic sitting beside the driver, pointed to the Number 9 pit, revolved both his hands over his head, and stretched one arm in a northeasterly direction. He was gone again like a flash of light, but he had told his story. Overalled figures scrambled from Number 9 pit and ran in the direction indicated. A moment later a white-faced boy on a bicycle came sprinting up to the rail where Doctor Kingston sat in his surrey.

"Quick!" he panted. "There's a car turned over up the road about a mile. Gee, it's awful! I was up a tree, and I seen it!"

THE physician gathered up the reins and prepared to back out into the clear. Then he saw that his wheels were locked with those of a buggy in which sat a red-faced man with a fur overcoat and a huge diamond winking from a plaid scarf.

"You'll have to back out first," cried Dr. Kingston. "Hurry!"

"And lose my place?" snarled the red-faced man. "I guess not! You'll stay right where you are."

"You heard that boy!" shouted the doctor. "I'm a physician. There's been an accident."

"What of it? There's a hundred other doctors around here. Let 'em get somebody else."

Dr. Kingston blinked a moment.

"Sir," he thundered, "in my professional opinion, you are a louse!" And drawing Black Bess upon her haunches, he crushed the rear wheel off the other man's buggy, wheeled and set off down the road as fast as the mare could gallop. A quarter of a mile past the curve in the highway, he came across a smashed and smoking radiator leaning against a tree. Twenty feet farther, under a second tree, lay the shattered engine; and still beyond—a chassis was twisted around a telegraph-pole.

"The fools!" muttered the physician. "The hare-brained fools!"

A cluster of men stood on the front porch of a roadside farmhouse. He drew rein, leaped out, and went up the pathway, bag in hand. The front room at the left held the mangled body of a young mechanic who took his last breath even as the physician bent down to listen.

Dr. Kingston got to his feet grimly. "Well," he grunted, "let's see what we have over here."

In the front room at the right lay the leather-clad figure of the driver. A mass of tangled yellow hair showed above features distorted by pain and dirt and blood. He was unconscious, and breathing in shuddering gasps.

"Basal fracture," diagnosed the surgeon. "Left leg broken—ribs too. . . . . Internal injuries, probably. . . . . H'm!"

The clatter of a gong sounded outside as an ambulance drove up. It was one of four, assigned by the authorities to patrol the course. Trailing the ambulance came a roadster with a white-faced mechanic at the wheel, and by his side a frail, hatless woman. They alighted and hurried up the walk behind two stretcher-bearers.

"It's Reynolds' wife," said some one. "That's Number Nine's wife. She's come right from the city!"

DOCTOR KINGSTON met the little woman in the hall. It didn't need a physician's powers to realize that this dazed slip of femininity was not alone destined to become a widow but a mother as well; and looking at her, he did not know whether life or death would come first. He shielded her from a view of the room, saying:

"We had better take him to the hospital at once. It is his only chance, my child. You must be brave."

Ten minutes later the ambulance was on the way to the county hospital, the country surgeon and two attendants riding inside and striving to hold the stretcher steady, while Bill Reynolds' wife crouched beside the driver, hair flying in the wind, and white hands pulling at the gong.

When they reached the great hospital that formed a brick horseshoe in the hillside, and were carrying their burden up the steps, the wind lifted a corner of the sheet, and Mrs. Reynolds caught a glimpse of what reposed on the stretcher.

"I—I think I will have to sit down," she told Dr. Kingston, and he led her into a waiting-room, where she remained for the greater part of the night until a nurse told her gently that the end had come. Twenty hours later Mrs. Reynolds joined her husband, leaving behind a tiny morsel of humanity snatched from the Angel of Death by a stubborn country doctor. The boy was a veritable child of Hermes, born without living parents, and sprung from the very loins of the fabled god of speed.

No wonder that editors and ministers of

the gospel decried this tragedy, and sought legislative curb against a speed-mad age, forgetting that every age since Father Adam has seen the pace increase, and until the last man dies, the tragic struggle will go on.

As usual, the flurry of discussion led nowhere and was short-lived. The great State of Illinois turned its attention to more important topics, and no one was very much interested when two months later Dr. Kingston and his wife took out adoption-papers for the little waif at the hospital, and thus relieved the county of any further responsibility.

SOPHIE KINGSTON, gray curls and black silk, received her little son with all the sanctified tenderness of a woman who has lost two daughters, and has dared to pray for recompense.

"We will call him Georgie after the first great American," she told her husband, "and he will be a leader of men."

"Anything but a sawbones," smiled her husband. "Bless my soul, Sophie, you look twenty years younger!"

Indeed, Sophie, with all her forty-five years, bloomed anew under the magic of unbelievably small fingers that swept her heartstrings. As for Dr. Kingston, he liked nothing better than to sit on his porch in the twilight, smoking a pipe, and listening to the voice of his wife crooning her favorite lullaby:

> Stars are twinkling in the sky,
> Little eyes blinking—I wonder why?
> Now go to slumberland; try, oh, try—
> But come back to me in the morning!

Listening thus, the old doctor thought only of how they would guard their adopted son from all knowledge of that parental tragedy. Little did Sophie or he dream that the helpless mite of humanity they had taken to their bosoms would one day fulfill destiny as "Kingston of the Thunder Gods," speed-monarch of the world!

Time passed, and when Georgie was four years old Dr. Kingston, answering a call at the hotel one day, lost his balance and fell down a short flight of steps. He was a portly man, and when he felt himself going, he made a desperate effort to regain his footing. Those who ran to his assistance found him sitting propped up against the last step, calmly probing with his forefingers two kneecaps from which all the ligaments had been torn away. Thus he learned, before the knees had time to swell, the full extent of his misfortune.

"Sophie," he said sadly, when they had carried him home, "I shall never be able to pick up a lady's handkerchief gracefully again. Get me some crutches, Sophie —and put a sign on the door: 'Dr. Kingston, always home!'"

SOPHIE bore the blow bravely, but the financial problem that now looked them in the face threatened to be serious until it was solved, a few weeks later in an unexpected manner. Abner Kingston, the Doctor's widowed brother, died in California, leaving a ranch just outside Calora, and a cottage on the outskirts of the same town. The physician was the sole heir, it appeared; and after talking things over, he and Sophie decided to seek their final haven in the Golden West, taking little Georgie with them.

They found a small valley, beautiful beyond their dreams, a quaint country town, an old-fashioned cottage with roses tumbling over the front porch, a red dog sleeping on the doorstep, and chickens prowling in the garden. There was the usual Chamber of Commerce sign at the station: "WATCH CALORA GROW." The history of the town was a record of three fires and a bank failure, but following each disaster, it had blossomed with renewed strength like a well-pruned tree. The editor of the Calora *Sun* assured them that the town was only one calamity removed from actual prosperity.

In these surroundings Dr. Kingston and Sophie wove their final love-nest, and devoted their attention to the upbringing of Georgie. He was a strange little chap with gray-blue eyes, and curls the color of ripened wheat. He was shy of other children, and subject to alternate moods of extreme docility, and then uncontrollable fits of temper during which he would run away to the hayloft, throw himself face-downward on the floor and scream until exhaustion brought sleep. Repentance always accompanied his return to the house, and peace was established when he was permitted to climb upon the Doctor's lap and look into the back of the massive gold watch. The delicate jeweled machinery held for the youngster a strange fascination. Again and again he asked the same question that little boys will ever ask:

"Papa, what makes the wheels go round?"

"H'm," would come the reply, "well, bless my soul, that's a stickler!"

Not infrequently the physician would pass his hand gently over the exposed mechanism, as a hypnotist might break a charm, and noting the boy's eyes yield from their fixed stare, would run his fingers thoughtfully over the well-formed little head, and murmur to Sophie:

"Imagination—ambition—pluck—perseverance. . . . . H'm, I don't understand this ridge over here." And his own eyes would become dreamy, and his face thoughtful.

Sometimes the instincts of the physician rebelled against his forced inactivity, and he wondered if it would be practicable for him to renew his practice. But he could not afford a driver, and experience showed him the danger of trying to climb in and out of a buggy with crutches, never knowing when the horse might move and throw him under the wheels. He schooled himself to sit in an arm-chair on the porch in the late afternoons, and tell stories to the little ones who always swarmed around. Georgie, of course, was entitled to sit on the Doctor's right knee, and three-year-old Marjory, who lived next door, usually occupied the remaining perch. Others were compelled to sit at the foot of the throne. The stories were thrilling narratives of Indians and cowboys, marvelous exploits of extraordinary people; and at their conclusion Georgie had one invariable question:

"Papa, is that story a *true* one?"

"H'm," the reply would come, "well now, let's see. H'm! Well, perhaps I'd better tell you another one."

And if the new story was vouched for as true, Georgie tucked it away in his memory, and days afterward would repeat it, this time with himself as the hero.

SO he grew up, a nervous little chap with the face of a dreamer, and outward traits that were hard to analyze. His movements were those of a young salmon, always trying to swim upstream, always rebelling against authority, and ever dashing enthusiastically after one lure, only to drop it in favor of another. Sophie was worried, for she loved the boy dearly; but the wise old Doctor used to say:

"Let the young colt kick up his heels, Sophie. I like the fire in his eye. Some day he'll settle down in the traces of his own accord, and then watch him go!"

But when the boy was sixteen, and attending high school, something happened which shook the little household with the force of a thunderclap. Georgie was taken to the county jail, facing a probable charge of murder! Calora rocked under the sensation; Sophie Kingston suffered as only a mother could; and her husband stumped around like a crippled lion, defying public opinion and defending the boy to the best of his ability.

Teddy Taylor, it appeared, had figured in some school escapade, and Principal Rufe Winstrom had undertaken to punish the boy with an old-fashioned hiding. Teddy was fifteen, small for his age, and the sworn chum of Georgie Kingston. What was equally important, Teddy's sister was the same Marjie who used to share the honors of Dr. Kingston's lap in the old story-telling days, and Georgie had a sofa pillow at home fashioned of Marjie's class colors. Peering through the window of Winstrom's office, the youth with the blond hair and the strange gray eyes saw his chum writhing under the swing of a cane. Before he knew what he was doing, he darted up the stairs and forced his way into the office. His face was white, and he was trembling in the grip of one of his childish furies. He staggered in between man and boy.

"Don't do it!" he choked. "Don't do it! *Don't do it!*"

WINSTROM was not born to his job. He was merely a thin-lipped martinet, who saw no farther than the end of his nose. Here was an impudent challenge to his sense of discipline. A more discerning man would have realized that this trembling boy was out of his head. But Winstrom merely clenched his teeth, motioned the smaller youngster to leave the room, and locked the door behind himself and Georgie Kingston.

"My boy," he said, "you've had this coming for some time. There's just a little too much ego in your make-up to suit me. Hold out your hands."

No one ever learned exactly what followed, but ten minutes later Georgie Kingston himself unlocked the door, stumbled out into the yard with a long red mark across his face, and fell sobbing on the handball court.

Teddy Taylor went into the office and

found the principal on the floor, his skull fractured, and a quart ink-bottle lying in pieces by his side.

It was all a nightmare to Georgie. He was dazed, and either unable or unwilling to say anything in his defense. But Teddy took the stand when his chum was arraigned and told a straightforward story; that story, coupled with the testimony that Winstrom would recover, eventually worked in Georgie's favor, and he was released on probation, to bear the gossip and surveillance of a small town.

Other boys, less sensitive, might have weathered this period of stress, and even have taken secret pride in all the attention aroused. The comment was not all adverse, by any means. There were those who asserted openly that Winstrom got just what he deserved. They remembered the red mark across the boy's face, and recalled stories told by their own sons, stories to which, at the time, insufficient notice had been paid.

THE effect on Georgie Kingston, however, was that of an overwhelming calamity. He felt that he had brought disgrace on the community, disgrace on those near and dear to him, disgrace on himself. It was so very different from the heroic exploits his imagination had always projected, that he yielded once more to the impulses of his childhood. Only this time, his destination was not the Doctor's friendly hayloft, but along the highway leading east to the city of Santa Inez, thirty miles distant. He stole from the house in the night-time, carrying only a bundle of clothing; but before he went, he made his way into the main bedroom under the eaves, and knelt for a moment at the bed where the gentle breathing of his foster parents told him they were asleep. Moonlight, filtering through the shutters, spread an emerald veil over Sophie Kingston's gray curls and finely chiseled features. The boy pressed his lips ever so lightly to her hair, and tiptoed through the open door.

Behind him a woman stirred uneasily, opened her eyes, and then awakened her husband.

"Arthur—Arthur! I think Georgie's calling to us."

"Eh?" exclaimed the Doctor. "What's that? H'm, why bless my soul, Sophie, I don't hear anything. You're dreaming again."

Mrs. Kingston sat up in bed nervously, and called out:

"Are you asleep, son?"

There was no answer from the adjoining bedroom. She was on the point of arising, when the Doctor detained her gently.

"Calm yourself, Sophie," he urged. "Go to sleep. The boy's all right."

In the morning they found a note on the breakfast-table propped up against a blue china sugar-bowl:

Dear Folks:
I just want to run, and run, and run.
Please don't look for me.
I'll come back when I have fought it out.
Your own
GEORGIE.

Sophie Kingston cried all that day, and the Doctor stumped down town to take counsel with Editor Sommers and Town Marshal Bob Devine.

"Mind," he told them, "I don't want the young colt lassooed or hobbled. Let him breathe the free air of the range. Only, the brand of an old man is on him, and he's all I've got. Find out, if possible, where he is, and let me know if he needs help."

In the evening the Doctor and his wife sat in two armchairs before the fireplace, holding hands, their eyes reading the past on the dancing flames.

"Imagination—ambition—pluck—perseverance," mused the old gentleman, "and that ridge back of the ear. He'll come back to us, Sophie; strange forces are working within that boy—he will appear again and vanish, appear and vanish, until some day— He paused and frowned into the flames, thinking of a day at West Bend when a car had swept by him and returned, swept by and returned, until—

"What?" she asked.

He shook his head, patted her hand and answered gently:

"That part will come after you and I are gone, Sophie. Maybe he will come back to us, even then!"

IT was Marjory Taylor who got the first word from Georgie. He called her on the telephone, a week after he had disappeared, being unable any longer to bear the suspense of voluntary exile. He wanted to know if "Mother and Dad were all right."

"You poor kid," said Marjie, who was two years younger than he, but very level

of head and warm of heart. "They're all right, but everyone misses you. I can just tell from your voice that you're terribly homesick. What are you doing?"

"I'm going to carry papers for the *Star* if I can get a bicycle," he answered. "Don't tell my folks where I am. I'll call you again." And he hung up.

Two days later the editor of the Santa Inez *Star* received an unsigned note on pink paper which read:

"I am sending a bicycle in your care for Georgie Kingston so that he can carry papers for you."

When the expressman made delivery, it turned out to be a girl's bicycle, and the name and address of the owner were written on the under part of the leather seat. Margie had forgotten about that. Editor Tollington had once worked as a reporter on a large city daily, and he knew that the best stories were those that were never published. He sent the bicycle back to Calora with a note to Marjory Taylor, reading:

> Thanks ever so much, but see, George is already fixed up. He came to work for us today. He's a nice boy, and we'll take good care of him.

Then he sent for his circulation manager, and explained matters.

"That's the boy who brained old *Ichabod Crane* down at Calora. Dig him up a bike and put him to work. The *Star* ought to go into every home for twenty miles around."

So that was how the hand of Destiny gave Georgie Kingston his first assignment, sending him out on a country highway, astride a contrivance of steel and rubber, to match his youthful muscles against Father Time. There were four papers in Santa Inez, engaged in a desperate struggle for leadership in a fast-growing valley.

IT was the age when bicycle-racing had not yet been wholly supplanted by the motor. The fastest riders of local bicycle-clubs were employed by the competing journals to serve subscribers in the outlying region. It became a matter of pride with each boy to cover the most territory in the shortest space of time.

Georgie paid the penalty of an apprentice at this game, drawing a route that led up toward the Gray Mountain Mine, and put to test all that he had of wind and sinew. But it was a training school for the youngster that might have been devised by the God of Speed himself. The morning and evening grind developed George's nerves and muscles and confidence. Above all, the sense of power that came when he was spinning along the road in the early morning fed the hunger in his veins and soothed away his restlessness.

Soon he was challenging the right of anyone to pass him on the road. That was fair enough on the level stretches between Santa Inez and the first range of foothills; there he could hold his own. But the human body, no matter how muscled and willing, could not compete against gasoline-propelled vehicles where the road curved up on the mountain-side. Again and again George—pedaling for dear life—heard the squawk of a horn on the grade below him, and a moment later was breathing dust and exhaust-fumes of a motorcar. The vanishing mass of purring machinery seemed to mock the toiling youth. It said to him:

"What's the matter, Georgie—is that all the fast you can go?"

Strangely enough, he felt no particular bitterness toward this new marvel of human ingenuity—only a vast curiosity and a return of the old brooding spells. Just as he had wanted once to know what made the wheels go round in Dr. Kingston's watch, now he wanted to know what made an automobile go so fast. In pursuit of this knowledge, he hired out to a garage man for three hours each evening as a car-washer, and as he sponged and plied the hose, his eyes studied car after car, and his ears absorbed the vernacular of garage-men.

Old man Chessleigh, who owned the garage, took a liking to the boy, and gave him catalogues to take home and read. Georgie supplemented these with technical books procured from the public library. It was all very confusing at first, and he experienced the pang of homesickness. More and more he rejoiced in the sound of Marjory Taylor's voice on the telephone, assuring him that everyone was well at home, and demanding to know what he was doing and when he was coming back to Calora. He evaded a reply to these questions, because he did not know the answer himself. Down in his heart there was an imaginative dream of going back to Calora as a conquering hero, with the bands playing and the populace strung along the street to meet him. He did not

see how that was going to be accomplished, but he knew that he wanted it, and instinct seemed to tell him one day it would come.

Sundays, he rode even farther along his route than usual, climbing up the mountain road to the divide where he could see in the distance the forest of oil-derricks that stood between Calora and the ocean. It was on one of these trips that he was whisked suddenly between the goal-posts of his first great ambition.

WALKING up a steep grade, and shoving his bicycle in front of him, George was almost run down by a yellow roadster that flashed around a curve in the road, swerved like a startled deer, and swept on in a swirl of dust. The lone driver was "hitting it up" recklessly. A hundred yards farther down there was another treacherous bend, too short to be taken safely at that speed.

"He'd better slow up," thought the boy. "He don't know this road like I do; he'd better watch out . . . . . Oh!"

From his position on the outside of the road George saw the yellow car careen into the lower curve, screech under the sudden pressure of brakes, skid twice, and then hover an instant on the edge of a cliff. Loose rocks gave under the weight of one rear wheel; dust spurted from under the spinning tires, and the car rolled off in a back somersault, catapulting the driver from his seat. The bank hid man and machine.

A minute later, his bicycle discarded, George Kingston was kneeling at the break in the road and staring wide-eyed at the scene below him. With its four wheels broken and its body crushed like an egg-shell, the yellow roadster was tilted on its nose against a huge fir tree thirty feet beneath him. Something banged farther down. It was the gas tank, pried loose from its fastenings and crashing against rock after rock in a precipitous flight. The steel cap flew off; sparks generated under the friction; the tank impaled itself on a granite boulder—and the mountain reverberated under the explosion.

Not more than five yards from the shattered car a young man in checkered suit crawled out of a friendly manzanita bush, propped himself into a sitting posture and lit a cigarette. Even as George Kingston stared open-mouthed, the rumpled figure below him applied a thumb to an aristocratic nose and wiggled his fingers at the inverted speed-chariot.

"Never touched me!" he taunted. "Zas secon' time I fooled you! Jus' f'r that—stay there!"

He looked up, and beheld the white-faced George.

"'Lo," he called. "Whas time?"

"It's about noon!" gasped Georgie. "Say—"

The man produced a silver pencil and a notebook, and gravely recorded the chronological information.

"Neares' train to Frisco?" he demanded.

Georgie choked, and then found his wits.

"Down this road about five miles there's a train that leaves at two o'clock."

The seeker after information added this item to the entry in the notebook, studied it a moment, said "Hell!" and struggled up to the level of the road. Then he saw the bicycle, and grinned.

"Zas it!" he cried. "Was rider m'self once. Les' swap!"

"Swap?"

"'Zackly," said the stranger. "Swap f'r bike. I'm bes' li'le ol' swapper in worl'. Swap ranch f'r machine; swap machine f'r bike—swap bike f'r cigar or what have you. C'mon!"

Before the dazed Georgie could protest, the extraordinary individual in the checked suit had appropriated the bicycle and shoved off. Twice he wobbled perilously, fell off, and remounted with grim obstinacy. His third attempt proved reasonably successful. He waved one hand triumphantly, headed for the bank, recovered control just in time, and disappeared blithely around a curve.

George Kingston scrambled down the slide, and stood spellbound in the shadow of his first automobile.

THAT was how the Santa Inez *Star* lost a promising circulation hustler, while old man Chessleigh, proprietor of the Main Street garage, gained a new employee. George gave up a week's wages in payment for the bicycle, and then pawned his services for a month in the new job so that the yellow roadster might be hauled from its predicament and transferred to the back yard of the garage. He became an apprentice mechanic with no other object in life than the reconstruction of what old man Chessleigh called "the Banana Special."

"It's got one of them newfangled French

engines," said the proprietor. "Cost a lot of dough, I'll bet; but kid—you'd be better off buyin' a two-cylinder lawn-mower. Course, we could put on a new body—that's about all it really needs; but the next time anything goes wrong, you'll be up against it. You wont get no parts in this neck of the woods."

"I'll make my own parts, then," said Georgie. "This is my car, and I'm going to learn all about it."

And to the amazement of old man Chessleigh, the boy was as good as his word. If ever there was a born mechanic, it proved to be George Kingston. He took to it as naturally as a bird to the air, grasping almost instinctively the purpose and function of every bit of metal on which he laid his fingers.

Before the winter rains began to scourge the valley, the Banana Special had graduated from the back yard to the repair-shop, and was in the process of transformation. This meant long hours at night in addition to the day-shift by which he earned his livelihood and managed to pay for various materials. Chessleigh donated a dilapidated body pried from an ancient touring car, and George remodeled it. Someone else gave him a top, and a pair of secondhand acetylene lamps. Fellow-mechanics became interested, and lent occasional assistance and advice. Little by little the car assumed shape. It was an extraordinary-looking creation, clumsy and high-bodied, bearing all the outward marks of patchwork; but underneath the plebeian hood the soul of a steel thoroughbred purred softly, awaiting the will of its new master.

"Breathes pretty," commented old man Chessleigh; "never heard just that tone before. What you going to do with it, Georgie?"

"Run it," said young Kingston. "It's *my* car."

BUT that night he changed his mind. He was painting the tonneau, and he stood back, brush in hand, to get the perspective of an artist viewing his first creation. He wanted to picture himself at the wheel, with possibly Marjory Taylor sitting at his side; but what he actually visioned was the figure of a stout old country Doctor with a pink face, sitting at the wheel, stiff legs set against the clutch and brake.

"Great Scott!" cried Georgie. "A little more leg-room up in front, and he could do it! He could resume his practice, and be a king! I could move the seat back, and put a brace over here, and lower the dashboard. Yessir, it would work!"

He thought of the sign which Sophie said the Doctor had once wanted to place on his door, and he paraphrased it, whispering to himself: "Dr. Kingston, out on a call!"

In the flush of this new idea he fell excitedly to work, happier at the thought of the joy he was going to give to some one else, than he had been at the prospect of realizing his own ambition; that was Georgie Kingston!

The second inspiration came from a contemplation of the calendar. Thanksgiving Day was only two weeks distant. Dr. Kingston was the type of sturdy old-fashioned American, sprung from Puritan stock, who was accustomed to observe the last Thursday in November just as his forbears had done. There had never been a Thanksgiving Day in Georgie's memory when he had not sat at the family table with bowed head, and listened to Dr. Kingston render his annual tribute to the Great Provider. There must be no break in this chain of magic days, no empty chair at Mother Kingston's right hand. George would go home, riding in a golden chariot, fashioned with his own hands, a royal gift to a crippled doctor from a repentant son. He could almost see Sophie's proud amazement, and hear the Doctor's deep voice:

"Why Georgie, my son—you don't mean to say you made this all by yourself? You *did!* Well, God bless my soul! Sophie, what did I always say? He's a trump, Sophie—he's a trump!"

Yes, thought Georgie, that was it: he would go home in glory on Thanksgiving Day, straight through the main street, so every one could see him. Old lady Strauss, from her armchair outside the grocery,—a chair that was a sort of reviewing stand for all that went on—would see him and spread the news. One of her sons was postmaster, and the other ran the Calora *Sun*. Between the three, no morsel of news ever escaped. Fair enough! George in his golden chariot would give them something to talk about! They hadn't seen him go away, but they'd behold him when he came back!

The Banana Special waxed glorious under repeated coats of enamel.

Marjory Taylor, quivering with delight,

learned of Georgie's plans over the telephone. No, she wouldn't tell a soul! Cross her heart, she wouldn't! But she'd be watching for him, and she'd see somehow that Mother Kingston and the Doctor were induced to prepare the usual Thanksgiving spread. And would Georgie promise to take her for the first ride?

"This is going to be Dad's car," he reminded proudly. "We'll have to ask him. Oh, Marjie—gee, you just ought to see it!"

BUT George had reckoned not with the weather god, who has a habit of sadly disarranging the plans of mere human beings. Boreas puffed out his cheeks, and the Storm King rode down from the North battering his way along the slopes of the Sierra Madre. The brown earth turned black under the steady downpour, and children flattened their noses against window-panes, chanting forlornly:

> Rain, rain go away,
> Come again some other day
> Little Johnny wants to play.

They might have said "Little Georgie" and not have been far wrong. But the rain persisted, and Thanksgiving Day found the near-by-mountains hidden under rumbling clouds. Late in the afternoon the Santa Inez *Star* posted on its windows news of a train-wreck just this side of Calora. The rails had spread under the weight of the local. Southbound trains were cancelled. Physicians were serving the injured in near-by farmhouses.

Georgie's last chance was gone. There were no trains. Try to get through in his beloved car with the last coat of golden varnish hardly dry? The thought was sacrilege itself. He tried for half an hour to get Calora over water-soaked lines, to tell Marjie of the utter failure of his plans. The wires buzzed and burred and crossed one another in the gale. Twice he secured the connection, only to lose it immediately. Some one kept cutting in—it was the operator at Calora; and finally he discerned that she was calling his own name. He shouted a repeated answer but apparently she could not hear him, for over and over again, he caught the fragmentary:

"No, no! . . . . Keep off. Want Kingsston . . . . Kingston."

And then a familiar voice that seemed to come from the other side of the world reached Georgie's ear.

"This is Dr. Kingston," it said. "Dr. Kingston is speaking."

The operator answered quickly, taking advantage of a temporary clearness in the line:

"I'm relaying a message from Gray Mountain. Can you come to the mine at once? There's no other physician available."

And the Doctor's voice:

"Why, God bless my soul, woman—"

And the operator again: "The foreman's wife is phoning. Her three children got hold of rat-poison. She says they're dying. Her husband was riding for help and broke his leg. They've no rig. It's a holiday. There's no one to help . . . . Wait! She's talking. Can you hear her?"

Dimly the voice of frantic motherhood made itself heard through the storm:

"My babies, Doctor—my babies! For God's sake, come! Five hundred dollars if you—"

"What kind of poison?" shouted Dr. Kingston. "Don't talk money! What kind—"

"The line's gone!" announced the operator. "If I can get her again, what shall I say?"

"Tell her," said Doctor Kingston, "you tell her that if I can get some one to lift me on a saddle-horse—"

"No you don't!" interrupted Georgie Kingston. "Dad, it's me! I heard everything. You stay home and get things ready. I'll bring 'em down! I'll get 'em for you! The mine is not so far! I know the road."

"God bless my soul," cried the old gentleman. "Georgie, where are you?"

"Never mind!" said George. "I've got a car that can make it. Don't you go out, Daddy—leave it all to me. I'll get 'em for you. I'm on my way!"

AFLAME with the suddenness of his resolve, he banged up the receiver and hurried over to the garage. Old man Chessleigh watched with amazement as George fastened storm-curtains on the yellow car and filled the tank with gasoline.

"Where the devil are you going?" he barked.

"Gray Mountain and then to Calora," said Georgie. "Three kids are down with poison, and Dad's waiting for them."

Old man Chessleigh gasped: "Gray Mountain on a night like this! You crazy?"

"I know the road," assured young Kingston,—"every foot of it, clear up to the Divide; from there on, I'll take a chance. Don't close that door on me, or I'll drive clean through it!"

The garage owner realized that the threat was uttered in all seriousness. He drew back, and as the gaudy yellow machine snorted past him into the darkness on its mission of mercy, he bawled forgiveness and a parting benediction:

"Good luck, you damn' young fool, good luck!"

Georgie didn't hear him. His eyes were on the feeble glare of the headlights, and his ears tingled with the challenge of the elements. Forgotten was the longing to keep the yellow car spotless in its painted purity. Something within him bloomed into being as he felt the engine respond to his foot upon the accelerator. He was George Kingston, a young Lochinvar, fighting the opening battle against his predestined enemies—Time and Space!

Written in well-thumbed books are the exploits of Paul Revere, and General Sheridan, and they who carried the good news from Ghent—may their fame increase! Georgie's ride is told only by the citizens of Calora who pieced the account together from what was later supplied by old man Chessleigh and the mine foreman's wife, and certain men in slickers who happened to be working on the road that night, and who did what they could to help. There is also, for corroboration, a photograph of the yellow car, taken the next morning, and preserved to this day in the office of the Calora *Sun*.

You should consider only Dr. Kingston, sitting at an untouched dinner, gold-headed cane tapping nervously on the dining-room carpet; Sophie standing by a lamp at the window, hour after hour; and Marjory Taylor tearing at her handkerchief, and going to the door every fifteen minutes to peer into the storm.

OFF somewhere on the crumbling road of Gray Mountain a mechanical thoroughbred nosed upward, hugging the scourged banks. A steel wristed youngster gripped the wheel, his head throbbing from the rain that beat into his eyes through the shattered windshield, but all his faculties marvelously alert.

Slipping, sliding, but ever crawling on, he made the Gray Mountain Mine at the top of the Divide, paused only long enough to cover three torpor-gripped youngsters under a mass of blankets on the floor behind him. Then he pushed on.

A spark-plug fouled and the engine sputtered; he coasted. Twice the wheels skidded him into the bank, and he lost one of his precious lights. The machine mired at a bridge, but fortune sent him help from a conscientious road boss. Farther on, the rear wheels sank again, and he freed the car by wrapping his coat around one tire.

And then with the worst of his journey over, and a straight oiled road leading into his destination, Time and Space rallied their forces against him, and he crashed into a storm culvert, snapping a knuckle on the steering gear. It was the first trump-card laid down against him.

THE little gilt clock on the Kingston mantelpiece ticked on until the hands indicated ten minutes to midnight. Sophie broke a silence that had lasted for hours.

"Arthur," she said, "Arthur, I want my boy! There must be some one who'll take us out—"

"Patience, Sophie!" said the old gentleman. "Patience. That boy will take care of himself. I can see—I can see!"

There was a cry from Marjory Taylor at the front door. Mrs. Kingston rushed in that direction, and saw the girl running toward the gate. The Doctor dragged himself upright, hobbled to the porch, and thrilled under the spectacle he beheld.

George was coming home, not with the bands playing and the populace lined along the street, as he had dreamed, but in a mud-coated, crawling, sputtering caricature of a car, fenders torn off, front tire gone and side curtains ripped to shreds. A fence-picket was wired to the front axle, and with its help Georgie was steering the once gay chariot as a small boy might guide his hoop.

He wrenched his fingers from their stiffened clasp, crawled out and fell against the slimy dashboard, fumbling for the catch to the side door.

"Daddy!" he called. "I did my best, and they're still living! Help me get 'em out, Mamma—and oh, Dad, I did work so hard to give you a swell car, and now look at it!"

ALL credit to the skill of an old country doctor with his stomach pump and his precious antidotes! He fought as stub-

born a battle as George had done, and in the end he saved three little lives.

What with this amazing story and the account of the train-wreck, the editor of the Calora *Sun,* the next day, ran out of adjectives, and his senses as well; but at Santa Inez, if you will remember, there was a man who knew a story when he saw one. So a great many people in remote places, who would not have been at all interested in a train-wreck at Calora, talked about George Kingston, and the Banana Special that saved three lives.

But as usual the real story was never published, for that developed just before the break of dawn, when the little ones were out of danger, and a reunited household was free to seek its rest. The rôle of physician slipped then from the shoulders of Dr. Kingston, and he sat at his desk, an exhausted old gentleman fingering a faded yellow envelope that he had guarded jealously for many years. While he hesitated, Georgie Kingston's future trembled in the balance. Dr. Kingston drew a deep breath.

"The sea calls to the little stream," he mused, "and all in good time it works its way down from the mountain peak. A child achieves manhood in a thunderstorm and knows not why. Heigh-ho, God bless my soul, it has come!"

He picked up the envelope, achieved his feet, and was plodding toward the hall, when Georgie came to aid him. At the threshold of Georgie's room they paused, and Dr. Kingston surrendered to younger hands the key that was to unlock the treasured secret of their relationship.

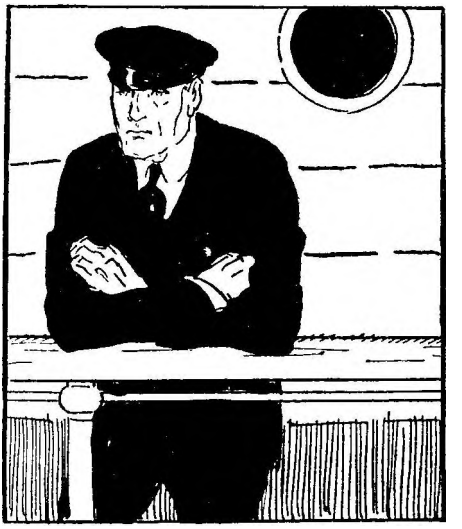
"Pretty strenuous night all around, Georgie," he puffed. "You've come home a man, Georgie, come home a man ready to stand on his own feet. All I have is yours, Georgie—can't even keep this envelope from you any longer. You've won it from me, lad—it's your birthright, and it may help to make things clear. Good night, Georgie—and remember that Sophie and I love you."

Almost an hour later Dr. Kingston, unable to sleep and tormented with uncertainty, crawled out of bed and made his way down the hall. He paused at the boy's half-open door and peered in.

GEORGIE KINGSTON, his back outlined against the lamplight, stood before a bureau on which were spread the newspaper clippings he had been reading line by line, over and over. But now his eyes were centered on a photograph pinned in the side of the mirror. The picture was that of a man sitting at the wheel of a racing-car, his head enveloped in a white hood, lips smiling, and eyes turned straight to the son he had never seen.

Old Doctor Kingston stood there on his crutches, watching—watching. The man in the photograph smiled silently on, until the mirror held the reflection of a younger face that merged into a likeness so extraordinary that the figure in the doorway quivered.

Georgie's hands went to a white silk kerchief in the drawer at the left. Mechanically he draped it across his forehead, and back over tawny hair; two bright spots appeared above his cheek bones, and his blue eyes answered affirmatively the look of the man in the picture.



The Gloria Makes Port

A powerful story of the sea, by the talented author of "The Luck of the Lucy Lermond" and "The Grist of the Sea."

By Newell O. Morse

RESURRECTED from the boneyard, rerigged, daubed with tar, and painted in an abortive attempt to hide the scars of forty ill-spent years, the disreputable old *Gloria* wallowed with stilled engines in the ground-swell of the calm. Five days before, she had sailed hurriedly from San Francisco, bound, by a sworn statement at the Customhouse, with honest freight for a Mexican port. Now haste was forgotten, while ship and crew hailed as a heaven-sent gift the fog that rose out of the sea, and veiled them for the moment in a shroud of invisibility. The sea-worn plates and trusses of the decrepit hulk groaned inwardly as the ship rose and fell, but no other sound broke the stillness, save the warm splash of the gathering mist as it dripped from cordage and superstructure.

Dusk was deepening, and aided by the fog, was rapidly blotting out the solitary lookout on the forecastle head from Captain Jed Bowers, who stood motionless and listening on the bridge.

Close beside the young captain, Mr. Kluxen, the chief mate, crouched over the starboard guard-rail and peered with straining eyes into the wall of fog, from which came at regular intervals the far-away bellow of a steam siren.

Neither man spoke or moved as night came on with the blackness of pitch. But at the end of a half-hour Captain Bowers, growing impatient, raised his hand, and finding it invisible a foot in front of his face, crept softly amidships and looked into the hooded binnacle. Whispering a word to the quartermaster, he bent over the engine-room speaking-tube, but straightened up quickly as he caught the step of his first officer behind him.

The mate's figure, a gross bulk in the gloom, backed off discreetly as the captain turned. But from a safe distance his voice came, sullen and mutinous.

"I tell you, Captain Bowers," he growled, "it can't be done. Listen!"

Kluxen broke off abruptly, as a vagrant snifter billowed up the fog from astern, and brought again the deep roar of the siren. But now the sound was riding on the wind, and louder, and nearer, it swelled in one breath to a raucous blast!

"There—there," rumbled Kluxen, pointing with one shadowy arm astern, "I told you—it's the revenue cutter; they've got our bearings, and they're coming mighty fast."

HE reached for the engine-room telegraph. But the Captain, leaping forward, struck up his arm, and gripping him roughly by the shoulder, threw him back against the rail.

"Keep your smartness to yourself, Mr. Kluxen," he warned angrily, but without raising his voice. "If that's the best you can do, get off this bridge. Send every man below, except the lookout, and remember—no lights!"

"Very well," growled Kluxen, backing off. "But when I speak in the line of duty, it does not call for an insult. If—"

"I've no reason to believe it's a revenue cutter," interrupted Captain Bowers coolly, but still keeping his voice low. "Sounds are very confusing in the fog, and—"

"No?" questioned the mate with the perceptible trace of a sneer, "—except that just before the fog closed in, they were headed across our bows, flying a 'Heave-to' signal."

"Mr. Kluxen!" The Captain's quick, catlike tread brought the two men face to face, so close together that the whites of the other's eyes glowed out of the gloom. "It's the last word. Take my orders or go to your room."

For an instant Kluxen, big and oxlike, hesitated, glaring angrily through the darkness at the Captain, whose lithe figure, shadowy, but obviously alert, stood ready to back up his command. Then the mate, choking back his rage, turned sullenly and clumped down the steps.

"There's no argument, Captain Bowers," he flung over his shoulder. "I'll take your orders; but"—only the quartermaster at the wheel caught his savage mumble—"later on, you'll get on your knees to take mine."

The young captain listened for a moment to the stealthy steps of the mate as he moved from station to station. Then, satisfied that his orders were being obeyed, and that the *Gloria* was in dead silence, he crept out to the starboard guard-rail of the bridge.

No one knew better than Jed Bowers the "Rules of the Road," particularly Article 15, which he had quoted glibly at his recent Captain's examination. "A steam vessel under way, but stopped, shall sound at intervals of not more than two minutes two prolonged blasts, with an interval of one second between."

But ignoring the whistle-cord near his hand, he leaned far outboard, and with every nerve atingle, strove to plot the sounds that crept up out of the mists of the starboard quarter.

It was too late now, to ask questions, Jed told himself grimly as he stared blankly into the wall of fog. He had signed his employer's contract,—foolishly without looking at it,—and had accepted his cash advance, and by that act had bound himself by the unalterable code of the sea to "owner's orders."

Such orders were to Jed, born and bred a sailor, and in the pride of his first command, a sacred thing, and broadly included such duties of port and sea, of working and driving, of hardship and devotion, that would bring to his superiors the greatest dividends.

But the lengths to which he should go beyond the straight line of the law, especially when he was outside his owner's confidence, was a problem too complicated for precise solution in the short intervals between the blasts of the pursuing revenue cutter.

FOR the previous six bitter months, Jed had been "on the beach," which in sailor parlance means out of a job. Possessing a full-fledged certificate in steam, he had found that while "youth will be served," is a truthful adage of the prize-ring, it was not true of a young sea-captain seeking a command.

Old Josiah Boggs, chief owner of the Painted Port Line, had turned him down cold at his first application. And other owners, as though taking his cue, had given more or less satisfactory reasons, amounting in the end to the bold statement that half a million in ship and cargo, together with the immeasurable value of human lives, was not to be intrusted to a youthful, devil-may-care skipper whose claim to considerations was based on the hard life of a windjammer.

To Jed's reply, that sailing vessels bred true sailors, and a prideful reference to his record, brought the rejoinder that he was too young, anyway, and the interview invariably ended with heated remarks and suggestions from both parties, which helped the young man not a bit in gaining

the confidence of his prospective employers, but left him with a swearing determination that the "swivel-chair parasites" should be shown.

For the last two months of his enforced idleness, he had been put to the hard task of subsisting on the doubtful charity of a sailor's boarding-house keeper. And more than once he had caught significant glances in his direction, when a deep-water crimp had powwowed with his host for a crew.

Then had come the hurried call from Boggs, followed by a regulation-breaking drive in a taxi to the dock, where the *Gloria*, with black smoke pouring from her funnel, hatches battened, and cargo-booms swung in, lay chafing at her mooring-ropes, ready for sea.

A contract had been thrust into his hand, and as hastily signed; a roll of bills, and a tin box said to contain the clearance papers with all necessary instructions, was likewise handed him. And within ten minutes after his arrival the *Gloria* had cast off and was on her way.

Jed understood vaguely that the Customs clearance of his cargo called for a shipment of material for a mining company at San Gregorio. And he also guessed, what every yarn-spinning salt along the Embarcadero was ready to swear, that smuggled among the cables and machinery were cases of arms and ammunitions for the rebels of western Mexico.

Another cloud had hung over Jed's horizon since that day. As he had entered the Captain's room for the first time, a bent and haggard man, with a heavy valise, stumbled out, a man who looked straight ahead, and made no reply to his successor's greeting, but hurried down the gangway and fled up the dock.

THE picture of the broken captain recurred vividly to Jed's mind as he peered dubiously into the swirling gloom, and, his hand seeking a new grip on the rail, fell inadvertently into the loop of the whistle cord.

His own record was clear—now; for he could readily prove that he knew nothing concerning, and had no part in, the storing of the *Gloria's* cargo.

But he also knew that if he did not sound his siren in *one minute*—and was caught, it was not only a question of contraband, for owners to settle, but a violation of the Rules of the Road. And whether this would be interpreted as willful lawbreaking or natural stupidity, his days as a sea-captain would come to an untimely end.

His hand twitched nervously on the cord; but again, "owner's orders" flashed through his mind—and no sound came from the whistle.

"Owner's orders," he repeated to himself, "were to take this old tub to San Gregorio; and San Gregorio it is!"

THE growl of the pursuing siren rose to a shriek on the shifting wind. But Jed, listening until the moisture-clogged whistle died out in a whining moan, gauged the course, and spinning over the wheel in the helmsman's hands, called sharply down the engine-room tube.

In response to his order and to the slowly turning screw, the *Gloria* gathered way noiselessly, and turned, with a barely perceptible movement, on her heel to port.

The revenue cutter had also slowed down, and as Jed had judged her way from the last whistle, was moving up from astern, on a line so close to the *Gloria's* wake that even the belated divergence would scrape the line that divided escape from disaster.

The whistle sounded again, nearer, and again nearer; and then, faintly but unmistakably, came the slow thump of reciprocating engines, beating out from a dozen uncertain directions in the billowing fog.

But the cutter, fearing the worst of all sea-catastrophes, a collision, was keeping to the strict letter of the law, sounding the siren every two minutes, and moving with bare steerageway.

Jed strained his eyes into the whirling mist until his vision reeled in an ocular spasm, before which danced myriads of fantastic lights and shadows. But rubbing out the fantasy with rough knuckles, he felt the dampness cool his swollen lids, and for the moment he saw clearly.

The sound of the approaching vessel was dead astern; and looking aft, Jed saw a faint glimmer of grayness in the fog, high up out of the water. But the distance and direction of the pursuing craft was beyond his reckoning, for with all his sea-knowledge, he knew it was useless to attempt to measure the distance of a single glow of light without perspective. Yet his hand instinctively sought the helm, and brushing the quartermaster aside, turned the wheel until the lubber's-mark showed that the *Gloria* had swung a quarter-circle.

Pointing to the course, he was about to steady the wheel, when sharply out of the darkness over his head came a deafening blast!

Dazed and bewildered by the nearness of the sound, he looked uncertainly along the narrow pathway of the bridge. But no figure showed except the motionless quartermaster, and certainly he had not pulled the whistle-cord. The sound died out in a choking quaver, obviously not of the *Gloria's* siren, and then slowly over Jed's perception dawned the appalling significance of the sound.

"Steady," he whispered to the helmsman; and then: "Half speed," he called to the engine-room.

The *Gloria* was still swinging, and Jed realized that he was about to play his last trump in the questionable game of hide-and-seek which his owners had thrust upon him. For so close was his pursuer that the last stunning blast dropping out of night over his head was the cutter's signal echoing back from the *Gloria's* superstructure!

A HASTY, ill-timed *gr-r-mp* rumbled from the cutter's siren, proving that some one on their bridge had caught the reverberations. But the incipient blast broke off suddenly, interrupted perhaps by some rule-bound officer on the bridge, who would follow the booked interval if it took him to the bottom.

However, another signal was due in two minutes; and Captain Jed, counting the slipping seconds, calculated the swing of the deck beneath his feet, and waited helplessly for the inevitable blast.

It came promptly, timed to the second. But Jed had guessed right. The slight divergence of course sheered off the sound from the *Gloria's* top-sides, and the shrieking vibrations shattered the night over his head—but without reawakening the echo, tore off aimlessly into the unresisting fog.

The *Gloria* now ceased to turn, and moved slowly straight ahead, at right angles to her former course; and Jed, looking astern, fancied he saw a bulk of darker gray, as the cutter ran square across his steamer's wake; and so close, that had the watchers on the pursuing bridge looked alongside, they would have seen the phosphorescence foaming from the screw.

Another light became visible, a dull, shadowy glow that passed slowly from quarter to quarter, and then, gradually merging into the mist before Jed's straining eyes—vanished.

The thump of slowed engines trailed off indistinctly after the fading stern-light; and a moment later, a sudden gasp swallowed up all sounds in the silence of the gloom.

FOR five minutes Captain Bowers listened without moving from the bridge, then calling a quartermaster, sent word for Kluxen to report at once.

The mate swaggered up the steps.

"What's wanted?" he asked aggressively. "If you—"

Jed's hand shot out, and grasping the astonished man by the throat, dragged him to the end of the bridge out of the hearing of the quartermaster.

"Now that the danger of a collision is over," he announced coldly, "I'll attend to your case. What's the game?"

Releasing his grasp slightly, he gave his officer a breath of air.

"Didn't you promise the owners," gasped Kluxen, "that in certain things you would take my orders?"

"With reservations," admitted Jed, "for the Lord knows, I needed this job; but I understand that refers only to the cargo, and after we have reached San Gregorio. But now— Am I wasting time?"

"I've the owner's interest at heart the same as you have, sir," replied the mate. "But it was whispered about the docks that the—er—owners would be just as well pleased if the *Gloria* never reached port."

"So they say," agreed Jed coolly. "But what do *you* know?"

"Well, you know the *Gloria* is a mighty old tub." The mate spoke confidently. "And Captain Boggs is a tenderhearted man; so, knowing how you sanctimonious Yankees have a fool way of going down with your ship, he—well, read your contract. You'll find that your authority passes to me if anything happens, and it appears necessary to abandon ship—me being a plain dago, without sentiment."

Jed felt a cold creepy weakness trickle down his spine. The story of the haggard figure hastening from the Captain's room flashed clearly enough now.

Old Boggs might well have laid a scheme of barratry, hedging his bet with a cargo of contraband, and with conditions that the previous Captain could not accept. Refusing, he had been discharged, and the heartless ship-owner had sum-

moned Jed, eager and unsuspecting, and hurried him off with an unread contract, before Customs authorities could intervene, or underwriters cancel his insurance.

"There's just one satisfaction," sneered Kluxen. "You're a lawbreaker now—just as we. But old Boggs"—his voice dropped to a placating tone—"will treat you handsome, if you follow orders—when the old tub founders."

"Perhaps," interrupted Jed dryly. "But I'm not a cat's-paw; and the old tub wont founder unless you and your beauties want to go down with it. By Jonah, I've a good mind to lock you in the forepeak; then if anything happens, you'll lead the procession to the bottom."

"We'll never be able to reach San Gregorio," whined Kluxen. "The cutter will be laying for us outside the three-mile limit. We might as well—"

"My orders were to San Gregorio," continued Jed coldly, "and that's where we're going; and it's quick obedience to orders for you, or disrating and the forepeak." He waved his hand in finality.

"Send the second mate to the bridge."

UPON the arrival of his junior officer, Captain Bowers straightened the *Gloria* on her course, and giving explicit sailing directions, retired to his room. There he re-read some of the finely written paragraphs of his contract, and spent much time in speculation, as to whether Boggs' plan included barratry with his gun-running, or whether Kluxen was overplaying his rôle as supercargo, or swelled with his importance, was just a plain liar.

For the following three days haze and mists dogged the *Gloria,* and the hiding sun kept the old craft alone in her little world. And as the floating pile of junk jogged along in the smooth seas, Jed carefully laid his plans, knowing that whatever might be the scheme of villainy, it would not culminate while they were far from land and lost in the fog.

In the meantime, he hoped, with the continued favor of invisibility that had enabled him to elude the cutter, to run far south of San Gregorio, and, then, if necessary, work his way back up the coast inside the three-mile limit.

ON the morning of the fourth day, when Jed mounted the bridge, he found the fog scattering before sharp yeasty squalls that whipped white the surface of the ocean, and whined shrilly through the gaunt rigging of the lumbering *Gloria.* He had made his latitude by dead reckoning, but by reason of the fog had been unable to check his position by solar observation. And he knew well enough that the swift and changing current of the Mexican coast, might have thrown him a hundred miles off his bearings.

As far at sea, and as uncertain, he told himself grimly, as the lengths he might have to go to fulfill his code of loyalty to owners.

He felt the sickening quiver of his sea-worn ship as it fought back the first blast of the squall, and rousing himself to the new peril, called sharply to the mate.

"Get everything secure up forward there, Mr. Kluxen," he shouted, "and tell the chief engineer that I want to see him on the bridge."

By the time Kluxen returned with the startling announcement that the chief was lying drunk in his bunk, the force of the squall had churned the ocean into a mass of pounding cross-seas through which the *Gloria* bucked and wallowed, groaning and trembling in every joint as though knowing itself unequal to the fight.

But Jed had now formed his plans.

"Tell all hands," he shouted to Kluxen, through the din of crashing seas, "the watch below, and everybody, except the men needed in the fireroom, that I want to speak to them, and be mighty quick."

THIS time the mate did not question Jed's authority, but drove the crew along the quaking deck and into a small grumbling crowd by the lee of the bridge-structure.

"Swing in the boats, and unhook them from the davits," came the next command. The momentary hesitation that questioned this unexpected order was swept away instantly by Kluxen, who, seizing the man nearest, shoved him forward, and repeating the Captain's orders, pointed to Jed's pistoled hand, resting on the bridge-rail.

The men grumbled, and looked over their shoulders sullenly. But now Kluxen, whether seeking the Captain's favor, or from the pure pleasure of driving, leaped into the mutinous crowd, and with the prompt application of sea-tried and time-honored methods, brought quick if profane obedience.

With the last boat unshipped and lashed bottom upward on the deck, Kluxen again

herded the crew in a muttering group, just forward of the bridge.

"Just one warning to you fellows," thundered Jed, using a megaphone to make his voice heard above the gale, "and that is—no one leaves this ship without my orders. We all reach port, or all go to hell together. Now get to your stations."

THE glass had dropped twenty points when Captain Bowers returned to his position on the bridge. The black squall was passing, but following in its wake came a shrieking gale that turned the momentary blackness of the sky to gray; and looking to windward, Jed saw a swiftly approaching wall of spuming white.

Mr. Kluxen crept up to the bridge as the new blow struck.

Down went the *Gloria* to her beam-ends, shaking like a leaf, and falling off her course, as an enormous cross-sea pitched the helpless hulk into the hollow between the waves. White, seething water broached and swept clean from port to starboard, while down in the ship's vitals came the jumping, thumping throb of racing engines.

Jed grasped the wheel from the dazed quartermaster, and spun it over as the bow rose. At the same time the hard-driven screw, biting deep with the submerging stern, gave a faltering steerage-way to the groaning craft, and in response to the hard-over helm, swung it in a walloping half-circle.

Again the bow dived, while solid water pounded from forecastle-head to wheel-house; but Jed was now steadying the helm, and with a final pitch, the old *Gloria* leaped headlong into the storm.

With the screw turning and headed bows on to the waves, the *Gloria* was safe—as any seaworthy vessel should be, and the helm was restored to the quartermaster.

CAPTAIN and mate crouched in the lee of the deckhouse where it formed a low shelter above the level of the bridge, and looked forward over the foaming crests. Both knew of what the other was thinking.

The old *Gloria* was spent. Six years before, she had been sold as junk to the Painted Port Line, presumably for a coal-barge. But Josiah Boggs had seen differently, and by patching and repairing had kept the old hulk in commission until the previous year, when it had been laid up in Oakland Creek, to rust and rot in that graveyard of living ships.

The details of the *Gloria's* resurrection were unknown to Jed, but he knew that the old tub was now facing its second day of judgment. The sickening stagger as the waves struck, the slow recovery, and the low-pitched moan of disintegrating forces told plainly to sailor-trained senses that it was not only a question of how much, but how long.

At eight bells, when the mess-boy fought his way to the bridge to tell Captain Bowers that a cup of coffee was ready below, Jed checked the barometer. It was steady at 28.80, the indicator pointing to the inscription on the dial—*"Hurricane."*

Jed motioned to the mate, and edged nearer the bridge steps; and then—the crash!

JED knew. Some one had taken an easy chance. No open seacock or telltale explosion was necessary to seal the fate of the *Gloria*. Heavy cases, badly stowed, once started tumbling in a seaway, would sink a ship as surely as cannon-shot; and louder and louder came the deadly smash of shifting cargo.

A shrill whistle sounded in the engine-room tube. "The devil is loose in the main hold—" came the report, and Jed interrupted without waiting for more.

"Attend to your steam," he roared. "Give us enough kick to head the old hooker into the storm, and I'll jettison that stuff."

Kluxen caught the last words.

"Open hatches in this gale?" he growled. "With green water?"

"Instantly! You stored that cargo, Kluxen. Now get it out—or go down with it."

Jed's eyes snapped a challenge that was not taken, and with a wave of his hand he sent the mate forward.

Twenty minutes later the *Gloria* was headed into the sea, with just enough steerage way to keep her bows on. Dunnage, mattresses, gratings, with anything of bulk that could help turn the flood of waters, was piled as a breakwater about the hatch, and a bag of thick oil was arranged to ooze from the bow.

The thick scum of the oil spreading over the sea as the ship fell back, coated the curling crests, and although the waves reared swift and angry into mountainous heights, they did not break, and the *Gloria*,

fighting back doggedly, ever met with sea-worn prow her ancient enemy, which sought but one broadside blow to batter the forlorn craft to scrap-iron.

Steam was turned into the winches, and a moment later a pale-faced winchman crept up to his station. A section of the hatch was lifted with a cargo-boom, and disclosed to the now jumpy crew a dark, crashing cavern, open in the deck, to air and water, and through which the weight of one breaking sea could send them instantly to the bottom.

The men drew back. But here Kluxen showed his ability as a sailor.

Slings, with trip-ropes, were rigged from the cargo-booms. And the first cases that banged against the hatch-coamings were triced up in an instant, and with a rattle of winches lifted clear, swung outboard, and dropped.

Case after case splashed alongside, while down in the hold Kluxen, a raging, swearing Berserker, drove the men relentlessly to their desperate and dangerous work, which with each roll of the ship threatened a horrible death in the tumbling cargo.

But every case that went overboard gave the advantage of a better clearance and faster work. And at last, late in the afternoon, came a glimpse of hope, that slowly grew into a comforting assurance that they had, for the moment at least, staved off disaster.

JED paced the bridge, conning the quartermaster, and watching for a shift of wind, while all the time he felt the ominous presence of the engine-room speaking tube.

A dull redness glowed in the haze to eastward, and as it gradually deepened, he reasoned with increasing certainty that it must be land, and by his reckoning the southern horn of the great Bight, which curves in a gigantic half-moon from San Gregorio Headland on the north, and ends to the southward in the sharp tip of Tiburon Shoals.

Off to leeward and astern a black speck gradually merged into the shape of a small steamer, and as the vessels drew nearer, Jed noticed that it was making bad weather, yawing from port to starboard, and rolling frightfully. Then the gray swelter of the storm, spreading out from a new quarter, narrowed the horizon and shut out ship, and the possible sight of land, which Jed believed not far distant on his beam.

FOR the last two hours Jed had felt that the *Gloria* was fighting against time, but with no word from the engine-room, he held on, with the forlorn hope that the jettisoned cargo might offset the seepage through the battered plates.

Calling the second officer to the bridge, he was about to descend to the hold, when the engine-room tube called sharply.

Jed whistled in reply and listened.

"Bisbee, the first assistant, speaking," came a very deliberate announcement which Jed instantly interpreted as a Yankee drawl. "The water is over the foot-plates now—and will reach the fires in about two hours. Our boilers are leaking somewhat, as well," continued the drawling voice, "and to keep all bilge-pumps working, we'll have to take the steam that's going into the winches. If—"

"Wait," interrupted Jed, "I'll take a look in the hold, and then tell you about the steam."

Descending to the deck, he called Kluxen from the hold.

"Get out the sea-anchor," he ordered, as the mate ran up the ladder. "We'll ride to a drag through the night, while Bisbee pounds every ounce of steam into the bilge-pumps."

Then through his mind flashed the questionable items of his cargo.

"Contraband?" he asked.

"Not all," replied Kluxen. "There's mining machinery all right, winches, cables —for heaven's sake, look!"

The *Gloria* rolled deeply as the mate shouted, and Jed saw only a rim of black oily water; but the next instant, as they rose on a crest, he glimpsed through a rift in the gray, the small steamer, now surprisingly near, and yawing and tumbling, unmanageable in the sea-way.

Both men raced to the bridge.

"I see signals," exclaimed Jed, reaching for the binoculars. "It's one of the Pacific Mail coffee-coolers, and—there's no need to open the book. It's N. C."

BOTH men looked from the disabled craft to the surrounding waste of heaving waters.

"N. C.—'In distress, want immediate assistance'—would do just as well for us," grumbled Jed dubiously. "And they've got wireless."

The first suggestion of the *Gloria's* offering assistance was pathetic; then, back in Jed's seagoing philosophy, came the quick imperative demand of the sea's most time-honored and noblest tradition.

A ship in distress—passengers, women and children—the last two hours of the old *Gloria*—while the coffee-boat sent out its S. O. S. The last two hours—could they be better spent? The revenue cutter should be within wireless call, if—

Kluxen was fumbling in the flag-locker. "Bend on C and X," he shouted, handing the flags to the quartermaster.

All deep-water sailors know that part of the code book by memory.

"C. X.—No assistance can be rendered. Do the best you can for yourselves."

"Stop!" thundered Jed, snatching the signals from the quartermaster's hands and turning on his astonished mate. "*I* give orders on this bridge.

"Not C. X. but D. C.—'We are coming to your assistance!'"

"In this coffin," gasped Kluxen, "with water over the foot-plates? Are you—Come about in this sea? You said yourself, we'd sink in two hours, if—"

The two men, face to face, and braced against the storm, peered deep into each other's eyes.

"There's women and children aboard that steamer, Mr. Kluxen." Jed's words cut like steel. "And you know that Pacific Mail captains don't ask for assistance unless they need it."

"But the wireless!" expostulated Kluxen. "The cutter is waiting for us, and will pick it up. And if two hours will put us on a sheltered beach—well, I don't want to spend the next few years in a Federal prison just for—"

"And I thought you were a sailor," blazed Jed, his voice rising in a taunt that roared above the gale. "You *think*—do you—that the cutter can pick that steamer out of this murk—in time—with night coming on?

"By Jonah! See here, Kluxen, have I got to pound this into you?" Gripping his mate by the shoulder, he spun him to face the disabled steamer. "There's the ship—in distress. And you—a sailor—are you?"

"Yes," thundered Kluxen, with an oath, "but by—"

"You said mining machinery was in the hold?" interrupted Jed. "Pumps?"

"Sure—stowed down by the keel. But—"

"Any one of them will throw a thousand gallons a minute. Get busy."

"But steam?"

"The donkey boiler. Get—"

BUT Kluxen was off the bridge, with face burning, and beside himself with rage at the biting taunt that had stung his pride as sailor, and as Jed had hoped, fired his latent forces to a pitch of fighting abandon.

Rousing the crew, he closed the hatches in a twinkling, and stood by for orders.

Jed called the engine-room.

"You'll have to stretch those two hours, Mr. Bisbee," he commanded curtly.

"Yaas?" came the noncommittal answer.

"There's a steamer in distress on our lee quarter. Can you—" Jed quickly outlined the plan of rigging the mining pumps in the cargo, to the steam of the donkey boiler.

"I can if the shovels hold out," came the drawling answer. "Just spoiled a perfectly good one on an *hombre's* head."

"Then—stand by for a heavy roll."

It came quickly. There was no time to look for a smooth patch, with water over the foot-plates; and Jed grasped the wheel as the veering prow swung defenseless into the foaming trough. The *Gloria* lurched groggily—she was too sodden to roll—while tons of solid water, smashing over the broadside, hammered and raged across the deck in the merciless endeavor to crush the iron shell before it could emerge.

Not a man on the ship but counted himself lost as the succeeding blows swept through the splintered rails and bulwarks, with the tortured *Gloria* more under than above the water.

Jed, holding the helm over, felt the kick of the propeller, and thought of but one thing—steerage-way.

The lull between three great waves gave a few seconds' respite, and the old hulk, swinging slowly from the wind, cut deep through a quartering sea. For an immeasurable moment it shuddered, as though shrinking from the final plunge, then flinging water from decks and runways, lunged into a wild run before the gale.

The two steamers drew rapidly nearer—the *Gloria,* low-lying and sodden, but driving at a rapid rate before the wind; the coffee-boat, high out of water, lightly laden, but rolling and pitching in a frantic endeavor to make headway into the storm.

"Not leaking," shouted Kluxen from the

rigging, where he had climbed for a better view. "Lost their rudder, I think."

"Lost their rudder?"

Jed's voice was swept away on the wind, but he leaned far over the rail and stared at the figures on the swaying bridge.

"Lost their rudder?" he repeated as Kluxen slid down beside him.

"By Jonah—that's a holy circumstance to hold up the old *Gloria*. Why can't they rig their sea-anchor and ride it out, as we were going to do—plenty of sea-room—and wireless."

The antagonism of the two men dropped before the common rage against the steamer that had brought them to the brink of destruction, for a cause that, compared to their own plight, was trivial.

JED turned to shout an order to the quartermaster, but instead stepped to the chart-box, and looking under the hood, made a quick recalculation of his position.

By dead reckoning, from his last observation, he was well out to sea from the extreme lower hook of San Gregorio Bight. And the coast, from the shoals which made the point, ran rapidly eastward. The drift of the storm, by compass, was to the west of south, which should give perfect clearance, and sea-room.

And then again came the thought of the coffee-boat's wireless. No doubt they were now in direct communication with the cutter.

Jed had offered his last desperate chance to save the steamer from some definite peril. But the presence of the revenue boat would mean—and it would not be far away if it had been lying in wait behind the shelter of San Gregorio Headland—that his pitiful attempt at rescue would be worse than thankless. And somewhere, according to Jed's reckoning, in the mists to eastward, was the soft and muddy bottom of the sheltered bight, where safely within the three-mile limit the battered *Gloria* could rest her bones until shifting tides and lightening cargo should cast the die—of voyage resumed or the last resting-place.

But still the old steamer pounded down on the wind, meeting the other boat so closely that a figure on the bridge could be seen waving his hands frantically, and pointing astern. A megaphone was at his lips, but no sound came up against the gale. Neither Jed nor Kluxen could catch his meaning through the flying foam.

Suddenly the distress-signals of the coffee-boat came down on the run.

Jed leaped for the engine-room telegraph, but while his hand still gripped it, he stopped with staring eyes to see new flags whip out in the coffee-boat's rigging.

"J. D.!" exclaimed Kluxen. "What the—"

Jed seized the code-book.

"'Two-flag signal—urgent,'" he read. "'J. D.—You are standing into danger!'"

NIGHT was dropping from the clouds, and Jed swept his startled gaze over the fast-narrowing horizon, then for an instant, the last effort of day struggling on the brink, shattered the enveloping mantle.

And Jed saw it.

Just astern of the coffee-boat, and dead ahead of the *Gloria,* toward which she was lumbering with steam and gale, lay a tawny, spuming spit of low-lying sand, with no backing of land, but jutting far out into the open sea!

"Tiburon Shoals!" he shouted. "Starboard your helm! Hard over!" And through the speaking-tube: "Hang on; this is the big one."

The first shock of Jed's realization that the currents had swept him inside the bight, and fifty miles off his course, was quickly followed by the vivid appreciation of the fact that if he had carried out his plan of riding out the night to a sea-anchor, he would have drifted on the shoals before daybreak; and with it, came the equally certain knowledge that unless he could make his own way face about, and into the teeth of the gale, dragging the disabled steamer after him, the wreckage of both ships would strew the shoals—and within the hour!

The *Gloria* rounded to, slowly, like a water-soaked log, groaning feebly as the millrace of waters roared through the remnant of her rails and bulwarks.

The two men on the bridge held on, and waited helplessly, while the whole structure quaked and quivered, trembling beneath their feet as the pitiless waves hammered and wrenched in a frantic endeavor to tear it loose from the deck-plates. But the throb of the engines came steadily, and again the *Gloria* swung her prow to face the seas.

"We'll work from the weather-side," Jed shouted to Kluxen as the *Gloria* steadied.

"We can't get to leeward. We'll have to use the gun."

Another twenty minutes was gone, together with the last detachable sections of rails, davits and housings which had shown the temerity to stand in way of breaking water, when Jed, with the *Gloria* dangerously close to the coffee-boat, properly judging the time and distance, shot the line across the forward deck.

A heavy manila cable was hastily attached, and paid out until it was drawn through the stern fair lead of the *Gloria,* and Jed, not trusting the iron bitts in the stern, led the cable forward and secured it with a double bridle around the hatch-combing.

With the two vessels, securely bound together in the strong bond of manila, Kluxen drove the men forward, and leaning wearily against a bridge stanchion, waved his hand.

JED signaled to the engine-room, and the *Gloria* moved slowly ahead, picking up, with a sickening lurch, the burden of two thousand tons that bucked and reared in the heavy swells, dragging back with furious force toward the pounding surf now plainly audible.

The fierce pluck of the coffee-boat as it yanked wildly from port to starboard, brought new groans of torment from the suffering *Gloria;* and Jed, rooted to the bridge, consoled himself grimly with the thought that at least he would be as good as his word: They would all reach San Gregorio, or go to the bottom together!

The cable held. And at the end of a half-hour Captain Bowers, taking a new bearing from the shoal, figured that they were doing a little better than holding their own. Estimating his distance from the surf-line, he laid out a course that would bring them at daybreak—the Lord willing—to the muddy shores and shelter of the headland.

Down in the fire-room Bisbee was driving his men like mad; worn out as they were with the double shift, staggering from exhaustion, and dripping with the parboiling heat, they threw coal wildly at the blazing furnace, ever shrinking back to die like rats in a trap rather than force an issue with the grim figure that stood with poised shovel ready to smash the head of the first man who shirked his job.

Meanwhile frantic winch-men were piling oil-soaked splinters into the donkey boiler, and with a scanty thirty minutes of the engineer's promised two hours remaining, brought the first flutter of steam to the gauges.

The pressure, once started, rose rapidly, and soon the big mining pumps were harnessed with long streams of hose from the donkey; and the leakage—within two feet of the fire-box—was held. By midnight it was forced back to the foot-plates.

Jed paced the bridge, fighting back the first blinding waves of weariness, and shuddering unconsciously with the *Gloria,* each time the pluck of the yawing steamer tore at the connecting cable. But slow and erratic as the course was, he grew confident as the night wore on. The wind was dropping, and a slightly smoother sea betokened the lee of the land.

At last, after seemingly endless hours, a faint redness tinged the gray to the eastward. And then, with tropical suddenness, the sun shot up, revealing sharply against the skyline the peak of San Gregorio Headland, whose high cliffs, dropping abruptly into the low marshy land of the curving bight, gave the sure promise of shallow water and a soft bottom.

A smudge of smoke trailed over the horizon to the north. It was still far away, but Jed reckoned that it must be the cutter in response to the coffee-boat's S. O. S.

Looking aft, he saw Kluxen pacing the deck. His mate's steps were unsteady from his long vigil, but he still grasped firmly in his right hand a heavy piece of dunnage with which he had guarded the cable through the night. For the mate well knew that the bedraggled and leaderless men huddled in the forecastle might at any moment turn into a desperate mob, if they once grasped the menace of the tow-line that yanked and plucked at the *Gloria's* vitals, threatening with every lurch to transform the old steamer into a heap of sinking junk.

TWO hours later the revenue boat overtook the dilapidated pair, and rounding to under the *Gloria's* lee, jogged along on a parallel course, and within speaking distance.

"Cast off," ordered the blue-coated officer on the cutter's bridge. "Your services are no longer needed."

It was the dull gray dawn of a heart-breaking, sleepless night, and one which had brought Jed's nerves, both physical and moral, to the lowest ebb—near the

point where a polite request, or a neatly worded suggestion, if shrewdly given, might bring a tired acquiescence from the sheer weariness of resistance. But the curt command acted like a tonic to his jaded system, and roused him in an instant to his primal combative instinct.

"I will, in San Gregorio," he growled defiantly, "and not before."

"I warn you," replied the voice from the cutter. "I have an order for the seizure of your ship for carrying contraband arms in violation of American port-regulations. But we don't want to send you up, after your gallant fight of last night. Cast off —save yourself—forget it."

In some indefinable way the command of the officer brought no thought of compliance from Jed, but instead roused a wild fighting stubbornness. Indistinctly, through his tired mind, ran the thought that he was effecting rescue, and the unwritten law of sea would brook no interference while he was so engaged; and then—he looked longingly at the distant shore line.

"If I need any of your help," he shouted back, "I'll ask it."

The officer stamped impatiently.

"I command you to stop." And he pointed significantly to a gun-crew standing at their stations.

JED leaned over the rail stiffly. He was seething, white with rage, at the peremptory command and threat, but some inborn hunch warned him to keep it to himself, and not to play into their hands. So with outward calm, he answered deliberately, as though stating the approaching hour of breakfast.

"We are now in Mexican territorial waters. I defy your authority."

"Nonsense!" came the heated reply, with other words of conclusive evidence that the revenue man was hanging onto the ragged end of his forbearance.

"You are six miles from land."

"But look—from headland to point!" Jed pointed to the high promontory ahead, and then turning, motioned to the distant blue line of Tiburon Shoals astern. "We're inside the bight."

"Nonsense!" repeated the man on the cutter, but with a perceptible slackening of assurance. "The three-mile limit follows the sinuosity of the shore-line."

"Not always," asserted Jed. "The United States says yes—sometimes. England says from headland to headland—sometimes. Both nations have compromised on it, but you know well enough it has never been settled. I claim the right of haven."

There was no further argument from the cutter. But another voice called:

"Don't be a fool. We came to help you, not to fight you. . . . . Cast off."

Again the sharp command served but to roil Jed's sensibilities to the boiling-point.

He would *not* cast off. He was inexpressibly and blindly angry, but too tired and weary of spirit to reason further than that he would stick to his rights, or go to the bottom with them.

He heard again through a tired maze of angry and ill-defined resentment the repeated command.

"Cast off, or we'll order your tow to cut the cable."

"No, you wont."

Jed did not move from his lounging attitude on the rail, but stared defiantly across the narrow stretch of water at the group on the cutter's bridge.

There was an obvious difference of opinion among them. A young officer pointed to the gun-crew, but the others shook their heads.

Then came the explosive verdict, carrying both a promise and a threat.

"Hang on, and be hanged—but we'll get you when you return to the States."

Jed waved his hand diffidently in reply, but stopped with upraised arm as the tube whistled softly from the engine-room.

"Bisbee speaking."

"Yes?" Jed held his breath. "A breakdown now!" he groaned inwardly. He would rather swim than give up the fight.

"I'll thank you," continued the engineer coolly, "to send down two men from the deck. I've just ruined a couple of shovels."

ONE hour later the inhabitants of the little port of San Gregorio viewed a strange procession slowly entering their harbor. An American revenue cutter, neat and dignified, led the way, and then a floating junk-pile, low down and sodden, with water over the hawse-pipes, and with a salt-spumed smokestack rising above decks stripped of everything movable, as though plucked by a giant hand—with skylights stove in, ventilators and davits bent askew, and fragmented sections only, of rent and jagged bulwarks, through which spurted six foaming streams of water.

Above all came the rattle of winches, the creak of cargo-booms and the splash of cargo dropping alongside as the crew, working madly under Kluxen's direction, strove to clear the *Gloria* of the last bit of contraband. Astern, with all steam gone from her leaky boilers, and following uncertainly on the tow-rope as the crew wrestled with a jury rudder, came the coffee-boat.

A leadsman in the forward chains of the *Gloria* was singing the depth. But not until the keel slid into a soft bed on the muddy bottom did Captain Bowers signal for his tow to drop anchor.

A moment later steam fluttered from the exhaust pipes, and with a hoarse sigh of relief the straining boilers of the *Gloria* blew off their overcharge of pent-up energy.

THE rumble of the winches ceased, and Kluxen crept up to the bridge. His face was haggard and his eyes swollen from lack of sleep, and he walked unsteadily from the exertions of the last hours of maddening work in the hold. One arm hung useless from the crash of a falling case.

"All out?" queried Jed as he saw his officers approach.

"You bet!" he answered grimly to Jed's inquiry. "I ought to know. I stored everything, except that cargo that shifted in the main hold—and that's a double cross that some one will hear from, when I get back to 'Frisco.

"You fixed the old pirate!" He looked at Jed wonderingly, and for the moment a reluctant note of admiration came into his tired voice. "But—it was mighty lucky that it was the chief engineer that was drunk, and not Mr. Bisbee."

A smallboat put off from the cutter, and a few minutes later Jed met it at the gangway. A much older man than the one who shouted from the bridge mounted the steps, and answering Jed's salute, spoke not unkindly:

"Captain Bowers, I wish I was in a position to congratulate you."

Jed nodded his head wearily.

"Your feat of bringing a disabled ship into port with your own vessel sinking beneath your feet shows capabilities worthy of a better cause than gun-running.

"Your owner—"

Jed held up a tired hand. "My owner," he repeated thickly, "I think—his orders were somewhat obscure—but my contract reads that the bulk of my pay is a bonus contingent upon my arrival in San Gregorio. And—we're here!

"If I could use your wireless?"

"No need to," the officer replied. "The whole story is in San Francisco now. You'll get the bonus all right, but that does not settle the matter of contraband."

"Contraband?" Jed asked coolly, with a wearied but convincing grin. "There is no contraband aboard the *Gloria*."

The revenue officer looked sharply into the young captain's face.

"No?" Then turning his searching eyes about the battered deck, he saw the open hatches, and winches still hissing steam from their recent work.

"Nerve!" he mumbled under his breath. "You've got it—great gobs of it. But don't tell me that you threw overboard your questionable stuff with revenue officers looking on, and powerless to intervene because of your coincidental work of rescue, and the belief that you were jettisoning cargo to lighten your sinking ship?"

Jed smiled noncommittally.

"Use our wireless if you want to," groaned the revenue captain. "But bonus—why, man, you can throw it into old Boggs' face when you get your salvage."

"Salvage?" For a moment Jed looked dully at the officer; then his face broke out in a cheerful grin as his eyes took in the rescued steamer anchored safely astern.

"I was so set on getting to San Gregorio," he mumbled slowly, "that honest to goodness, I plumb forgot there ever was such a thing as salvage."

"Crew, passengers and cargo," enumerated the revenue captain, speaking rapidly. "It ought to run well into five figures—and *no evidence* of contraband. I suppose I may as well take your word for it.

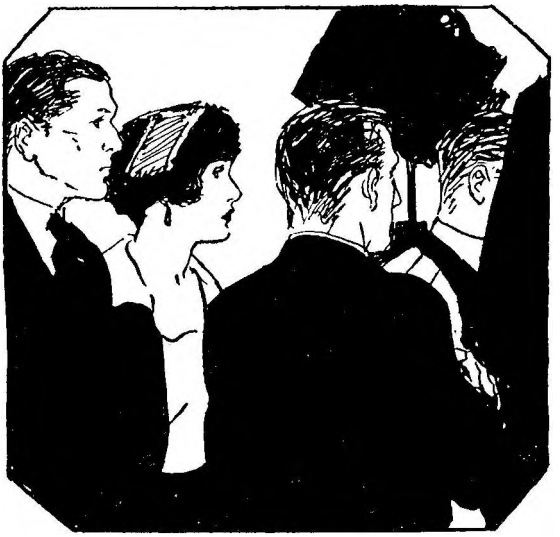
"But—let this be the last," he warned brusquely.

Again the authoritative tone roused Jed to quick resentment.

"That's a question," he answered coldly.

"Of what, may I ask?" The official snap came back to the revenue man's eyes. "You dare—"

"A question," interrupted Jed with quiet dignity, "on which you and I may not agree, but the ethics of which, I remind you, by the words of a great president, are found entirely within the rights of small nations to self-determination."



The Perfect Alibi

The writing-man whose "Save the Mail or Die" and "The Radio Murder" made such a hit is the author of this fascinating detective story.

By Charles Phelps Cushing

THE buzzer in the detectives' lounging-room at police headquarters went *z-z-z! z-z-z! z-z-z!* sharply, then repeated the signal twice for emphasis.

The two detectives waiting there responded in haste. Andrew Kerrigan flung aside his newspaper, chucked away the stump of his cigar and arose with remarkable speed and grace for one so overballasted. Miss Mamie Skaggs, a much trimmer and jauntier craft, hastily tossed onto the windowsill the hoop of embroidery on which she had been sewing, and as she hopped up, swiftly brushed some clippings of bright silk thread from her skirt.

Both detectives reached the door at about the same instant.

"After *you,*" bade Kerrigan, with a jerky bow and a forced grin.

Mamie sailed through, and on down the long corridor, Kerrigan puffing after her.

"I don't like the sound of that buzzer at all!" Mamie exclaimed as Kerrigan breathlessly caught up with her. "Listens to me like trouble again—mighty short and sharp."

"You don't say?"

"Yeh, you heard me. I nearly always can tell how the Chief feels by the way he jabs the buzzer."

"You ladies!" Kerrigan scoffed. Then, between gasps of mock admiration: "You sure are wonders—aint you, now—about observin' things?"

"Oh, I guess we can notice a few of the little *de*-tails," Mamie retorted. "We can take care of ourselves."

They sped along then faster, Mamie with her blonde hair tossing, her pug nose in the air, and defiance and excitement shining in her sky-blue eyes; Kerrigan with his pudgy features crimson from the exertion of the swift pace, but with his green plush fedora cocked on one side of his head rakishly as he strove to look careless and mildly amused.

They reached the end of the corridor.

"After *you*," bade Kerrigan again, at the Chief's door.

"Dammit! Come in!" the Chief bellowed.

MAMIE sailed on in; Kerrigan hove up after from starboard, and ranged himself alongside her before the Chief's desk.

Mamie had sensed the truth. The Chief's wrinkled visage was set in a deep scowl, and he lost no time in explaining why.

"Now get this!" he snapped. "Young Henry Oswald's just been murdered. Favorite nephew of the old grouch who runs the *Telegraph*. You know what that means. More 'crime-wave' yowls! More criticism of the Force! They'll burn our hides off this time."

He stuck a fresh cigar in his mouth and bit at it savagely.

"Get out there quick," he barked, "880 Riverside Avenue, on the ground floor. Get the superintendent to let you in—no one else around to do it. When you get inside, work fast. And dammit, *use your heads!* Don't fall down on this case, hear me? Get your man or turn in your badges. That's all. On your *way!*"

With that he slapped his hand down on the desk-top so hard that the ink-well geysered.

The two detectives blinked, wheeled and raced down the stairs to the street.

Kerrigan stuck two fingers in his mouth and whistled shrilly. A taxicab darted up to the curb; the two detectives dived in, slammed the door and sped away.

YOUNG Henry Oswald evidently had not died without a desperate struggle. The room where his body lay sprawled face downward, arms outstretched, was littered with the wreckage of battle, and his shirt was torn to ribbons. Every chair in the room was upset. A card-table tipped on two legs against the wall, and cards and poker-chips strewed the rumpled rugs. Hair-brushes, neckties and collars were all over the floor near where a dresser-cover had been yanked off. Books had been hurled about as missiles. A broken walking-stick gleamed in a beam of sunshine near the window, and bits of colored glass from a broken lamp-shade glittered with reflected light from the borders of the highly polished hardwood floor.

The superintendent of the apartment-house, a solemn old fellow with the punctilious manners of an ex-butler, closed the door softly and latched it as soon as he and the detectives had entered. Then he stood with his back against it stiffly, like a soldier at attention.

"I think I should explain, sir," he said to Kerrigan, "that nothing like this has ever happened in our place before. We want to keep it all as quiet as possible. I hope you understand our feelings in the matter?"

"Sure," Kerrigan agreed. "Mum's the word. Who else knows about this besides you?"

"No one, sir—as yet."

"No one?" Kerrigan paused in his rapid survey of the room and glanced up in surprise.

"No one," the superintendent repeated firmly, "—though, of course, we shall have to break the news presently to the young man's uncle, old Mr. Oswald, who owns the *Telegraph*. The old gentleman will take it hard, I fear—"

"So do I," agreed Kerrigan, curtly. "But go on with your story."

"Well, there isn't much to tell, sir. About half an hour ago the wife and I were just sitting down to a bit of a midday snack. Our quarters are right below here, in the basement. We began to hear a dreadful scuffling upstairs.

" 'That'll be young Mr. Oswald, up to his high jinks again,' I says to the wife. 'It's a bank holiday—Memorial Day, they call it. He appears to be starting the celebration early.'

" 'Yes, and he will keep it up all the afternoon; and we'll get little sleep tonight, either, I fear,' she says. 'It's a shame, such goings-on!'

" 'But what can we do about it?' I says. 'Nothing, my dear! You can't turn a young man out of his apartments when his uncle owns the building.' "

KERRIGAN rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"How long did this rumpus last?" he asked.

"Ten, maybe fifteen minutes, sir, getting noisier all the time. Heavy thumps on the floor. Once a crash of glass. But no outcries, sir, so I thought it was all playful-like. Then there was a heavier thud. After that I thought I heard a moan, but I couldn't be sure.

"I says to the wife then: 'Maybe I'd better run up and have a look about? Maybe some one's been hurt? Should I?' "

" 'Do!' she says.

"So I hurried up the stairs.

"Just as I popped into the first-floor hallway, I saw a young man in a motor duster, with the collar turned up high, walk out of the front door, whistling. He seemed so cheerful, sir, that he threw me off my guard. So I just stood there and watched him get into a limousine that was waiting outside, and I never made another move until he drove away."

"Get the number?" Kerrigan snapped eagerly.

"No sir. I'm sorry. But you see, he had me off my guard."

"What sort of a lookin' man was he?"

"I couldn't see his face, sir. Kept his back turned all the time. In build, I'd judge he was about your height, but not so stocky. Very black hair, he had, and glistening. I noticed that; but that was about all I can remember. I didn't have my wits about me, sir."

He seemed to falter a moment, then went on slowly: "I don't believe I ever saw him here before. That is—I can't be sure."

"Well—you let him get away. Then what?"

"Then I thought, sir, that as long as I'd taken the trouble to come upstairs, it would do no harm to look in. So I pressed Mr. Oswald's bell. Several times I pressed it. Then I pounded on the door and called. No answer. So I hurried downstairs for my pass-keys, beginning to feel a bit worried.

"When I opened the door and looked in, there he was, sir, lying just as you see him, stone dead. It gave me a bit of a shock, I can tell you. I never had liked young Mr. Henry. You'll pardon the expression, ma'am,"—he turned toward Mamie,—"but there is no other way to say it—he was as mean as hell! Many's the time I've been almost angry enough with him to do this thing myself. Many's the time—but that's all forgotten now. The poor young man—"

"Cut the sob-stuff," Kerrigan ordered. "What next?"

"That's all, sir. I ran to the telephone and rang up the police. That, as you know, was barely half a hour ago—about twelve-thirty. No one has been in here since but myself and the wife. And not a thing has been touched, sir."

"Good!" cried Kerrigan. "What do you say, Mamie?"

"Good!" she answered briefly. "Let's get busy."

Kerrigan plumped down on his hands and knees beside the body.

"Let's see first if he was frisked," he muttered. He appeared to be talking to himself, rather than to the others present.

FROM the right hip pocket he pulled out a bill-fold. From it he counted out two hundred in crisp new bank-notes.

"Wasn't a robber," he decided.

"Of course it wasn't," Mamie reproved. "Don't you see that the desk hasn't been touched, either? And not a closet door opened or a drawer pulled out?"

Kerrigan appeared not to hear.

"Look at those knuckles!" he exclaimed. "All cut to pieces! Some battle, I'll say!"

He rolled the body over, and revealed a bruised and lacerated face, with a deep cut over one eyebrow.

"I repeat—*some* battle!"

"We heard you," Mamie agreed, shuddering slightly as she stared.

The superintendent indulged himself in a faint moan.

"Poor Mr. Henry!" he said, shaking his head mournfully. "Such a wild young man! I might have known it would come to this. Horrible!"

Pale but resolute after this outburst, he straightened to attention again, with his lips set in a tight straight line.

Kerrigan got up, brushed off the knees of his trousers, and his restless eyes began to rove around the littered room.

Mamie, meanwhile, made toward the writing-desk and began to run through the letters and papers in it. That gave her a chance to turn her back on the body lying in the middle of the floor.

Kerrigan stepped briskly to the window and threw up all the shades. The midday sunshine streamed in, dust-motes glittering in its beams.

The superintendent moaned again, ever so slightly.

"Have a chair, friend," Kerrigan invited. "It may take us an hour or so to go over everything, and you'll wear yourself out if you keep standin'."

The man accepted gratefully. For the rest of the time that the two detectives were working in the room, he did not stir nor open his lips.

An air of suppressed triumph gleamed

in Kerrigan's eyes at the end of that hour of painstaking search.

"Well, Mamie," he demanded, "what have you got to offer?"

Mamie sighed. That sigh was not put on. She meant it—and meant it for complete discouragement.

"Not a thing worth while," she confessed frankly. "This sort of case is a little out of my line, I guess. I've got some names and addresses out of these letters—from women, most of them. He was a gay young devil, all right! But I'll be honest with you, Andy. I haven't the smell of a clue."

"Now, that's strange," Kerrigan observed, sarcastically. "I've got one that's a bear." He stuffed some playing-cards and two torn and crumpled collars into his pocket as he spoke. "Well, come along, old girl. I'll tell you all about it on the way back to the station." He was chuckling with deep satisfaction as he went on: "It's just as I've always said; the Chief never ought to send a woman out on a case like this. It's rough stuff, and all out of her line."

MAMIE shrugged her shoulders, but kept silent.

In the taxicab, on the way back to headquarters a few minutes later, Kerrigan pulled out his trophies and made explanations.

"Take a squint at the backs of these playin'-cards," he remarked. "A woman never would notice that they're marked—every one of them. Likely enough, that's how the fracas started. Somebody got hep to the fact that he was bein' trimmed."

Mamie nodded, doubtfully.

"But that isn't so important." Kerrigan pulled out the two collars as he spoke, and pointed proudly at them. "Here's your *real* clue as to who was present at that party. See what it says on the inside of the band of this one—the size, here, fourteen and three-quarters? That's one of young Oswald's collars, a slim man. Here's his initials, too, *'H. O.'* in indelible ink.

"Now, look here," pointing to the band of the other collar. "This was the only other collar in that scatter on the floor that was of a different size. See the size-mark stamped here? 'Fifteen and three-quarters' means a much larger-necked man. Notice this, too; both the button-holes ripped out. It got torn off his neck in the battle. *Some* battle that was! You remember how Oswald's shirt looked? All clawed to ribbons!"

"I follow you all right so far," Mamie assented, bending over as she spoke to peer at the laundry-mark. "But what's the big surprise you're going to pull next—that his last name begins with *'R'?"*

Suddenly she checked herself and clicked her fingers in shock.

"By George, you *have* got it!" she cried. "I'd almost forgotten—"

"I thought you had," Kerrigan remarked dryly. "You'd almost forgotten that every laundry in town has a number indexed down at police headquarters. You'd almost overlooked this little '813' down here below the *'R.'* A little flustered today, aint you? Well, Mr. *'R'* of laundry No. 813 is all the clue I'd ever hope to find. I'll walk into that laundry before another half-hour. I'll have my gentleman's name and address in fifteen seconds later. Then nothing short of a perfect alibi is going to keep that bird out of the lock-up after sundown. Am I right?"

Mamie nodded gravely.

"You're dead right. I've got to hand it to you, Andy. You've got a hot trail. *But*—"

"But what?"

"But it would be just our luck, on a big case like this, to hit just what you spoke of—the perfect alibi. We might—"

"'We'!" Kerrigan mocked angrily. "'We'! Where do you get that 'we' stuff? What have *you* done on this case, I'd like to know? Except stand around and look pretty!"

Mamie shrugged her shoulders with resignation. They drove on to the station-house, after that, in silence.

IN the detectives' lounging-room at police headquarters Mamie sat beside a grimy window, all alone. She had picked up her hoop of embroidery, then dropped it again. The corners of her mouth were twitching slightly, and her eyelids were suspiciously red.

She heard Kerrigan's heavy footsteps now, approaching down the corridor. Hastily she reached for her vanity-case. As Kerrigan entered she was industriously powdering her nose.

"I've got it, Mamie!" Kerrigan exclaimed exultantly. "Raeburn Rensselaer, the fellow's name is. Answers right enough to our description, too. Slick black hair and all! The laundry man says the fellow

was in day before yesterday after his collars and told him he was going out of town for a few days—"

Kerrigan checked himself suddenly.

"Say, what's the matter, old girl? You —you don't look happy about it?"

"Going it all alone, are you, Andy?" she demanded, with a little catch in her voice and evading his puzzled stare.

Kerrigan stepped over, grasped both her arms firmly and gave her a few reproving shakes.

"Mamie! Look here, old girl—I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. I'm sorry."

She looked up, peering at him doubtfully.

"I don't blame you, Andy. Not the least little bit. I know I'm just in the way on a case like this—"

"No doggone it, you're not! I shouldn't have gone rushin' off like that, either. I wanta apologize."

"Anyway, Andy," she pleaded, "please try to keep up appearances. That's all I ask. It doesn't look very well for me to be left sitting here by the window doing fancy-work while you're out digging up evidence alone. Does it, now?"

"No, Mamie, it don't," he confessed contritely. "And it wont happen ever again. There, now! Mitt me! That's better. . . . . Now stick your Sunday bonnet on your head. We're goin' to run out to Hyde Park and call on some of our best people. The Rensselaers, bah Jove!"

He watched her approvingly as she adjusted her hat before a dusty pier-glass and pulled on a pair of long white gloves.

"You look mighty nifty today," he observed with enthusiasm. "A reg'lar queen! Say, here's an idea. That Fifth Avenue front of yours—it's just what we'll need this afternoon. One of us has got to get past the butler at this Rensselaer fellow's front door. You're elected. I never could make the weight. They'd spot me in a second and send me around to the servants' entrance. Hope you've got some of those flossy calling-cards on you—the ones that say 'Miss Chesterfield'?"

"I've got 'em," Mamie reported after a hurried inventory. "Enter Miss Chesterfield."

She paced across the room in the manner of a mannikin showing off a Parisian gown.

"Nose a little more up in the air," Kerrigan suggested critically, "like you was sore about something."

"No," Mamie objected firmly. "We mustn't lay it on too thick. These Rensselaers are prob'ly pretty hard to kid. Better leave the little *de*-tails to me, Andy."

Mamie was beaming again, and a becoming flush of excitement flowed on her cheeks.

"Gee! you're a knockout, Mamie," Kerrigan declared. "Never saw you look keener. And that's sayin' a lot."

"Shush your blarney," Mamie retorted. "You're just trying to make things up to me again after being so mean this afternoon. What I want from you now is a taxi—the most expensive-looking cab you can find. We've got to put this party on in style. Yes, and another thing," — looking him over coldly,— "keep your fat head out of sight when we drive up to the house. If anybody ever saw that awful green Kelley of yours through the window, our goose would be cooked for fair."

Kerrigan nodded and forced a grin.

"After *you*," he bade at the door.

And Mamie swept majestically down the corridor.

None of the taxicabs that the pair of detectives observed in the street outside of police headquarters quite passed their critical inspection. On the corner Kerrigan halted, rubbing his chin in his most deeply reflective manner.

"If a thing's worth doin' at all—" he began.

"It's worth doing well," Mamie finished, briskly. "Well, go ahead and spring it. What's your big idea?"

"Why not hire a high-grade six-cylinder tourin'-car and show Hyde Park some real class?"

"You're right, Andy. Let's do. We can't be too particular."

SO it was with every desirable appearance of "class" that Miss Mamie Skaggs, alias Chesterfield, drove up to the curb in front of the venerable Rensselaer house half an hour later, and with all dignity proper for her rôle, strolled up the front walk to the door. Kerrigan, duly cautioned, was keeping out of sight.

All of the front shades of the house, Mamie noted, were pulled down, giving out an air of nobody at home that day.

She had to press the front doorbell several times before an elderly, ruddy-cheeked servant responded. As he opened the door, he was adjusting his coat-collar as if he had just slipped into it in a hurry; and a

stare of mild surprise was the first expression Mamie noted on his face as he bowed and bade her enter.

He clicked a switch, and a newel-post lamp flashed on.

"Sorry, miss, but Mr. Rensselaer has been out of the city for several days. He is not expected back, in fact, until tomorrow morning. Would you care to leave your card, miss?"

With extreme deliberation Mamie extracted one of her Miss Chesterfield calling cards and dropped it onto the little silver tray the doorman presented.

"Dear me," she sighed. "I did so hope to find him in today. Was it some important business matter that called him out of town?"

"Oh, no, miss. Just the holiday celebration—Memorial Day, you know. He went down to New York to watch the military parade there. He's very fond of parades, miss, as perhaps you know. But was there any message you might like to leave?"

"You might tell him, please, that I'll call again tomorrow. Did you say he would be back in the morning?"

"Yes, miss, on the ten o'clock train from New York—the Broadway Limited."

As he spoke, he laid Miss Chesterfield's calling card tenderly on top of a small stack of mail and newspapers collected upon the white marble shelf of an old-fashioned walnut hall-tree.

"So sorry, miss," he murmured as she was turning reluctantly toward the door. "Good day, miss."

"So sorry," she repeated. "Good day."

The door closed softly as she strolled down the walk again.

"Drop us at the Union Station," she told the chauffeur, getting in and settling back despondently.

"Well?" Kerrigan demanded, as the car started.

"Expect the worst," she warned. "He's framing up an alibi."

"It'll have to be a good one," Kerrigan muttered, "if he wants to break down our evidence."

"It *will* be a good one," Mamie answered grimly. "My instinct tells me it's bound to be."

Kerrigan laughed, but without heartiness.

"I kinda feel the same way about it," he confessed. "What's his game?"

"The butler says our man's been in New York over the holiday, and is due back tomorrow morning at ten on the Broadway Limited. That part of it, about the train, I believe. He seemed rather particular about it."

"Think he had you spotted as a cop?"

"N-o-o," she drawled doubtfully. "I wouldn't say that. But he knew, of course, that he never had seen me before."

They drove on to the railway-station. There they checked up on the schedule of the Broadway Limited. There they paid off the chauffeur of the limousine and watched him drive out of their sight before they hailed a taxi to take them to police headquarters.

At five o'clock the two detectives reported to their chief.

"The man we want, sir," Kerrigan announced solemnly, "is due in at ten tomorrow morning—"

"What's his name?" the Chief snapped, glaring at them over the top of an extra of the *Telegraph* that he had been devouring.

"Raeburn Rensselaer."

"What!"

The Chief jumped up, crumpling the newspapers to his breast, and his face went suddenly livid.

"Saints above!" he groaned. "Do you know what you're sayin', man? Raeburn Rensselaer? He's another of old man Oswald's nephews. You can't pinch him unless you've got enough evidence to convict a holy saint."

Words failed him for a moment, as he sank back into his chair.

"What the *Telegraph* will do to us now! I ask you—just try to picture it? My job aint worth a dime. Your jobs aint worth that much. If you make one bad break before you pull that arrest, they aint even worth a copper cent."

Again he brought the flat of his big hand down on the desk-top so hard that the ink geysered.

"Clear-r-r out!" he bellowed, rolling his "*r*"s in a broad Irish brogue in the stress of his emotion. "Land yer-r-r man in thr-r-r-ee days, or-r-r I'll kill the both of ye with me own two hands. So help me, St. Patr-r-rick, I will!"

In unceremonious haste the two detectives bolted through the doorway and fled down the corridor.

MAMIE had worked late into the night to gather a collection of snapshot portraits of Raeburn Rensselaer from old

files of Sunday newspapers and society magazines; and when she and Kerrigan turned up at the train-sheds of the Union Station next morning, shortly before the Broadway Limited was due to arrive, they had ample assurance that they could recognize their man the moment they glimpsed his face.

But if they only had known it beforehand, all this labor might have been spared. For the first person to greet them as they pushed their way into the throng outside the gates was Snapshot Bill Kelly, staff photographer of the *Telegraph;* and Bill was bursting to impart to them the information that he was on an assignment to "shoot" a portrait of the nephew of his boss. He was not elated about it, however—he was peeved.

"This is the life!" he railed. "Say, I've shot no less than sixteen thousand plates of that young cuckoo in the past two years. I've shot him playin' golf and ridin' to the hounds. I've shot him in his soup and fish, and his bathrobe, and his bathin' suit. I guess this is the only pose of him I ever missed—gettin' off a train—and he wants to make the collection complete. As a lens-louse he sure cops the brown derby and the silver-plated mustache cup."

"Lens-louse?" Mamie laughed. "Please explain."

The trio had pushed their way through the gates by this time and waited inside the trainsheds alongside track No. 3.

"A lens-louse, miss," the photographer answered, pouring out all the bitterness of his soul, "is about the lowest form of human life. You've seen those birds who are always buttin' their heads into the foreground of a news snapshot or a news movie? They're lens-lice, commonest species. From that grade, they range all the way up to generals and prima donnas. Gettin' into the picture is a kind of mania with them.

"Now you watch this Rensselaer guy. Here comes the train now. The minute he sees me, he's gonna snap to attention and strike a pose, and hold it with a smirk on his face till I shoot my flash. Now watch! You never can catch these fellows off their guard and lookin' natural."

Snapshot Bill drew out a telegram and consulted it briefly. Then he strolled down the platform and set up his camera on a tripod, focused upon the steps of one of the rear Pullmans.

"*He* sent me this," he explained. "So there's no hurry—he'll wait till I'm ready. He'd wait all day."

Presently a stocky young fellow with the tanned cheeks of a sportsman and glistening black hair emerged.

He descended two steps of the car stairs, then paused, and true to prophecy, struck an attitude—one hand on the rail, the other lifting a derby, as if in friendly greeting, while he smirked toward the lens of Snapshot Bill's battered camera. A flashlight powder flared; the shutter clicked in unison.

"Thanks," said Bill, and gathered up the legs of his tripod.

"Got a good one?" the young man inquired anxiously.

"Sure."

"That's fine! But you'd better touch it up a bit around the eyes before you print it. I've been out of town on a party. Probably I look as if I needed sleep."

"Trust me," Bill reassured. "And much obliged."

Then the young man marched off, two red caps following him with his baggage.

MAMIE glanced in quick inquiry at Kerrigan. He shook his head.

"No need to follow him," he argued. "He's goin' straight home."

Snapshot Bill looked up and grinned.

"Forgot to ask you what you were on," he bantered. "But I get you now. Hope you nail him, Andy. Hope he gets a million years."

"He may get the chair," Kerrigan growled.

"So much the better. Nothing's too good for a lens-louse. If there's anything I can do, call me up, day or night. You know the number."

"One thing you can do right away," Kerrigan suggested eagerly. "Gimme the first print offa that plate before it gets retouched. Think I can prove a black eye and a bruise-spot by it."

"Sure. If you want, you can have it in less than an hour."

"And," pleaded Mamie, aghast at Kerrigan's frankness, "promise—promise on your word of honor—you won't spill this story around the *Telegraph* office?"

"Sure!" Bill thrust up his right hand. "I solemnly swear."

"Aw, don't worry about Bill," Kerrigan reproved. "I've known Bill for fifteen years. He'd gimme his shirt if I asked it."

"You bet I would," Bill answered heartily. "And what's more, I'd help anybody squash a lens-louse—even a perfect stranger."

"Well," sighed Mamie, "thank goodness for that! Andy has me worried stiff, the way he was talking. . . . . Say, Andy, let me tell him the rest of it? It will sort of relieve my feelings."

So she did, in a taxicab on the way uptown, while Bill listened with eager attention.

"I SEE it clear enough," Bill summarized as Mamie reached the end of her story. "This bird is buildin' up a pretty alibi."

He began counting the points off on his fingers:

"First, he tells everybody, like he did the laundryman, that he's goin' out of town for a few days. Half a dozen witnesses, maybe.

"Next, he has it all fixed, if anybody calls at the house, to let them see the blinds pulled down, and his mail and papers stacked up in the hall. That makes some more witnesses.

"Then what? The butler has word that his boss is expected back at ten, Tuesday morning. And I get a telegram, also evidence, same effect. Telegrams—Exhibit A, Exhibit B, hand-outs for the jury.

"Next, he has me snap his picture gettin' off the train for more evidence; and the *Telegraph* will run it on the society page this afternoon—all good alibi stuff. 'See for yourselves, gentlemen!' Juries eat that sort of thing.

"And what was he doin' at the hour of the murder? Well, if you want to know, he was five hundred miles away—down in New York City, watchin' the Decoration Day parade. Of course, he's got witnesses to prove it too. You can't get back of that.

"And what have you got to show him up as a faker? Just an old linen collar with his laundry-mark. He don't know about that yet. But as soon as he does, he can find an easy way to explain it. Maybe he left it at his dear dead cousin's house when he stayed there overnight last week. But how did the buttonholes get ripped? Oh, it was too tight, and he got mad and tore it off his neck. That's a cinch."

Bill paused, and hearing no objections entered, went on:

"Yes, in general, he answers a description the superintendent of Oswald's flat building gives out—about the murderer's build and his hair. But that's all you've got on him, unless maybe my picture here helps you prove his face has been to a fight. And I can't guarantee that it will. In fact, it's doggone doubtful. Those faint blue marks don't show up dark in a photograph—they come out white. That's why engravers mark up a print with a blue pencil; in that color the marks never show. I think he's had his right eye doctored. But I'm afraid the picture wont prove it."

Bill heaved a deep sigh.

"You're pretty near at the end of your row, I guess. The only thing I can suggest is, have another round with that old fellow out at the Oswald apartment house. Maybe he's holdin' out on you."

"Why do you say that?" Mamie asked.

"Put yourself in his place. You want to do the right thing, and you've got your suspicions of somebody. But suppose that somebody happened to be the nephew of the old man who pays you your wages? You'd go mighty slow about castin' asparagus. You'd tell the cops all you knew for a fact. But you certainly wouldn't bust out and say, 'he looked to me like Raeburn Rensselaer' unless you saw his face. You'd want to be doggone sure. If you weren't, it would cost you your job."

"That's right!" Mamie exclaimed. "He did kind of hedge. Said he 'couldn't be sure.' I didn't want to interrupt just then, but I meant to ask him later, and forgot to. Say, Andy, let's go right out there now and put him over the jumps."

Kerrigan nodded agreement.

"Here's where I leave you, then," Bill told them. He knocked on the taxi's front window for the chauffeur to stop, and got out. "Well, see you again later. Hope it's a good lead."

KERRIGAN and Mamie descended a dark stairway into the basement of the apartment house. Kerrigan knocked violently upon the superintendent's door. A timid little gray-haired woman in a gingham wrapper opened it.

Scowling, Kerrigan swept her aside and strode across the room. The man he sought was sitting in a rocking chair beside a radiator, shivering in a heavy bathrobe, his back to the door and only a little fringe of gray hair showing above the bathrobe's turned-up collar.

The detective clapped a heavy hand upon the old man's shoulder, and his captive leaped up with a scream of fear.

Kerrigan whirled him about and flung him violently against the wall. Clutching his captive's wrists, he pinioned them together and snapped a pair of handcuffs.

"Oh, my God!" the old man groaned.

His wife screamed and rushed toward him. Mamie caught her by the arms and dropped her firmly into a chair.

"Better not make trouble," Kerrigan growled. "Come along quietly."

"But—but—what have I done?" the man stammered weakly.

"We'll find out all about that later, down at the lock-up," Kerrigan answered grimly. "Then I guess you'll tell us what you know."

"But I've told you. Told you already—"

"You lie, you old fool! You lie, and you know it. Why didn't you tell me yesterday who you thought it was that went out the front door? You said you'd never seen him before. That's good!" Kerrigan laughed hoarsely. "You old liar, you'd seen him a thousand times. Bah! You're afraid of your job; that's all—afraid if you spoke, old man Oswald would fire you. Well, I'll give you something else to be afraid of. *Come along with me!*"

"I wasn't sure! I wasn't sure!" The pleading voice broke in a falsetto. "I couldn't see his face."

"You didn't need to. You'd seen his back often enough. Aw, come along. You can tell the captain—if you wont talk for me."

The man sank on his knees, wailing.

"Before God, I swear it, sir! I couldn't be sure. I thought—I thought it was his cousin, Mr. Rensselaer. But I couldn't be sure. Oh! Oh! Oh!" He beat his shackled wrists on the floor in a frenzy. "If the good Lord strikes me dead for it, I couldn't say more!"

"Get up," Kerrigan bade, mopping his glistening crimson face with a big bandana handkerchief. "Sorry I had to be so rough with you. But I had to have the truth. Here—lemme unlock these. Can I get you a glass of water?"

The man sank limp into a rocking chair, pallid, with the sweat streaming down his cheeks. His wife darted to his side.

"It's all right now," she soothed. "It's all for the best, too. Didn't I tell you so?"

"It's always best to tell the cops everything," Kerrigan advised. "They'll get it anyway, you know. Just keep your mouth shut, now, and we'll let the matter drop."

Mamie breathed a deep sigh of relief and gave the old lady a hug.

"Thank heavens, that's over with. I can't stand this rough stuff."

"I don't like it much myself," Kerrigan confessed. "Gosh! I sure raised a sweat."

As they went out, he was still mopping his glistening forehead.

"One more piece of strong-armin', and I'll call it a day," he mused.

"Why? What else have you got to do?"

"I've got to rob that laundryman of some of Rensselaer's collars. Want 'em to show the jury that the ink-marks check. Like to go along?"

"No; I thank you," Mamie answered with a shiver. "I'll meet you again tonight at headquarters, seven o'clock."

IN the smoke-fogged lounging-room at police headquarters that night Mamie sat under a huge old-fashioned chandelier plying her needle swiftly. She noted a satisfied grin on Kerrigan's face as he entered bearing a little package that looked like a box of lunch.

"Here it is," he announced, "and I got it easy, too. Just walked in and asked for Rensselaer's laundry, and the lady handed it over. All it cost me was forty-eight cents."

"Is that little box his laundry?" Mamie asked incredulously.

"Sure. He gets the rest of his wash done at home. All he sends out is his collars."

"Oh! I didn't understand."

"I didn't expect you to. It's all outa your line." Kerrigan was beaming. "This exhibit is going to go good with a jury, I reckon. 'Open the box for yourselves, gentlemen. Check up the laundry-marks with the marks on the collar we found in young Oswald's room. See for yourselves.' Get the idea?"

Kerrigan rubbed his hands in glowing satisfaction.

"Say, we haven't had a bad day at all," he added hopefully. "We drew a good prosecutor, too—Beranger. He can put that old superintendent on the stand and make him count for something as a witness. By George, I believe we've got a fightin' chance. Maybe that snapshot of Bill's will help, too."

Hurried footsteps were approaching down the corridor.

"Speak of the devil—" said Mamie, and smiled.

At the door stood Snapshot Bill.

Mamie's smile faded swiftly as she caught a closer glimpse of the agitation written on the photographer's face.

"Bad news?" she demanded.

"Rotten!"

Bill dropped disconsolately into the nearest chair.

"We're licked," he declared glumly, "licked to a pulp."

"Why? Didn't the plate print up?"

"Sure. It's good enough—though it wont help us much." He clenched his fists, gasping; then his shoulders sagged and he gestured helplessly. "It aint my plate that's worryin' me. It's some other guy's movin'-picture film. They're showin' it down at the Bijou tonight. I just come from there. Rensselaer's right in the middle of it, grinnin' at the camera."

He paused, greeted with blank stares.

"Hell's blazes! Don't you get me yet? It's a news movie of the Decoration Day parade in New York—a shot of the crowd. And there he is, the dirty lens-louse, right in the foreground, with his face about three feet high. Yes, and a couple of skirts along with him for witnesses. We're licked, I tell you. It's the perfect alibi."

Mamie's hoop of embroidery clattered to the floor. Neither of the flustered men made a move toward it, and so she picked it up herself. Then apparently quite self-possessed, she rose and smiled.

"Well, gentlemen, what do you say?" she suggested dryly. "How about a pleasant little evening at the movies? Maybe this is double-feature day?"

SNAPSHOT BILL, though still somewhat dazed, led a march uptown and into the glare of the bright lights along the Great White Way of Twelfth Street. There he regained enough of his normally quick wits to suggest a way to save some precious time.

"We don't have to go to the Bijou to see this fillum," he advised. "Every big first-run house in town will have it. Let's try the Palace. It's closer, and the show starts there at seven-thirty. The news reels ought to go on about eight." He took a quick glance at his watch. "Hurry—we can just about make it."

Fidgeting in front-row seats at the Palace, the trio had to sit through ten minutes of torment while an electrician played with colored flood-lights and an orchestra mangled the overture to "William Tell."

This ordeal at an end, the house lights began to dim. The news-reels at last began running—Camden, N. J., the launching of a freighter; Indianapolis, Ind., a "better babies" show; Drumwright, Okla., great oil-well ablaze; New York City—

"Watch it!" Bill warned hoarsely as the caption flashed:

"Ten thousand veterans parade on Memorial Day."

For two agonizing minutes white-haired veterans, middle-aged veterans, young veterans and boy scouts marched past; then up flashed the long-awaited subtitle:

"Seen in the crowd along Riverside Drive."

"Now!" Bill whispered. "Watch it *close!"*

The camera swung from a focus on a color-guard of three Civil War Zouaves and their tattered banners, to take in a panorama of the crowd. Down the crowded curb it swept, face after face, until it settled, near at hand, upon the smirking features of Raeburn Rensselaer. There could be no mistaking him; on the silver-sheet the face seemed three feet high. Beside him, with their arms linked in his, two flappers with skirts cut almost to their knees smirked with him and feigned coy embarrassment.

That was all. Another title flashed:

"Memphis, Tenn., girl of nineteen in daring aërial stunts."

"Enough," Mamie faltered. "Let's go."

She got up, pulling at Kerrigan's sleeve.

Snapshot Bill, rousing himself from a stupor as he saw the rise, followed hastily.

In the lobby outside, blinking from the lights, the trio paused. Mamie appeared to have assumed the leadership now, and the other two deferred to her for a suggestion.

"We've got to find out about this thing," she mused. "And we've got to do it quick."

"You said a mouthful," Kerrigan growled. "We've got forty-eight hours—then we get the gate."

"Follow me," Mamie ordered, and started off briskly down the street, the two men tagging after.

At the first corner she turned into a drug-store.

With a jerk of the finger she beckoned them to follow.

"Is it cyanide you're buyin'?" Bill asked, forcing a grin. "If it is, miss, get me some too. I'm in on this party to the finish."

"Good!" Mamie answered heartily. "I'm counting on you; so I do hope you mean it. But all I'm going to do right now is buy three toothbrushes. What's your choice, please—soft bristles, medium, or stiff?"

"Medium for mine," Bill answered.

"And yours, Andy?"

"Same, I guess. But what the—"

Mamie ignored him and turned to the drug clerk.

"Three toothbrushes, medium please," she requested. "No—nothing so expensive —these cheap ones will do. Don't wrap them up. We're in a dreadful hurry. Here's your change. Thanks."

She wheeled and headed for the door.

"Stick these in your pockets for baggage," she bade, smiling. "Now let's grab a taxi for the depot. We've got to catch the first train for New York, and I remember one around nine o'clock."

It was Bill's turn to look dumfounded.

"But I can't go to New York," he objected. "If I beat it away like this, I'll lose my job."

"Get another, then. Get a better one. As good a man as you are wont be out of work long." She eyed him sternly.

"Say!" she demanded, "I thought you said you'd stick for the finish?"

Bill hesitated no longer.

"All right," he agreed. "I'll stick. Anything to oblige a lady."

Half a minute later the three were dashing down the White Way in a taxi to the railway station; and when the Manhattan Flier pulled out of the train sheds at eight-fifty-five it had them aboard, rather light on luggage and completely out of breath, but all there otherwise.

AT ten the next morning Mr. Andrew Kerrigan, Mr. William Aloysius Kelly and Miss Mamie Skaggs shot skyward on an express elevator to the offices of the World-Wide News Films, on the twenty-second story of a tower building in Times Square.

There Mr. Kelly slipped two bits to a tow-headed office boy, and in his best professional manner asked for an introduction to the guy who shot those "fillums" of the Decoration Day parade.

"Tell him I'm a photographer myself," Bill added. "And I said they were great stuff, and I want to tell him so right to his face, and shake hands with a real big-time camera man."

"Aren't you spreading it on pretty thick?" Mamie asked, as the boy, grinning broadly, sped away.

"Not too thick for the fillum-trade," Bill answered gravely. "Lady, you don't know the half of it. Which reminds me —you'd better let me do most of the talkin' today. Take all the notes you want, but keep mum till I slip you the cue. Understand?"

Mamie promised with a nod, Kerrigan with a solemn grunt.

A moment later a lean, beady-eyed, hatchet-faced youth, clad noisily in a suit of Broadway cut, obviously new, and his prosperity further advertised by squeaky new yellow shoes and a new silk shirt with a bright red tie, strode down the aisle of film-cutters' tables and eyed the three visitors with haughty condescension. Closer inspection revealed why his ears appeared to stand out too far—a fresh haircut was evident, with the scent of barber-shop lotions still heavy upon the surrounding air. As he paused, with his hands upon the office gate, the visitors' eyes were dazzled by the glitter of a large and unnaturally bright diamond ring.

"Kelly's my name," Bill greeted him. "Just dropped in for a minute to tell you I think you sure shot some wonderful stuff, corkin' fine stuff, on that Decoration Day parade. I want to take off my hat to you on that back-lightin' in particular, Mister —" Bill hesitated and coughed. "What'd you say your name was?"

"Coyne."

"Well, Mr. Coyne, I'm proud to meet-cha! That's all. Shake! Could I introduce some friends of mine, who also admire your work? Miss Skaggs, Mr. Coyne. And this is Mr. Kerrigan."

Mr. Coyne consumed greedily a few more warm compliments.

"I wonder," Bill ventured next, "could you do me and these two friends of mine a great favor? You've got a projection room here, I guess? Would it be askin' you too much if we said we're dyin' to see those pictures of yours run off again?"

"No trouble at all," the youth responded. "Come right in."

He led the way into a bare little windowless room, no furniture in it but a few camp-chairs facing a small motion-picture screen. There he whistled through a loop-hole cut in the wall at the back of the room to the operator of the projection-machine.

"I say, Sid!" he called. "Run us this week's news-release, will you? When you're ready, shoot. We're waiting."

He switched off the ceiling-lights; the projection machine sputtered and began to run off the Camden launching, the Indiana baby show, the Oklahoma oil-well blaze and the New York Decoration Day parade on the miniature screen.

Mamie made a few hasty notes on a pad which she slipped back into her handbag before the lights came on again. Something she had observed appeared to have excited her tremendously, and she was having a hard time to conceal her emotions about it.

Kerrigan sat glum and stolid.

BILL said never a word until the show was over. Then he arose slowly and gripped the young camera man's hand again.

"No use talkin'," he sighed. "You make all the rest of this crew look like sellin'-platers. I hope they appreciate you here?"

"Oh, they treat me all right," the flattered youth answered, airily. "I cop all the best assignments, and they let me help edit the whole reel. I have to cut a lot out of some of these other fellows' stuff."

"I'll bet you do," Bill agreed with keen interest. "Have to throw a lot of it away, I guess?"

"Oh, we keep it all—in the files, you know. Bushels of old stuff around the place. But only a little bit of what comes in ever gets onto the screen. Everything has to be cut a lot. Everything has to be edited. It's a mighty responsible job."

Bill moved reluctantly toward the door.

"Well, it's been a great pleasure and a privilege to meetcha," he attested. "I'll always remember this day." He halted, pondering deeply. "I wonder—" He checked himself and soberly wagged his head. "No, I wouldn't have the nerve," he muttered. "I'd like to ask another favor of you. But I wouldn't have the nerve."

"Aw, go ahead," the youth urged earnestly. "What's on your mind?"

"I just wondered," Bill faltered, gazing at him admiringly. "I wondered could you give us a clipping or two outa that film? You know—something in the way of a souvenir?"

"Sure. Happy to oblige," the youth responded. "What would you like to have?"

"Some of the old G. A. R. men, for example. That's all great stuff. And a little piece of that last shot of the crowd, close-up."

"I'm not much stuck on that crowd shot," the youth objected, hesitating slightly. "It's kind of commonplace."

"Neither am I," Bill humored him. "It's the lady who wants a piece of that," he went on meekly. "She took a notion to it, she said. Just a woman's whim, I guess."

Mamie was quick to catch the hint.

"The girls are so pretty and coy," she explained. "Hope you don't mind? I don't understand the fine points of photography."

"Oh, all right," the youth assured her. "If that's what you want, it's yours. And how about you, Mr. Kerrigan?"

"Gimme a little souvenir of some Spanish-American war vets," Kerrigan stalled. "My old outfit, you know."

"Wait just a minute, then," the youth promised, "and you'll all have everything you want."

In less than a minute he was back.

"There you are," he said. "With the compliments of Alfred Coyne. Drop in again sometime."

"We will—thanks," Mamie answered, eying him steadily.

A faint smile played about the corners of her mouth; then the clasp of her handbag went shut with a sharp metallic click that startled Kerrigan out of a trance.

"Gosh!" he exclaimed a moment later just outside the door. "I thought I heard handcuffs!"

Mamie's cheeks glowed with excitement above an inscrutable smile.

"Right again, Andy," she snapped. "I guess you *did!*"

As Mamie spoke, she opened her handbag and passed her clipping of film to Snapshot Bill.

"Here, take good care of this," she ordered. "You'll need it in your business this morning. Grab a camera somewhere and hop right out to Riverside Drive. When you get there, shoot me a good sharp still, from exactly the same spot where this movie was taken. Rush it, please! I want an enlargement off of that plate by two o'clock. I'll be waiting for you in the writing-room of the Hotel Cortlandt."

Abruptly she wheeled toward Kerrigan.

"Andy, you know some of the force here? Well, you'd better beat it down to

headquarters then and gather up a couple of your pals. Have them on hand at the hotel, same place, same time. We may have to make our first arrest this afternoon —that is, unless young Mr. Coyne comes through with a full confession. If we can, we ought to catch the Broadway Limited home tonight. Got that all straight, now?"

Snapshot Bill recovered his speech first.

"Say, lady, excuse me," he pleaded. "I get your drift, all right; but you work too fast. You can't arrest this kid just because he looks crooked and happens to be wearin' new clothes. Maybe his aunt's just died and left him a million dollars. 'No crape on his arm, so it don't seem likely?' No—and maybe I think, the same as you do, the Rensselaer slipped him the coin to put something over. *But what?* I can't see *what*. It stumps me—and I know a lot about fillums."

He held the scrap of celluloid up to the light.

"I can tell you one thing," he went on earnestly. "There's nothin' phoney about this photography. It shows a long pan from the parade—and you can't make no mistake about this bein' the Decoration Day parade—straight to the crowd close-ups, without a break in it anywhere. Don't kid yourself that it's a double exposure or any other trick stuff. This picture's no fake. I'll stake my rep of fifteen years on that."

MAMIE smiled, unperturbed.

"I didn't say the photography was faked," she protested. "I'd say it's absolutely genuine. You don't get my idea, at all. My clue's a woman's clue." Her eyes sparkled with triumph and suppressed gayety. "All I wish is that this case was going to be put up to a jury of twelve women. I could smash that Rensselaer alibi in two minutes—just long enough to say six words and run the film."

She laughed merrily.

"Oh, my! Oh, my! Coyne certainly had his nerve! When I think that fifteen million women will see that film in movie houses tonight! But let's not waste any more time jawing. Remember, gentlemen, two o'clock sharp—or sooner, if you can make it. While you're gone, I'm going to take a little stroll up Fifth Avenue on business. I want to be ab-so-lute-ly sure I'm right."

Kerrigan turned, staring blankly, toward the photographer.

"Whatcha think, Bill?" he asked. "Is she off her nut?"

"No," Bill replied, pondering. "Now that she mentions it, I noticed something funny about that fillum myself."

"What, please?" Mamie coaxed.

"Never you mind," Bill answered, grinning. "But I gotcha now. I've got an eye for legs myself."

"You're hot on the trail at last!" Mamie laughed. "Now you know what I want. So bring back something that proves it. We've got to fix the time, of course, beyond the shadow of a doubt."

SHORTLY before two o'clock Snapshot Bill burst into the writing-room of the hotel and darted gleefully toward the little desk where Mamie Skaggs was scribbling in a notebook.

In triumph he slammed down onto the blotter two fresh, damp photographic prints.

"We've got it!" he chortled. "Lady, your hunch was right! The pictures prove it. Take a squint at this."

He laid the photographs side by side.

"Here's the one I shot this morning—and this is off of that movie film. The movie print's kind of fuzzy; I can make a better one when I have more time. But it shows all we need to go ahead on."

Kerrigan and his two friends from police headquarters had just put in their appearance. Kerrigan, in great embarrassment, was trying to introduce them, but the moment seemed unpropitious. Mamie's eyes were riveted onto the two prints, and Bill was almost equally oblivious of the outside world.

"Don't you see it yet?" Bill demanded eagerly.

"Sorry, but I'll have to confess I don't."

"Fix your lamps right here then." And Bill drew forth a pencil and indicated, on the print from the movie film, the tiny black crosslines of some steel beams against the distant skyline. "Now do you get it?" He ringed with his pencil-point a tiny flag fluttering above the highest beams. "You said you wanted a piece of evidence that even a man could understand? Well, here it is! When steel-workers finish their job on a new building, they always stick up a flag on the top beams. You wanted to prove, didn't you, that this piece of movie film wasn't shot when the caption said it was? Well, there's your proof. Compare the pictures—"

A sharp little cry of joy escaped Mamie's lips.

Kerrigan and his two friends crowded close to have a look.

Then they too exclaimed when they saw that Bill's snapshot showed the same building, not in the steel beam stage, but completed, and a faint coil of smoke issuing from one of its chimneys.

"It wont be so hard now to make our young friend Coyne confess," Mamie predicted.

AND it wasn't. That same evening Messrs. Kerrigan and Kelly and Miss Mamie Skaggs caught the Broadway Limited back home. It put them into town at ten the next morning. An hour later they had Raeburn Rensselaer in the office of the Chief of Police, raging in defiance, but under arrest.

For three agonizing hours Rensselaer had sat there, clenching his fists until their knuckles showed white, struggling desperately to keep his wits about him while the Chief and the two detectives grilled him with an unrelenting fire of questions. He could have prolonged the dreadful torture of their accusations a little longer, but it would have been of no avail in the end. At last his head began to droop; then his shoulders sagged, and he slipped down limply into his chair. A moan escaped him. With haggard eyes he looked up and gestured pleadingly for pity. Long ago the color had gone out of his ruddy cheeks. Cold sweat coursed down them now over an ashen skin. He was confessing. While the Chief prompted with questions, a secretary's swift gliding pencil transcribed the answers:

"My name is Raeburn Rensselaer. . . . . I am thirty-five years old. . . . . I live at Number 10 Hyde Park Place in this city. . . . . On the morning of May 30th, last, I killed my cousin Henry Oswald in a fight we had in his apartment at 880 Riverdrive Avenue. . . . . I did this in self defense, because he attacked me, after a quarrel we had about a card-game. I saw the cards were marked and accused him of cheating. He jumped at my throat, and I had to fight back."

The voice droned on, wearily now and without emotion:

"In a rage, I struck him over the head with a walking stick and killed him. I always had hated him, but I never meant to kill. I hated him because he was the favorite nephew of my uncle, Henry Oswald, owner of the *Telegraph*. I hated him more, because he was a liar and a cheat, and my rival in a love-affair.

"Immediately after the murder I left the house at 880 Riverdrive Avenue and went to New York City. I had been out of town for two days on a motor-trip and thought I could establish an alibi. . . . . When I got to New York I picked up a newspaper and saw a story in it about the Decoration Day parade. That gave me an idea, for the year before I had been photographed in a news motion-picture watching a Decoration Day parade in New York. As that picture had not been used, I thought that if it was still on file, it could be useful now as part of my alibi.

"I remembered the name of the film-company, for I have always been interested in photography, and I found the camera man, Alfred Coyne, whom I recognized as the man who had taken my picture the year before. . . . . I bribed him for two hundred and fifty dollars to substitute last year's crowd picture for the crowd picture he had taken the day before, and to include it in this week's news-release. We ran it off in the projection-room, and it looked all right, so I thought I had a perfect alibi."

He hesitated. "I don't know yet how the police discovered the trick and caught me," he ended.

The Chief turned to Mamie.

"How *did* you catch him?" he demanded.

"Easy," Mamie answered. "Just one of the little things a woman sees—the clothes were all out of style. The skirts, in particular. Don't you remember how short they were wearing 'em last year? The minute I saw that, I knew the picture couldn't be as new as the caption said it was. The rest was easy, after I heard Coyne mention that he had old films on file and say he helped edit the reel."

"By golly, that's good!" The Chief brought his hand down on the table so hard that the ink-well geysered. "I don't know what I'd do around here sometimes without a woman detective. I guess I'd be out of a job."

Then a broad grin spread across his features, and he barked:

"Call in that fool reporter for the *Telegraph*, who wants to get us all fired for inefficiency. I've got a story for him that'll make his hair curl!"

John Goes Up to Stay

Mr. Brooks is at his best in this story—and that is very good indeed, as those who read "Diana of the Aphasians," "Simple Minds" or his other baseball stories will agree.

By Jonathan Brooks

IKE was a great catcher when catchers everywhere had decided to abandon whiskers in favor of breast-protectors. The middle period of his career he devoted to wanderings up and down the land like a modern Jason, seeking golden fleece in leagues where he might keep on catching awhile longer. His latter-day life was devoted to advising Jake Daly of the Royals, and collecting rents on farms he had bought with baseball wages.

One spring during the middle period, Ike negotiated himself into a job with the Paducah club of the Kitty League. He had two reasons for picking Paducah. The place is on the Ohio River, where it is as hot in the summer as Babe was under the collar the day Harry Harper whiffed him twice in a row. Your old-timer must have heat to thaw him out, even if he has to wear a steam-filled breast-protector and electric shin-guards. The second reason was that they did not know him in the Kitty League, one of the few remaining circuits in which he had never played.

"Say, kid, I'm sorta sweet on yuh," said Ike one July night to a strapping big right-handed pitcher, one John Somers, from Hannibal, Missouri. John, that day, had pitched two games, shooting a heavy, fast ball that drove Ike's mitt back against his chest and made his left hand tingle.

"What are yuh tryin' to do—flirt with me, or what?" asked John, a good-natured, rather green youngster.

"So you're onto us city fellers, are yuh?" asked Ike, laughing. "No, I was just sayin' I like your work in the box. I think you've got the stuff."

"Much obliged," Somers replied, blushing under his heavy tan.

"Come on out here in front of the hotel, where we can sit down; it's cooler," Ike explained. When they were seated on big straw-bottomed chairs on the sidewalk, Ike renewed his advances. "Listen, kid, I gotta proposition to make yuh. How old are yuh?"

"Twenty-two," Somers replied.

"Play any ball before showin' up here?"

"Only around home, back at Hannibal."

"Well, listen. How'd yuh like to go up to the big time?"

"Gee whiz," exclaimed John Somers, all excitement. "How could I do that?"

"Well, I've been around some," said Ike. "I know a lot of the big felluhs. If you'll stick with me, I'll show yuh a few things about pitchin', and then mebbe I can fix up a deal so yuh can get a try-out. What d'yuh say?"

"Why, three cheers, I guess," was the only reply the big youngster could muster.

THE education of John Somers was a revelation to him, but old stuff to Alibi Ike Thompson. He had taught many a big rookie to follow through with his weight on every ball, had shown them all the folly of winding up with men on bases, and imparted to each and every one his knowledge of battery craft, gleaned through a decade of major-league service. John Somers was a ready and eager pupil. His bulk had not developed at the expense of brains. When Ike told him what was meant by following through, the boy saw the idea.

"Take a long step when you shoot," said Ike. "Think y'll fall on your face, all flattened out, and then ketch yourself. On your right foot, way up here toward the plate."

This was a sample of precept, and Ike needed to attempt no example. John Somers developed a follow-through that in almost no time had Kitty League hitters thinking he was going to slap their faces immediately after every delivery. He looked like a storm blowing up out of the box, and the ball shot past like a grain of chaff in the wind.

While John Somers was working, learning and winning games, Ike began writing slow, painful letters. Jake Daly turned him down, saying he already had nine of the best pitchers in the big leagues. Neither of the Chicago clubs was interested. A friend managing one of the St. Louis teams was not interested. As a last resort Ike wrote to old Hollenbeck Adams, president and treasurer, of the Misfits. He stated in his letter, as diplomatically as he could, that if Adams cared to be advised, and would appreciate the advice, he could tip off the Misfits to a husky and promising young right-handed pitcher.

The deal went through to the satisfaction of everybody concerned, except Somers and Ike. Adams put in a draft for Somers, and drew him. The boy was overjoyed, and could not thank Ike enough for his kindness. He wrote glad letters home, and the Hannibal papers printed long stories about him. At the end of the season he went home and was greeted as a conquering hero. All winter long he gloried in his triumph. Then, along in March, he received a letter from Adams, telling him to report to Sioux City. That was all. The boy was heartbroken. He was ashamed to tell his friends he was not going to the big league after all. He thought he would give up the game. What was the use of working so hard to make good, if that sort of thing could happen to him?

Ike had been disillusioned earlier when he had stopped in the Misfit town on his way home from Paducah to collect from Adams for tipping him off to the boy. Old Hollenbeck laughed at him.

"Thought you were doing me a favor, Ike," he said. "Never dreamed you'd expect me to pay you. Why, we never pay for such things. Not enough money in baseball to do that."

Ike swallowed his wrath, for he knew old Hollenbeck.

"Served me right," he told himself. "Knew all along the old devil was tighter'n the varnish on a new bat."

The next spring Ike fished for a job in the Gulf Coast League, where the weather is hotter even than Ohio River towns offer. He reported about the time John Somers, listening to older heads, decided to play one more year, even if he had to go to Sioux City.

SOMERS turned in bravely enough and pitched good ball for the Sioux, although he naturally did not win as high a percentage of games as he had for the Dukes. From the Kitty to the Western is quite a jump, but the youngster, gritting his teeth and using everything he had and all that Ike had taught him, made good.

Harve Morgan, manager of the Sioux and second baseman as well, was a smart, overbearing fellow. He played an aggressive, fighting game, picking rows with the umpires, opposing players and even his own men, to keep things stirring. He rode his pitchers hard and often. John Somers irritated him, for John never gave him a chance to ride. August first was approach-

ing before Morgan found opportunity to razz the big fellow.

"Well, big boy," he called to the kid before a home game one warm afternoon, "I guess you're whittled down to our size now."

"How's that?" asked John, rather startled.

"Why, the Misfits have let their string on yuh go. Guess that tells yuh how good y'are, don't it?"

"I don't understand," said John.

"Why, yuh pore fish, they sent yuh out here under an option to call yuh back by July fifteen if they wanted yuh, see? Well, they don't. See? Guess that'll bring yuh down to our size and set yuh to work, hey? No more high-and-mighty stuff, now. You've gotta work to make good."

THE boy was unnerved. He had known nothing of the optional agreement, and the news upset him. On top of that, Morgan's derisive comments bewildered him, with the result that when he took the box for the game, he was in a daze. Denver's light-hitting club batted him all over the place. He was hurt. Nothing like that had ever happened to him before. Morgan sent him to the showers with a choice assortment of gutter-talk pouring into his ears.

He dressed and walked to town. Ill at ease, he tramped all about the business district, trying to think a way clear through his trouble. Why had he ever started in baseball? How could the Misfits send him out here, and how could they keep him here? Why did he stand for Harve Morgan?

That last question was haunting him at ten o'clock when he entered the hotel, where, with several other players, he lived. Crossing the lobby, he heard a girl's voice raised in an indignant note. It was Dorothy Main, who leased the news- and cigar-stand from the hotel company.

Now, John Somers was a big, shy youngster who blushed when any woman under fifty spoke. He was afraid of Dorothy Main, although he bought a paper of her every morning, and occasionally went so far as to exchange an opinion on the weather. He thought she was about as pretty a girl, and altogether just about as sweet, as he had ever seen. No girl in Hannibal compared with her.

A familiar figure was leaning over the cigar-counter, an impudent head gazing at Dorothy. The boy strode across the lobby and grasped the man by a shoulder. He whirled the fellow about with one hand, and jerked him upright, away from the glass case, as easily as if he had been handling a rag doll.

"If this big bum is bothering you, Miss Main, I'll be glad to take him away," he said. Then he turned to Morgan: "What's the idea, bothering this lady, yuh big stiff?"

"Oh, Mr. Somers, don't let's have a fuss," begged Dorothy Main. "Harve has just had a couple too many, and he don't know what he's doing. Take him up to his room, wont you, please?"

Miss Main thanked him prettily next day, and brought hot blood to his cheeks. He stammered. When he reached the ball-park and reported to Morgan, he stammered again; for Morgan, with resentment of Somers' poor pitching the day before, his own wretched action in the hotel, and the boy's handling of him like a child, all under his belt, read the riot act all day. He fined John fifty dollars and suspended him ten days without pay. The boy was sick over the affair. He resolved to quit the game and go home, but he feared to face the folks. And Dorothy Main advised him to stick. He finally resolved to ignore the manager as far as possible. Two weeks later came a climax.

"Listen, big kid," said a stranger to him in the hotel, "you're Somers, aint yuh? Well, my name's Flynn. I'm bush-whackin' for old man Adams, of the Misfits."

"Yeah?" John Somers showed signs of interest.

"He let go his string on yuh, but I been watchin' yuh work. Saw yuh turn in a nice game this afternoon. See? I'm askin' the old man to put in a draft for yuh."

"Why, that's awful nice of yuh," said John. "Mighty nice. I'd like to have a chance up there in the big league."

"Mebbe so, mebbe so," said Flynn. "But the old man says he wants to know whether y'll be reasonable."

"Of course I will. What does he mean by that?" asked John eagerly.

"Well, just this. A lotta kids go up to the big time thinkin' the majors can't get along without 'em."

"They've been running a long time without me," John said.

"And they want the ball-park, an interest in the street-car company, and the

best hotel in town give to 'em for signin' a contract," added Flynn, ignoring John's smiling interruption.

"That's not me," John assured the scout earnestly.

"Fine," said Flynn. "I heard you were a good guy. Now, then, what do you say to a one-year contract, to be signed provisional to our gettin' yuh in the draft?"

"How do you mean?"

"Well, we sign the contract, you for yourself, and me for the Misfits. See? Then we put in a draft for yuh. See? If it goes through, and we draw yuh, why, the contract's good. See?"

"I see," said John. "That looks fair enough to me. Is it regular?"

"Sure," declared Flynn. (It *was* regular, with Hollenbeck Adams.)

Flynn named as salary, in the provisional contract, merely the same figure John was drawing from Sioux City. In dismay the boy drew back. Couldn't they pay better in the big leagues, with their big crowds, than the minors paid?"

"Why, looky here," Flynn exclaimed. "Yuh wanta remember yuh'll be just a rookie, gettin' a try-out. You make good, and yuh can get more, of course. But don't get it in your knob that they pay a movie actor's wages in the majors."

He wheedled a signature out of the boy. More, he made John understand that he, Hollenbeck Adams and the Misfits, individually and collectively, were doing the boy a tremendous favor. John went to bed happy. Flynn wired Adams of his success, and left at midnight seeking more rookies.

Next day John Somers was troubled.

"Don't like those Misfits," he said to himself. He put his finger on the point that had evaded him when talking to Flynn. "This thing's a kind of blackmail. Fine sort of business, I don't think. But I've signed the old contract."

HE decided to be frank with Harve Morgan and tell the whole story. Morgan thanked John for confiding in him, and said everything was all right. But the night the draft closed in Class A, which was the night before the draft opened in Class B, Harve Morgan wired his cousin Georgia Morgan, manager and part owner at Columbus in the American Association, accepting an offer for John Somers, pitcher. At the same time Harve telegraphed the secretary of the national baseball association, notifying him of the transfer. The secretary and Georgia Morgan were equally surprised, neither having had any intimation of such a deal.

Harve Morgan told John he was sorry, but that it could not be helped. Clubs in Class A, he said, could buy out of Class B and it was to his interest to sell. How could he be sure the Misfits would put in a draft?

John was heartbroken. He talked things over with Dorothy Main, who heard his tale of woe, and then sagely advised him to go through with it.

"No matter what happens," she said, "you've got what they want to buy, and you'll be selling it to them one of these days."

"Guess you're right," he admitted reluctantly. "Hate to go away from here, though."

"You might write to some of your friends once in a while," suggested Dorothy.

"I'll say I will."

JOHN SOMERS went to Columbus and finished the season with Georgia Morgan's Senators. Georgia asked a few questions to see why Harve had shipped the youngster to him, and decided he would hold the boy for the season, to get some good use of his strong right arm in the following pennant race, before trying to make a deal with any of the major league clubs. John won several games, and was surprised, in a mild, petulant way, to find none of the big-league managers had sent for him.

He was ashamed to himself, and stayed in Columbus all winter, choosing a job selling automobile insurance in preference to the prospect of going home to face his friends in Hannibal. Two postcards to Dorothy brought answering cards, but when he wrote her a long letter telling his troubles, she failed to answer it. That completed his tragedy. He spent the winter under a cloud of gloom. He was sullen and angry when he reported to Georgia Morgan in the spring.

"Think we'll show this league some runnin' this year," said Georgia. "I'm bringin' Harve over here to take care of second. He can hit, and he can field. He's smart, Harve is. With you in there slingin' now and then, and another new man in the box, we'll give these birds something to think about."

John Somers, disillusioned and indifferent, pitched good ball, but only toward the end of the season did he flare up and display some signs of animation. Harve Morgan was the cause.

" 'Member that little dame we had out in Sioux City?" he asked.

"Miss Main?" the boy replied, resenting Harve's familiar and none too respectful manner.

"Yeah. Well, she's comin' over here."

"So?" John's heart beat a little faster. Dorothy had ignored his letter, but she was the only girl he had ever cared to talk to.

"Yeah. She's sold her lease in the hotel back there, and I've helped her make a deal for the cigar-, candy- and news-stand spaces in three of the best hotels here. She's smart, that kid. And we'll make some jack, I'll say."

John lapsed back into indifference. If she wished to hook up with Harve Morgan, knowing him as she did, it was her own affair. Older and more astute philosophers than John have quit cold before the problem of an ill-natured man's attractions for woman. John, to do him credit, figured the thing out to a decision that Harve must have a better side than he knew, reserved for Dorothy. There was no reason why he should give her any further thought.

But he did when Dorothy Main appeared in Columbus and took charge of the stands in the hotels, in partnership with Harve Morgan. Harve made the deals, but she seemed to be putting up most of the money. John met her, and renewed their friendship.

"Why don't you let the boy alone?" she demanded of Harve Morgan, who complained of their growing intimacy. "He's a good kid. What did he ever do to you?"

"Where do you get off to be takin' his part against me?"

"The same place you get off, to be worried over whose part I take, or how," she retorted.

Harve Morgan steered three major-league scouts away from John, by knocking the boy, or refusing to let him work when scouts were in the park. Hollenbeck Adams, however, sent Flynn out to see Somers pitch a game. Flynn appeared. John had one of his good days, and let down Indianapolis, a hard-hitting outfit, with three safe blows. Flynn talked to Somers that evening.

"Listen, kid," he said. "We don't wanta miss connections for the Big Time again, do we?"

"I'd sure like to have my chance up there," John admitted.

"Well, then, let's talk turkey. Suppose we fix up another little contract between ourselves, see? If we can agree on terms, then the old man will put in a draft for yuh. See?"

"Yeah, I see," grunted the big boy. "But I don't go with you—not unless the contract is a good one."

"Oh-ho, so that's the way the land lays is it? Well, lemme tell yuh this, kid. Don't try to beat the men that own the major-league clubs. It can't be done. See?"

"I'm not trying to beat them," John declared. "All I want is a fair show. Suppose you name a figure for this contract."

Flynn pondered awhile and finally set a salary lower than John was getting in Columbus. He expected the boy to negotiate, but John refused.

"Nothing doing," Somers said.

"Listen, kid—" Flynn began.

"I'm not interested," said John. "I can pitch for more than that, right here. Don't see why I should gamble on the big league for less than I'm sure of now."

FLYNN went on about his business. Every time he met another ivory-hunter, he made fun of the big green boob out in Columbus. The result was that no one but Adams of the Misfits drafted the boy. When the American Association season ended, John Somers was instructed to report to the Misfits.

"That's fine," exclaimed Dorothy Main. "Wonderful! I knew you'd do it. But John, I hate to see you go away."

"Well, you know I hate like the dickens to leave," said the boy. "But it's my big chance. And Dorothy, I can winter here in town. Do better here than working at home."

"Always an eye to business," commented Dorothy slyly.

"That's not the only eye I've got," John hastened to assure her, blushing at his boldness.

John Somers was a happy youngster, despite the fact his three years in league baseball had taken him to the age of twenty-five and to the point where he would soon be on the verge of acquiring

the title of veteran. On the train to join the Misfits, his heart kept singing over and over, in tune with a flat wheel: "My chance, my chance, my chance."

When he approached the Misfit park, and sought out Silly Sam Williams, Misfit manager, he was so excited he forgot to be bashful. Silly Sam gave him a suit and told him to make himself at home. Silly Sam spoke to Hollenbeck Adams and thereafter let the boy dangle ten days. When he had absorbed enough humility, old Hollenbeck sent for him. Hollenbeck spoke of many things, such as opportunity, coöperation, team loyalty, unselfishness and youth.

"But Mr. Adams," John protested, "that is not as much as Columbus paid me, not much more than Sioux City paid me. Up here in the big league—"

"Young man," interrupted old Hollenbeck sternly, "we do not do business as free-handed as the United States Congress. When a man has made good, we reward him. We pay him well, very well indeed. We believe you can make good.

"We have tried to keep a string on you, for we have confidence in you. We carry you about the country in Pullmans, so you can learn the game. We invest money in you. The salary is only a small part of your expense to us."

"But how can I live?" John began.

"You'll find your expenses small," old Hollenbeck assured him. "I think you'd better study the matter over, and come in tomorrow."

John studied it over, and caved in as many another youngster had done, and the next day signed a contract at a niggardly wage, as big-league wages go. Hollenbeck Adams signed the contract, but felt that the boy was too uppity. Needed another lesson, he told himself. When John was ready to report to spring training-camp, after a hard-working winter in Columbus, with evenings in Dorothy Main's company, he received a telegram instructing him to report to Salt Lake City.

"There's nothing else to do," Dorothy pleaded with the big fellow. "You cannot afford to throw away every chance, just because Mr. Adams has sent you back to the minors. The thing to do, John, is to go out there and pitch your head off. Show 'em they can't afford to let you stay out of the big leagues."

John reported to the Mormons, who took over his Misfit contract gladly because it carried a smaller salary than they usually paid. Adams kept a string on him, in the form of an optional clause calling for his return to the Misfits if sent for before July 15. Late in June, after winning several games, John fell ill from a cold and was laid up until near the first of August, a lonesome, homesick youngster in a strange town. The Mormons could not afford to pay him for being sick, and relinquished his contract. Old Hollenbeck Adams overlooked a point, and neglected to exercise his option.

John, weak and miserable in health and spirits, borrowed enough money to take him, seeking sympathy and Dorothy Main, back to Columbus, a free agent. When he reached Columbus, Dorothy Main was gone. It was just as well he could not learn where she was or why she had left the city. Murder might have been committed.

JUST about this time Jake Daly, manager of the Royals, found himself and his club in a terrible predicament. The Royals, always meat for Hollenbeck Adams' Misfits, looked particularly sick in the inter-club series this year. Jake could count on his thumbs the games he had taken from the Misfits. And he needed those Misfit games, to have a chance at the pennant. Every time they met, his club lay down and died, as Jake described it. The hitters quit hitting; the pitchers quit pitching; and the fielders developed a habit of throwing away most of the balls they managed to field without erring. Whenever anybody whispered "Misfits" at them, the Royals trembled like a rookie facing Walter Johnson for the first time.

Therefore Jake Daly called in Alibi Ike Thompson for consultation. Ike was now in retirement, collecting rents on his farms, but he left home and journeyed down for a session with his old friend. When it was over, he shook his head sadly, allowed he didn't know anything that could be done, and went back home. But he did say he would think about it. This thinking accounted for a telegram Jake Daly received:

> Have answer to problem. Wire thousand expense money quick. THOMPSON.

Jake wired the thousand but sarcastically asked whether it was for a wedding trip or what. That was the last he heard of Ike in three weeks, for Ike had made tracks

for Paducah, Sioux City, Columbus, O., and Salt Lake City.

File notice of contract agreement with John Somers immediately. THOMPSON.

That was the next word Jake Daly had from Ike, and it came in the form of a telegram, dated Columbus, O. Jake swore roundly, but wired back at once:

All right but who in blazes is John Somers? DALY.

"John Somers," Ike telegraphed, "is pitcher, and I am leading him in right now."

"Damned old fool," said Jake Daly. "I send him a thousand dollars to dig up an idea, and he brings in a pitcher. I've got as many pitchers now as there are games on the schedule."

HIS temper was sadly frayed when old Alibi Ike appeared, two days later, bringing in a great overgrown giant wearing a sick and puzzled expression on his face. The Royals had just lost four in a row to the Misfits.

"Glad to see yuh," he muttered to big John Somers. "Ike, where'n hell have yuh been?"

"Ask me where I haint been," Ike rejoined. "Easier to answer. But say, have you got a suit big enough for Somers?"

"If we've got any left at all, we'll make one fit him, I guess," said Jake. "We've got a young army out there now, wearin' Royal uniforms. May not be any left for him."

But he sent Somers out to the clubhouse with a message to the trainer asking him to provide a road uniform, if nothing else was available, for the big fellow. Then he swung round on Alibi Ike Thompson.

"If brains was thread," he declared, breathing sarcasm, "yours would fit the littlest needle ever made. I ask for an idea, and you bring me a pitcher."

"Right," Ike rejoined calmly, biting off a fresh chew. "Good, big two-legged idea with a fast ball 'at'll break a Louisville slugger four ways from the handle. Beat these Misfits to a whisper."

"But I've got nine pitchers now."

"That's what yuh said when I brung in that little left-handed slow-ballin' McCormick kid, wasn't it?" Ike asked. "Calm down, Bill. Them Misfits musta been takin' yuh again. Have they?"

This was a cruel and unnecessary thrust. Ike knew very well they had, for he had studied the four box-scores.

"Lord, yes," Jake groaned. "And if they and their cussed jinx take another series from us, which we've gotta play 'em next week in their yard, I'm gonna commit suicide."

"Cheer up," said Ike. "They wont."

The two old friends went on quarreling until they had their fill. Jake's problem had changed since he had seen Alibi Ike. Only the Misfits had been able to whip the Royals decisively, and by dint of consistent winnings elsewhere, Daly and his men were up in third place only a short distance behind the leaders.

"Here we are with six weeks to go; the club's in good shape, and we're only five games behind the Bears, up in front. If we could crack these Misfits, in four games next week and in three we've got to play 'em last thing on the schedule, we might make up the difference."

"Beatin' the Misfits will put yuh in second place," said Ike. "How they got up there next to the Bears is beyond me."

"Did it beatin' us, I tell yuh. They've taken twelve outa seventeen away from us. 'Nough to put anybody in second place, even these cheese Misfits."

"Well, you tie into 'em today and tomorrow, and by the day after that, I'll give you the answer to the problem," said Ike. "No, lay off me now. I'm gonna see whether it'll work before I spring it on yuh."

REJUVENATED by witch hazel and steaming showers, gingerly rubdowns by the Royal trainer and the stinging tunk of the ball in his old left mitt, Ike worked out morning and afternoon with big John Somers for three days. Games played by the Royals made no difference. All his attention was focused on Somers. The two were inseparable, eating together and rooming together. By the evening of the third day he knew the boy's condition, and more, he knew his story by heart. Then he went to Jake Daly.

"We can win the old pennant, Jake," he said.

"Yeah?" was Jake's reply. "And we can elect Wilhelm president of France, too, if we go at it right. What's the bright idea?"

"Lemme handle the club the first game of the Misfit series."

"I don't suppose, after twenty years, I

can run a team, hey?" Jake asked sarcastically.

"Nonpareil," declared Ike promptly. "Second to none, Jake. But here's one game I can win, where you can't. Just this one game. We gotta murder this jinx."

THE first game of the series with the Misfits, on their home grounds, was a memorable affair. Hollenbeck Adams, approaching the close of a season in which his club, thanks chiefly to the jinx on the Royals, had been up among 'em from the start, was adding substantially to his bank-account. More, he was looking forward to a possible chance at the world series.

Specifically, when the series opened with the Royals, he was congratulating himself on the biggest crowd of the season, out to see the Misfits trample on the Daly club again.

"Listen, you guys," said Alibi Ike to the Royals, on the bench before the game. "If you're whipped now, stay on the bench by the water-bucket, will yuh? This big kid Somers, here, and me, will go out there by ourselves and show yuh how to beat 'em. What d'yuh say, hey? If y'r not through, go on out there. Somers will do the slingin'. I'm puttin' it up to him to show yuh how it's done. Get me?"

His sarcasm got under their skins as no amount of profanity from Jake Daly had done. They went to bat first, and smarting sorely, piled into the Misfits pitcher for two runs. Right there, except for one thing, the game ended. That one thing was the pitching of big John Somers, rookie, recruited after long and disappointing years in the minors.

"Boy," said Ike, "these Misfits work for old Hollenbeck Adams, who's closer than his eyelashes. He kept yuh in the minors four years. Let's see yuh show him. G'wan out there, kid."

John Somers had his fast ball, his fast ball with a hop, and his fast curve, all working that afternoon. The Misfits were lucky to ring up three hits and get out of the ball-park without having their bats broken. Hollenbeck Adams could hardly believe his eyes. Neither could Jake Daly.

"How come?" he demanded.

"The kid wanted to win," said Ike simply. "He had a real notion about whippin' them dudes, which is something the rest of your crowd didn't have. And he didn't know anything about that jinx stuff."

John Somers finished the second game of the series and saved a one-run lead. The Royals lost the third, but the boy pitched the fourth of the series and crushed the Misfits with three hits. Old Hollenbeck Adams protested the first, second and fourth games, and filed a claim on John's services, asserting he still had a string on Somers.

"He can't get hold of me, can he?" the boy asked Ike.

"Not without he uses a derrick and grapplin'-irons."

"I've got a letter from Salt Lake, with a copy of the agreement in it," declared John. "It shows the date when his option died. I'll not work for him."

"Atta boy," said Ike. "But yuh can beat his ball club to a whisper, hey?"

JAKE DALY applauded. The old Misfit jinx was weakening, Jake said. But this chronicle is not of the first Royal-Misfit series. Nor is it of the first game of the last series between the Royals and Misfits played on the Royal park. John Somers, working as brilliantly as before, pitched the Royals into a tie with the Misfits for first place. Next day the Misfits clawed, tore and hammered their way to a lead in the sixth inning; but John Somers, looming larger than Jeff Overall, strode to the box and stopped the scoring. The Royals thereupon turned to their bats, and heartened, pounded out a victory. This, still, is not the tale.

You have guessed it. The story is of the third and last game of the final series of the season, with the pennant at stake. Weak-hearted fans, fearful of another of those ninth-inning finishes, will please leave the park now. Run, don't walk, to the nearest gate. The game cannot be held up, and the exits must not be blocked. Those who would be in at the death of the Misfit jinx, keep their seats.

"Go get these dudes," said old Alibi Ike to John before the final game with the Misfits. "Gotta show 'em up today. Know what they've done?"

"Made life miserable for me," John replied.

"A lot more. They've gone and signed up Harve Morgan—'member Harve? They think he can get you up in the air, see? Flynn did it. Brought him on here to put him on the coachin'-lines. See?"

"I should worry about Harve Morgan," said John coolly.

"Don't yuh know what he's done?" Ike demanded.

"No, nor care."

"Listen: this Morgan flimmed that girl outa the lease on them cigar-stands in the Columbus hotels. Sold the lease and kept the dough, leavin' her broke there in Columbus. Had her thinkin' he was crazy about her, and left her flat. At's what he did."

"Say—what's all that?" John Somers asked, slowly. Then as Ike's words translated themselves to his deliberate brain, he broke out in anger: "Listen: this game can go to the devil. I'm gonna go get that guy right now see? I get my hand on him, and—"

"Wait a minute, wait a minute," Ike interrupted.

"Wait, hell. I'll break every bone in his head. I'll show him—why, Ike, he can't treat 'at girl like that and get away with it—not while I'm alive."

BIG John Somers stood up, peeling off his sweater, and studied the crowd of players about the Misfit bench. Ike watched him apprehensively. The boy reached for a bat, in the row of assorted sticks on the ground before the dugout, and took a step up from the cellar. Ike grasped an arm with both his hands, at the same time signaling to Jake Daly for help. Between them they managed to drag the youngster back to the bench. Strenuous efforts were required to talk him out of violent measures.

But he started the game.

"Hi big boy," yelled Harve Morgan from the first base line, with John Somers in the box and the first hitter of the Misfit line-up approaching the plate. "How's the old ladies' man, hey?"

John flushed and looked around slowly, to see Harve standing with a derisive grin back of first base. He turned about on the pretense his catcher and the hitter were not ready, and threw the ball to the first baseman. Walking deliberately a few steps across the field, he returned Harve's sarcastic greeting.

"I'll see you about some ladies' affairs, right after this game," he said.

"Do it now, do it now, not eventually," Harve Morgan retorted.

John scowled at the quicker-tongued Morgan, and returned to the box. It was a struggle to confine his thoughts to baseball, with the chattering, mocking ex-manager on the coaching-lines. The big fellow's mind kept turning to Dorothy Main, and to plans for revenge in her behalf on Harve Morgan.

"I'll get 'at guy," he promised himself over and over.

Preoccupation showed in his work, for the Misfits eked out a run in the very first round. It was only with an effort that big John pulled himself together and shut off further scoring. Jake Daly asked Ike what was the matter with the boy.

"Don't worry," said Ike. "He'll pull out O. K."

Daly campaigned with the first two-thirds of his batting-order through an attack that netted four runs in the last half of the inning. For the moment he forgot the threatened lack of effectiveness of his big pitcher. But when John started the second with a base on balls, he looked at Ike again, questioningly. The shadow of the Misfit hoodoo looked over his shoulder. Ike shook his head.

"Atta boy!" yelled Harve Morgan. "Just like pitchin' for P'ducah, hey?"

John glowered back at him, and proceeded abstractedly to pass another man.

"Goin' up, now," jeered Morgan. "Graduatin' to Sioux City."

A hit followed, sending in another run. The big fellow woke up to his situation, ignored Morgan for the remainder of the round and stopped the run-getting.

"Four to two, now," warned Alibi Ike, on the bench as the Royals came in. "John, you'll have to quit listenin' to that guy out there."

"Wring his cussed neck," growled Somers.

"Yeah, but after the game," said Ike. He arose, afterward, and looked over the top of the dugout at an empty reserved seat in the front row. "Not here yet," he said to himself.

In the third inning, unsettled by Morgan's taunts, the boy pitched himself into two holes. To two hitters in succession he shot three balls. Then, grooving a strike, he was walloped by each of them for a two-bagger, with one run resulting. The score stood now four to three, with the Royals margin slipping.

"Say, what's the matter, big guy?" growled the Royals' catcher, walking out toward the box to hand John the ball. "This is more hits and runs than these birds have made offa yuh all season. Get organized, quick. Let's go."

JOHN straightened up and whistled the ball over with such speed the Misfits were helpless.

"Get 'em next time," was Harve Morgan's parting shot as the inning ended. Big John glared at him over his shoulder, as he strode toward the bench.

"Listen, kid," exclaimed Jake Daly excitedly. "You'll have to get goin' purty quick. If yuh don't feel like pitchin', say so, and I'll try somebody else. We staked yuh to four runs, and now look at us. On'y one run left to go on. What d'yuh say, hey? I'll jerk yuh if they get any more men on base. I'll—"

But at this point old Alibi Ike interrupted. Taking Jake's arm, he whispered:

"Lay off, Jake, lay off."

Aloud, Ike continued:

"It's that bird Morgan, over there, bothers the kid."

"I'll tear his dirty ears off," muttered John Somers.

"But you're pitchin' to these Misfits, not that bird," objected Jake Daly. "Pay attention to them."

Ike looked over the top of the dugout again, as Jake was speaking, in the direction of the empty seat in the first row. It was not empty now. Dorothy Main was sitting in it, looking eagerly at the Royals' bench. She smiled and nodded questioningly at Ike as he recognized her.

"Listen, Jake: lemme take the kid over here by the rail," said Ike. "Come on, kid; party over here wants to see yuh." He motioned Dorothy to come to the railing through an aisle between the boxes. She was waiting for them by the time Ike had dragged the slow-footed John out of the dugout.

"Lady here to see yuh, kid," said Ike.

John looked up in wonderment, and blushed all the way down to the brass toeplate on his shoe. The situation was too much for him.

"Hello, John," said Dorothy Main, smiling radiantly at him. She held out a hand.

He stood stupidly, fumbling in his throat and mind for words.

"Thought you were crazy about Harve," he said finally. "Never answered my letters. Couldn't find yuh at Columbus."

"I had to leave Columbus," she explained. "And letters were not forwarded. I thought you hadn't written."

"Is it so about you and Harve?" he asked slowly,— "that is, about him cheatin' and sellin' the business?"

She nodded, and his face clouded.

"Well, I'd oughta killed him that night out in Sioux City. I'm gonna do it yet," he declared, very slowly.

"Not until you've won this game," she said. "I came to see you win it, John. I've never seen you pitch in a big game like this. And Harve—his murder can wait, can't it?"

She smiled as she talked, and watched the big fellow closely. He flushed again through his tan, and dug his toe in the dirt. It was a minute before he spoke again.

"Can you wait for me, after the game?" he asked finally.

"After I've come all this way to see you, I'm not going to hurry right off again," she replied.

This was the first intimation that she had come all the way from Sioux City, and big John Somers was dazed. He had no more to say. Instead, he stood looking at her, his mouth open, wonderment in his eyes. She had to tell him the game was waiting on him.

"The inning is ready to start," she said, motioning toward the field.

"I wont keep yuh waitin' long," he promised, recalled to his surroundings. "We'll hurry it up."

He strode back to the bench, casting another glance at her as she turned back to find her seat, on his way.

"Say, Ike," he said excitedly as he pulled off his sweater coat, "she's come all the way from Sioux City to see me pitch this game."

"Yeah?" Ike asked, as one surprised.

He plucked Jake Daly by the sleeve, sitting on the bench beside him, and nodded toward the figure of the big fellow swinging out to the pitcher's box.

"Lock the door, Jake," said Ike confidently. "The old ball-game's in. This is the end of their jinxing."

WHO cares to see a pitcher's battle? Answer: nobody but a home crowd with money, city pride, pennant hopes and a one-run lead in the balance. If big John Somers had been bothersome to the Misfits in the first three games he hurled against them, he was now completely baffling. His speed was blinding, only the catcher and the umpires following it.

Big John gave everything he had to every ball pitched, whether fast ball, fast curve or the hopper. The Misfits made a steady profane parade to the plate and

away from it. From the fourth inning on, most of them refused to run out their flies and topping bounders to the infield.

Just as they were dying on their feet, the climax came. The first Misfit up in the seventh inning reached first because John's throw to the first sacker after picking up a slow grounder tore off the baseman's mitt and carried it ten feet past the foul line.

"Hey," growled the first baseman as he retrieved the ball and tossed it to the big fellow, "yuh're pitchin' to the catcher, not to me."

His shot upset the boy momentarily. He eased up on the next ball pitched, with the result the hitter connected for a drive at the second baseman. It was an ordinary grounder, but in his anxiety to make a double play, the second sacker fumbled. Both runners were safe. The next man up was the Misfit pitcher, and the crowd breathed easier, with Jake Daly.

PUTTING on all his steam, John fanned his rival on three pitched balls, but the catcher muffed and then kicked the third strike. Bases filled. Every Misfit on the bench piled out and began clattering bats. Harve Morgan and the other Misfit coach raised a riot.

John Somers clutched the ball, surveyed the bases, looked at Ike from the corners of his eyes, and quickly glanced toward the girl in the stands. Then he settled to face the batter. As he did so, he saw a pitcher stumble out of the cellar, under orders from Jake Daly, and start for the bull-pen to warm up.

With the bases filled and none out, the play in order was to force the hitter to pop up a fly ball. Using his fast hopper with all his speed, big John got the first man on a stingy foul to the catcher. The crowd relaxed a whit. The boy, encouraged, forced the next Misfit to loop a little fly to himself in the box. Fans roared approval, and the infield went back to play for the next man at first. They might as well have stood where they were, with gloves off. Somers fanned his man for the third out, and bedlam broke loose. It does not matter that John Somers, first to bat in the last half, walloped a long triple, or that the Royals ran wild to score six runs before being retired. It was as if the Misfits, crashing confidently into a great brick wall, found the wall turning resentful and taking the aggressive. They were buried under an avalanche of brick and mortar.

The game, to all intents and purposes, ended right there. Dorothy Main, in the stand, wanted to kiss the big fellow. Jake Daly actually did so. Alibi Ike belted Jake on the back in sheer exuberance.

Harve Morgan raved, gibed, howled and laughed derisively, but his efforts to divert John's attention in the remaining rounds were vain as a raindrop's efforts to drown a duck. Big John ignored his former manager. Striking out the last Misfit, in the ninth, he turned to Morgan and grinned.

"Hope you'll like the big league, Harve, from what you've seen of it."

Then, with a word to Dorothy Main, beseeching her to be sure to wait for him, the big boy eluded crazy rooters wishing to carry him on their shoulders, and ran lumbering for the clubhouse and the showers.

"Last sad rites for the Misfit jinx, Jake," said Ike as they plodded across the field through the crowds, unheeding demonstrations by the fans.

"The stuff yuh pulled aint in Reach's book, either," Jake replied. "I've got it figured out, Ike, about the kid hatin' old Hollenbeck Adams, closer'n glue. But this stuff about Morgan, now, and the girl?"

"She said she'd be glad to come on and root for the kid," Ike explained. "I asked her when I heard Flynn had brung in Morgan for Adams. You're payin' her expenses, yuh know."

"If she come all the way from Australia," Jake assented. "But this Morgan, what did they want with him?"

"Old John Flynn told Holly that Harve Morgan's the only bird in the world which can rattle the big felluh."

"Like I can rattle the Washn'ton monument," exulted Jake Daly.

"IF these Misfits ever win another game from the Royals, it'll be because y've lost your mind, Jake, and sent me in there to pitch with my old soup-bone," said Ike next morning after he and Jake Daly had finished congratulating John Somers and his bride.

"Holly hasn't recovered yet," said Jake. "He can't believe he lost six out of seven to us. He's sick over it."

"I should worry if he never gets well."

This was John Somers, who was outblushing his bride as far as from left field to first base.

Strategy Hawkins Talks

Mr. Woolley is a business expert himself, and when he writes a story he puts into it ideas that are worth money to every reader.

By EDWARD MOTT WOOLLEY

STRATEGY HAWKINS tore open the telegram, and a minute later turned to Delia Jones, his secretary.

"Please answer this in the usual way," he said, "and send it 'collect.' It's another one of those restaurant cases!"

Turning back to his desk, Hawkins dug into a bunch of documents, and Delia scanned the message with assaying eyes. It read:

Strategy Hawkins,
Seventh Floor, Trust Bldg.,
Metropolis.

Wire your terms for a few days in Hubville. Am in clutches of my creditors. Fast work necessary to save me.

JULIUS C. HUNGER,
Proprietor, Palais d'Hunger.

Delia's lip curled as her fingers flew over the typewriter keys:

Terms one thousand dollars cash retainer and additional fee dependent on results.

"If Mr. Hunger is in the hands of his creditors, we're not apt to hear from him again," Delia suggested as she pulled the messenger-call lever. "A thousand dollars—"

"If he's shrewd enough to scent a way out of his creditors' clutches, he's smart enough to have cash tucked away somewhere for emergencies," retorted Hawkins. "He comes from intellectual stock or his middle name wouldn't be Cæsar—which apparently it is. We'll hear from him before lunch, Delia. Make sure my emergency traveling bag is properly equipped, for I wont have time to get home."

"You spoke of getting new pajamas," hinted his secretary.

"Get them for me, if you please." Hawkins handed her a small wad of currency. "And collars or anything that may be lacking. Linen for two or three days will be sufficient. By that time Hunger will either be out of the woods or hopelessly lost in them. If he measures up to our psychology

tests, as I surmise from the tone of his telegram he will, the prognosis will be favorable. We'll have no trouble in handling the creditors scientifically, Delia."

"We seldom do," agreed the girl. "But what shall I do with the president of the Cast-iron Chair Company? He has an engagement with you for tomorrow."

Hawkins drummed on his desk with his pencil.

"Business is distressingly good, Delia," he observed. "I fear the Cast-iron Chair people must wait—Hunger's case is more urgent, even if the fee *is* smaller. There is more in this work of ours than mere money. Use the proper contact with the Chair people, Delia, but hold them off."

At eleven forty-five Hawkins again tore open a yellow envelope:

> Have transferred one thousand dollars by wire to your credit. Will meet you train arriving Hubville ten forty-five tonight.
>
> HUNGER.

HAWKINS rode in Hunger's roadster to the Feeders' Club that night, and on the way applied certain secret mental tests, with excellent reactions. Besides, Hunger possessed a most pleasing distinction. Personality is important in the restaurant business. He was thirty-eight, nattily garbed and businesslike, but withal showed evidence of mental distress.

"Hunger," observed Hawkins, "I take it your troubles have not come from the wrong contact with your patrons, nor from the contact of patrons with wrong cookery. This gratifies me, for otherwise the retainer you have paid might be less conducive to results."

"I get along with people, and I'm a judge of *cuisines,*" conceded Hunger. "Yet humiliation and failure beset me, Mr. Hawkins. For five years I've clung to the edge of the abyss over which have gone—I don't recall the exact percentage of *restaurateurs* who—"

"Ninety-four and three-quarters per cent of them fail, or disappear, leaving assorted notes and accounts payable," supplied Hawkins. "But gird yourself with courage, Hunger. I see already a way to put the credit hounds off the scent."

"I am not overoptimistic," regretted Hunger. "I have a most extraordinary museum of unpaid bills, and although in my establishment I feed many hundreds of people daily, I still accumulate bills, bills, bills, until I am obliged to keep some of them in the pie cabinet, sir. I now have six days to clean up my indebtedness, or—"

Here they alighted at the club, and soon afterward were in executive session, with easy-chairs, a box of cigars and of course sundry paraphernalia befitting this age of constitutional rights and prohibition.

AT ten minutes to midnight Hawkins was getting limbered up—his extraordinary memory hitting on all six.

"Example is the soul of precept," he observed to Julius Cæsar Hunger, "and really I must tell you the story of Hen Cookie, a restaurant man down at Blodgett City.

"Cookie had been shipping-clerk for a handkerchief factory, and after ten years resigned because the vice-president's eighth cousin needed a job. Cookie thought the world, for him, had come to an end; and after hunting work for six months had about decided to jump off the bridge. He happened to think, however, that his wife knew how to cook; so they started a lunch counter in a hole in a wall—five stools. An old aunt, mentally unbalanced, supplied fifty-six dollars as capital.

"Cookie thought that cooking was the whole secret of a restaurant, and on this basis expanded—on his debts—until the sheriff considered him worth closing up.

"By the time he'd squirmed out by giving thirty-day notes to all his creditors, he began to see that things must move faster; so he had a sign painted, 'Hurry-up Counter,' and reopened.

"His outlook was still very crude on the whole philosophy of appetite. I can best exemplify this by citing 'Doughnut Charlie,' an old lunch-counter chap who prided himself that he had fed more doughnuts to people than any restaurant man in the United States. But at sixty he sold his lunch counter for one hundred and twenty-five dollars—ninety dollars of which went to collectors. Charlie had been no sales-philosopher. His patrons had used him merely to exchange twelve-cylinder appetites for enough doughnuts to extinguish hunger temporarily for the least money—i. e., ten cents. For forty years Charlie had aided and abetted these customers. In consuming doughnuts they had a definite financial plan; he had none in selling doughnuts—except to stir eating impulses that meant only down-and-outism for himself in old age.

"No, Cookie didn't concentrate on

doughnuts, but he had no vision or finesse in the art of discovering or creating dilettante appetites and then satisfying them at a profit."

"Ah!" murmured Hunger. "I begin already to see—"

"A lot of the things salesmen sell are nothing but doughnuts in disguise," continued Hawkins. "Unless you plant in a young man's brain the seed of the impulse to buy a forty-dollar-suit,—just to illustrate,—he'll keep on buying your 'specials' at fifteen dollars. Salesmanship is not filling wants but the scientific sowing of impulses and the cultivation of the blades when they sprout.

"Vaguely—like yourself at present—Cookie began to see that a business could be built out of the struggling impulses of the people about him, provided he knew how to direct these untrained motives that yearned for expression. Accordingly he chose a new location, with the aid of a little high finance upon which I need not dwell at this late hour. He now devoted himself to the development of vision within and a new front for his establishment. But the vision, unhappily, was limited chiefly to the acquisition of rococo, and of gilt cherubim on the ceiling."

"They may have brought him some business," suggested Hunger.

"No," sighed Hawkins, reaching for a match. "About the only practical purpose of cherubim is to benefit guides who take tourists through statehouses for a fee. It is quite proper for taxpayers to acquire plaster angels, but Cookie afterward discovered ways to make people eat that were based on better psychology."

HAWKINS rested while he lighted another cigar. He resumed:

"A few months later, heavily involved in another series of debts, he appeared at my office for advice. It happened that my research department had been investigating the methods of 1468 successful meal-dispensers; and believe me, Cookie took back with him all the mental baggage he could carry. But tonight, Mr. Hunger, let me confine myself to a running narrative of the high spots. My specialists will go into details with you later, and supply directions for sowing the seeds of eating impulses, and for harvesting the ripened crops of buying motives.

"The stories of these successful chaps held Cookie spellbound. He couldn't help thinking how queer it was that all these men could play their respective games with such honest cunning, while his only game had been to satisfy plebeian appetites at a loss.

"Cookie told me all he could remember about his business. Very few of these facts, of course, were on record, for although his office used a bottle of ink a week keeping books, said books merely told him how much his debts were. That's a common foible of offices.

"So we set to work to dissect his business and reduce it to writing. Careful observation revealed one hundred and forty-nine of his regular diners who had well-worked plans to live on fifteen, twenty and thirty cents a day. They had analyzed Cookie's menus down to the free pickles, and were playing a sort of bridge-whist game of combinations to beat the food-market. Thus boiled rice was a good filler, and baked potatoes could be eaten skins and all, along with a couple of rolls. No coffee —water. Coffee sometimes pays five hundred per cent or more net profit, but water has no such trait.

"In other words, these thrifty customers were playing their game quite skillfully, Mr. Hunger, with the facilities that had cost my friend Cookie a satchelful of money. Yet *his* only game was to go broke.

"Further observation convinced him that numerous star boarders were doing even better than the one hundred and forty-nine budget persons—in fact were living on the best Cookie's Rococo Eating-house provided, at less than half price. There are one hundred and seventy-six ways to beat the restaurant cashier, once you educate your waiter."

"Then I have discovered only nineteen of them!" Hunger exclaimed, in dismay.

"Listen," advised Hawkins. "Cookie's place had come to be a regular banquet-hall for slick and well-groomed fellows like Bucket-shop Eddie, Biscuit Joe, Hurry-up Abe and Caruso Frank; and what they didn't know about the eating game wouldn't have made a stick of type. Bucket-shop Eddie told me afterward that he found it possible to live for practically nothing if cashier and waiters had backslid from religion—provided, of course, the *restaurateurs* had taken no college degree in restaurant accounts. Cookie today has at least the equivalent of a degree. Furthermore, those who lived on very low

budgets at Cookie's expense have been frozen out by a twenty-five-cent minimum charge.

"Of course such leaks aren't peculiar to eating shops. A kind-hearted garage friend of mine liked to be helpful to customers, and I estimated afterward that he had done nearly four thousand dollars' worth of free work in a year—little 'oh, nothing' jobs.

"SPEAKING of accounts," reminded Hawkins, "recalls the fact that few persons—even those so engaged—realize that every kind of business needs its special textbook on mathematics. Permit me to diverge for a moment, Hunger. I am reminded of a restaurant bankruptcy case. One of the witnesses was the ex-manager, one Casper Knowall, who spent a painful hour explaining under cross-examination what he didn't know about restaurants. He couldn't just recall how many square feet of dining-room and kitchen space, under given conditions, would be the right proportion, or how many ounces of bread were the dose for one sandwich, or how to figure the shrinkage of meat in roasting and boiling.

"Knowall was not a little embarrassed when invited to analyze the year's sales of meals into normal proportions of food costs, wages, rent, fuel and so on. And he was visibly worried, as evidenced by ridges of thought under the façade of his dome, when the lawyer inquired how much capital would be needed to start a restaurant in the city of Steelburg, with one hundred thousand people—how much furniture, linen, silver, how much he should pay for his music, rent and so on.

"It was established also that Mr. Knowall had been considered an expert in estimating for banquets. He stated haughtily that two olives were correct for each guest, but was puzzled when called on to explain an instance where his restaurant had supplied eleven olives and ten demi-tasses for every guest without extra charge. Of course it was not brought out who got the surplus coffee and olives. Leaks are not easy to find after they've happened.

"No, Mr. Hunger, I'm not joking when I say that graduates of business administration are needed in business, restaurants included."

Hunger had been fidgeting in apprehension lest Hawkins put him on the stand for cross-examination on the technology of dispensing meals, but the noted philosopher left that ceremony for daylight hours.

"But I was speaking of impulses, Mr. Hunger," Hawkins went on. "If you know how, you can make people laugh or cry at a show; and in your Palais d'Hunger you can fiddle on the feeding emotions of Mr. and Mrs. Homo in the same way. It's so in most everything that's sold.

"Although Cookie at first wouldn't really believe this, he went ahead with some experiments. . . . . Now don't bother to make notes, Hunger; my secretary will give you ample data. Let us see what Cookie found out about average checks. You know that every store is always trying to increase its average sale. If a salesgirl sells an average of one dollar and forty-nine cents per customer this week, the manager tries every scheme he knows to bring it up to one dollar and sixty-three cents next week, and two dollars and eleven cents next year. . . . . What? It can't be done in restaurants? Listen:

"Cookie's average breakfast check was forty-seven cents when he began to keep tabs on the psychology of different food-combinations. When he offered 'poached eggs and plain bread,' along with coffee, the average check went down, but jumped above par when he substituted 'poached eggs on crisp toast,' and put it in red ink on his menu card.

"'Pancakes and pork sausage' had always been as steady as a Wednesday-evening beau, but when Cookie started playing 'browned link sausages with rich-complexioned waffles and crushed maple sugar'—well sir, if the whole house didn't stand up and shout curtain-calls. He wired three times to Vermont for more sugar before he got the right tempo into his menu card.

"You see, it wouldn't pay to go on feeding the whole crowd the same thing every meal until they got tired of it, any more than you'd advertise nothing but baby-blue coats; but anyhow Cookie found he could increase his average check maybe ten or twenty-five per cent at will, by fiddling correctly on the feed-strings.

"Cookie worked out and charted hundreds of combinations by experimenting; and all his former salesmanship looked like the gurgling of an infant.

"Ah!" exclaimed Hawkins, with sudden recollection. "Music hath charms. It's the talisman of the appetite-merchant, if only he knows how to apply it.

"Don't you know, Hunger, that music applied with merchandising science will bring a big increase in trade in almost any line! It's a form of salesmanship that's never been developed to one-tenth of its possibilities. The circus has the plot of it well worked; but circus-music will not sell dinners, and dinner-music wont motivate buyers of trousers or vacant lots.

"To subdue or cheer crazy men, asylum keepers use repertories selected by alienists, and varied to the type of mania. Cookie found he could sway appetites by the same methods—playing the part of alienist himself.

"Eating, you see, is largely a matter of tempo. So is buying a hundred-dollar gown. A man will buy a fur-lined overcoat if you get him in the right mood, and a movie star will fail to register agony if the studio orchestra stops at the critical moment.

"Thus Cookie observed many distraught and love-harassed young women. Left to their own contemplations and the futile attempts of their young men to infuse appetite, they would return him perhaps sixteen and two-thirds cents net profit per capita. Skillful building up of tempo with music would invariably bring up the net to a dollar or more from the girl alone; and increase the masculine profit five hundred per cent, anyway.

"Conversely, Cookie learned to his dismay that he had been killing appetites by building wrong forms of dining tempo. . . . . Sure, I'll furnish you my Musical Key to Appetites."

HAWKINS declined a sixth cigar, but after standing up to brush off the ashes, took one and lighted it. Hunger interpolated some observation on desserts.

"Aha!" quoth Hawkins. "You have given me the cue. Desserts were a troubling proposition with Cookie. Most of his fancy finales were costing him twenty per cent more than he charged for them.

"Here was a big leak, and the chief factors were kitchen space, time and skilled labor. Cookie came up to see me again. Now as nearly as we could get at it, half a million *restaurateurs* had gone broke on desserts, yet had laid their troubles to lack of capital, unfair competition, or red ants. It would take a hundred millionaires shoveling money into the hopper continually to provide shares of stock for this type of business men.

"Cookie took the dilemma by the antlers, and his first move was one of his many surprises—he featured candy as a dessert. There was practically no kitchen cost, and people took to it like a youngster to a lollypop, and spread Cookie's fame."

"I must have lost fortunes in desserts," breathed Hunger, sadly. "I never thought of candy."

"There are 197,642 kinds of candies," Hawkins went on. "Cookie is still springing candy surprises, and his patrons marvel at his generosity. They don't know that his mathematicians have proved by cube root that he has recouped his dessert losses and got on the other side of the dessert fence.

"But of course candy hasn't done it all, Hunger. Cheese—there are some scores of kinds. Yet it wasn't quite so easy to swing some of his patrons to cheese for dessert. My research manager hit on a plan, and we got young Lionel I-forgot-his-name and his chum Maurice to dine at Cookie's every day for a month, at cost, and to order each night a different variety of cheese for dessert.

"Sure, Hunger. . . . . You know the psychology of it as well as I. But you never gave it full importance, or reckoned it in figures. That's a curious kink in human nature. Men know things in the back of their heads, but never take the trouble to find out in terms of dollars just what the aforesaid things mean to them.

"If three men sit down to breakfast in a dining-car and find a fourth guest regaling himself with ham and eggs, two of the others will order ham and eggs—on the average. Out of every three persons who catch a fourth with figs in cream, one and five-sixths men and five-eighths of a woman will order this delicacy. Now in practical application this means that you can make your guests eat what you wish—without their knowing that you wish it. You can also make people buy red or blue ribbon—but that's another story.

"CONSIDER lemon pie!" pursued Hawkins.

"Ah! Lemon pie!" purred Hunger. "I have been too dumb to tabulate such facts and make use of them, but good lemon pie is almost unanimous."

"It is," agreed Hawkins. "Lemon pie, indeed! You bring me to a most luscious place in my narrative. It was not part of Cookie's scheme to dispense altogether

with pies or other tantalizing closing strains to his feeding compositions. Far be it! In so far as he could sell pies profitably by the piece, yes indeed.

"Cookie, you see, had been deeply inoculated with the friendly microbes of salesmanship, and knew the futility of the time-worn and pseudo-serious menu asseveration about 'home-made' pie."

"There's no such animal," agreed Hunger, "outside the family kitchen."

"Buncombe is always poor salesmanship," said Hawkins. "Cookie had his home-made pies constructed in the home kitchens of famed cooks. This not only took the overhead expense out of his restaurant, but gave him a product instantly synonymous with a hundred-percent increase in price. Moreover, he put a tariff on it by requiring a day's notice when patrons wanted real home-made pie.

"What? . . . . Don't cavil, Hunger. Cookie surely did—does it still; and his customers get down in humility and send in their pie-reservations. Look here, Hunger, when *quality* is one hundred per cent what the seller says it is, the people surely make a trail to get it. But that venerable 'home-made' dodge has helped out professional receivers in every line of business.

"Yes, Mr. Hunger, once you learn to play upon the gustatory nerve and taste corpuscles with the fine touch of a true food artist-salesman, you'll have your customers well in control. Of course you know the taste-center is located in the *gyrus uncinatus* of the brain, and—"

"I fear I'm still a babe in the restaurant business," sighed Hunger. "I've never played on the *gyrus,* but I should like to begin."

"The great trouble, I repeat," said Hawkins, "is the neglect of schools of business administration to put on courses in taste-handling. Indeed, you could build a nice public library from the things most salesmen don't know about the psychology of impulses.

"For example, my client Cookie desired, as I have explained, to reduce the consumption of fancy desserts in his table-d'hôte dinners. Among his steady and prohibitive consumers of debit desserts (entered on the left of his Profit and Loss account) was Van Hootyn, assistant treasurer of a brickyard.

"'Wouldn't Mr. Van Hootyn have just a little additional portion of the heavy soup?' the clever waiter would say. 'And another roll?' Soup and rolls are more often on the credit side.

"So when the meal approached its close with Plombière aux Marrons, Van Hootyn was barely able to whisper to the *garçon:* 'No, George; leave me out.'

"Ah, yes," reiterated Hawkins, "salesmanship is the delicate art of discovering the seat of impulses along any given line, and of developing and controlling these impulses in accordance with prediscovered essential facts. But first you've got to know just what you propose to accomplish; otherwise you may arouse buying impulses that will turn out to be *Frankensteins.* That was the trouble with a merchant who got too clever with his advertisements of hairpins, and brought an avalanche of females who blocked his store for a day and cost him maybe a half-barrel of profits he might have made on dress goods.

"UP to this time," Hawkins ran on, "Cookie hadn't appreciated the advantage of surrounding himself with the right organization; so he got a dozen nurses, telephone girls, garage men, traffic cops and janitors on his New Business staff—"

"'New Business' staff?" inquired Hunger. "I have heard the term applied to banks—the Tenth National Trust & Savings Institution has such a staff. I understand it to be a staff organized to hunt up people with money which may be deposited in the Tenth National, et cetera. But getting business for a feeding institution is—"

"Somewhat more complex," admitted Hawkins, "but on that account more alluring to the salesman who yearns to increase the size of his hat. It is a curious fact, Hunger, that my own business, with a surtax which leaves a vast hole in it, is possible only because so few concerns have New Business departments."

"The personnel of Cookie's New Business staff is unique," ventured Hunger. "I do not just get the functions of the nurse, telephone girl, garage man, traffic cop and janitor."

"They are ex-officio functionaries, Hunger. A little honorable money animates their impulses. Their sole duty is to supply Cookie with names of people of suitable means who may be so situated as to benefit by his services.

"Nurses, you see, are in touch with

housewives who face the servant problem, or who are not well able to manage meals at home.

"Telephone girls—ah, they know so much! Yet Cookie asks them only for names of people who may derive advantages from an acquaintance with Cookie.

"The garage man and traffic cop? It is self-evident—Officer Mike Terry directs a hundred tourist parties to restaurants every day.

"Countless business men fail, Hunger, simply for lack of ingenuity to get information on markets.

"I have mentioned of janitors, Mr. Hunger. They are most valuable members of a New Business staff. They know more about some people's affairs than anybody else except doctors, and they're more approachable than medics. It's a mistake to assume that janitors are high priced as New Business scouts. They'll do more market exploration for five dollars than a bricklayer will lay bricks for a hundred dollars. Up in the Sunnyside Apartment Building, for example, lived more than fifty couples without children, and most of them took their dinner out—maybe lunch too. So in sending his scientific taste-developer menu card to these people at intervals, Cookie secured concentrated advertising among restaurant spenders. He skipped the families with babies, as reported by the janitor. This functionary kept for Cookie's benefit a perpetual inventory of 'eatable' tenants, as he called them.

"THAT reminds me of Sam Pettigrew, tax collector of my town," Hawkins went on. "Sam isn't exactly on his toes when it comes to up-to-date personal-property lists. Last spring his 'delinquents' included forty-eight men who'd been dead five years—and presumably only Gabriel could reach them with a summons; yet Sam spent good city money for space in the newspapers to threaten these dead men with summonses if they didn't step up and pay.

"Restaurant men sent out 469,001 carloads of advertising menu cards and circular letters last year—"

"The *one* car must have been mine," explained Hunger. "The printers are among my keenest-scented creditors."

"All these carloads contained sixty billion appeals to come in and eat, Mr. Hunger. If one per cent of the invitations had switched new guests into the eating-houses, probably several thousand restaurant proprietors would now be looking forward to retirement. But from evidence in hand we are forced to assume that 99.999 per cent of these appeals were wasted—because the saporific or taste-producing ganglia were not touched."

HAWKINS consulted his watch.

"Five minutes past two," he observed. "Allow me to be brief and give you only a sample or two of Cookie's impulse-breeding letters to 'prospects' and customers. We need to study the science of the skillful press-agent—of course rejecting the crudities and untruths. Ah, yes, our job is the more difficult because we deal with facts, though we must be imaginative enough to adorn them—make them live!

"How is it that my friend Ketchum, publicity man for the circus, fills that vast tent every day? Ha! Ketchum well knows the human brain. He understands just what keys to touch inside your head, Hunger, to make you pass up your engagements tomorrow, leave your Palais d'Hunger to the bus girls if necessary, and hie yourself to the big show. You go—why? Because Ketchum wants you there? Helno—because *you* want to go—you itch to go! Ketchum has short-circuited the circus ganglia in your impulse centers and there's no help for it.

"Now then, Cookie worked on this very basis—though modified. He sent out his invitations on glorified telegraph-blanks. For instance:

" 'My dear Mrs. Epicure: Sunday evening, when you and Mr. Epicure are surfeited with meats and vegetables, perhaps you feel the call for something different and tasty. Let us set before you a plate of our hot biscuits (made by a widow far-famed for home cookery), along with sweet clover comb honey and a pot of hot chocolate.

" 'And then, if you wish, a dainty taste of home-made peach preserves and a finger of cocoanut cake. We should like to whisper to you the name of the cake-maker—but she has bound us to secrecy.'

"Or perhaps he wrote something else. I am quoting from memory, Mr. Hunger, merely to give you the thought:

" 'When other foods pall on your appetite, there is always one dish that has its call—the Palais d'Hunger salad of lettuce-hearts, ripe tomatoes, and young

onions if you wish. Of course French dressing—compounded in accordance with the formula of the famous French chef Jacques Loucoules. And then your favorite cheese and toasted crackers—and coffee.' "

"I feel my *gyrus* stirring already," muttered Hunger, who was leaning back with his eyes closed. "Let us adjourn to the all-night dining-room, Mr. Hawkins. My word—I wonder if they have hot biscuits and honey! We must have them. The night *chef* shall make some. And I propose a dab of Gorgonzola cheese or your own choice, and a pot of tea."

THE night was well spent—in two meanings of the term—when Hawkins declined the last biscuit on the plate and accepted a slim but genteel cigar.

"Yes," he was saying, "the danger is very great of creating popularity which in the end will necessitate selling your upholstered roadster and riding thereafter in a flivver. Don't 'broadcast' products, however delectable, which will eat into your friendship with the banker. Conversely, you should build up products to meet popularity and profits.

"Cookie knew, for instance, that a certain dish carried an approximate net profit of twenty-nine cents, and another dish netted eight cents. It was good strategy to create a vogue for the former—always remembering that popularity based merely on a salesman's artifice made business that could not endure.

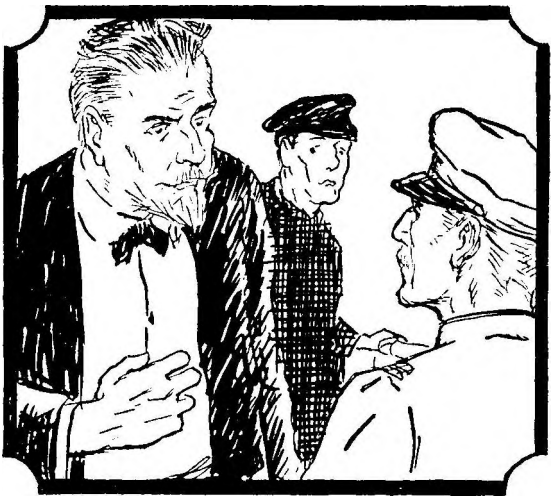
"Cookie had a law that the composition and taste of a dish must be the basis. The food concoction must be tried on the advertising man—not the advertising man on the food. Before Cookie came to me, he had used the advertising copy of an agency which theoretically paid a genius one thousand dollars a week and cigars to write ads about things he couldn't bother to look at. The agency quit business owing the genius twenty-seven weeks' salary and the cigar dealer $576.82.

"No, Hunger, the affliation must come from the honey and biscuits. To this end Cookie labored unfailingly with his *chef de cuisine.*

"Now, Hunger," concluded Hawkins, as he rang for the elevator to take him to his room on the sixth floor, "we will lay my 'Strategy Appetite Plan' before your creditors in the morning. It has never yet failed to work when I recommended and supervised it.

"Forget your creditors for the time-being, Hunger—I know just how to penetrate the proper fissures of their cerebral hemispheres, to bring them into accord.

"Yes, you can pay my additional fee in installments, as you gain profitable control of more and more appetites."



Politics Is Politics

They are mighty interesting, these South Coast folks of Louisiana. Mr. Frost, who wrote "The Daughter of Nez Coupé," has here written another remarkably attractive story about them.

By Meigs O. Frost

IN the inner and private office of the suite that was labeled "Governor" sat two men.

One, swinging back in his swivel chair behind the great flat-topped mahogany desk, looked out through the window at the mighty curve of the chocolate-brown Mississippi. Down its gorge of high clay bluffs the huge river swept its way to the sea, past the ancient building that for close to a century had gazed down on its flood—the curiously incongruous structure of black-and-white marble mosaic floors, of quaint and hideous stained glass, of arched iron-framed Gothic windows, and battlemented Norman-French feudal towers that is the capitol of Louisiana.

The other, his chewed cigar-stump short in the corner of his tight-closed mouth, sat with crossed legs in the chair of audience beside the desk.

On the broad blotter between them lay a sheet of paper. Brief pencil notations marked the column of typewritten names that ran down the page. The pay-roll was under the political microscope.

Some such sheet of crinkling parchment, laboriously inscribed with dagger-sharpened quill, lay upon some black oaken table in one of the secret apartments from which, in the long-dead days, the Doges ruled Venice. In those days men went forth from such a room stealthily, to solve with needle-pointed poniard the political problems of their times. Today fountain-pen and typewriter do the work of quill and poniard. But the spirit of the politician has changed little with the ages.

"I've just been looking over Captain Petrie's record." It was the Governor who was speaking. "It looks pretty good to me."

"Oh, there's nothing against Joe Petrie as far as his work goes," smoothly agreed the other. In the State's turbulent politics men knew him as "the Little Feller from New Orleans." The name was either affectionate or damning. There were no neutrals among the men who knew Patrick Morath, whose hundred and twenty pounds of compact, wiry, fighting Irish sinew, topped by a shock of flaming red hair,

flashed in and out of battle in ward-rally, caucus or legislative halls, a stormy petrel on the political seas of his city and his State. Men loved him and fought for him, or they hated him and fought against him. None with whom he came in contact were long indifferent.

"You'll have to remove him 'for cause' and without any other explanation," Morath went on. "The job is appointive. There's no civil-service guff to worry about. Joe's jumped the fence and lined up with the old crowd. In our last judicial district election down there he voted for Williston. Carried a bunch of water-front votes with him, too. It took a lot of work for us to put Lozengill over for the Supreme Court. It was an off election and our majority wasn't anything like what it should have been. That sort of thing encourages the old gang too much. Makes it all the harder to handle 'em next time we come to bat."

"Petrie has been captain of the *Eagle* close to twenty years now," the Governor put in. "He's in line for the captaincy of the Conservation Commission flagship, after all these years on the oyster-department patrol. He has given pretty faithful service to the State of Louisiana."

"Service is service," conceded the Little Feller. "But," he added softly, "politics is politics. It was politics put you here. It's politics is going to put you higher. And you play politics just one way, Governor. Reward your friends and smash your enemies. Got to have reasonable efficiency on the pay-roll, of course. But you don't give men jobs for their good looks—nor altogether for their efficiency. If the pay-roll can't deliver the votes in a pinch, what's the use of having it?"

HE spoke gently, as one who wraps elaborate courtesy about a child to whom something must be explained carefully. The Governor was a queer bird, he recognized. Made a fine candidate. But these reform leaders—you never could tell. Political amateurs, the best of 'em.

"You know the fight we had under your leadership, Governor, to pry that old gang loose. Oh, I know you had a landslide once the upper parishes began to swing your way and the band-wagon-jumpers climbed aboard. But the heart and the guts of the old gang's organization is down there in the city. And you had a roller-coaster trip to Baton Rouge compared to the sledding it took to get our man in the mayor's office down in City Hall, when we bucked the gang that was bucking you. We licked 'em. But the margin was too damn' slim for comfort."

"It *was* slim," said the Governor reminiscently. Through his memory flashed the thought of that pivotal election, when he had come to the city in person, and headed the new organization whose enthusiastic youngsters had guarded the polls and slugged toe to toe with the desperate heelers of the beaten Ring as they sought by intimidation to swing their tottering chances into even a narrow-margin victory.

NO mind-reader ever followed his subject's thoughts more clearly than the Little Feller.

"Well, there you are," said he, giving just time enough for the thoughts to sink in. "And there's more fighting ahead. Can't let a man on the pay-roll buck us and get away with it—not even old Joe Petrie. Not just yet! Look at those levees out there."

He waved a hard-fisted hand toward the west bank of the great river, where the long lines of the protective earthworks shone tawny in the afternoon sunlight. "Old Cap'n Joe Petrie is just like a leak in that levee. Got to plug the little leaks—quick!" His jutting, red-bristling jaw crunched on the cigar-stump at the word. "If you don't, the little leaks get to be the big ones—and your levee's out."

The Little Feller was a psychologist of merit. He had picked exactly the right comparison for the Governor. The State's chief executive, like other Louisiana planters, had done his turn on levee-patrol when mud-smeared, water-soaked men with sand-bags fought the swirling demon that roared defiance at them and gnawed crumbling and dissolving banks of earth from beneath their feet while at the same time, far behind them, it was gurgling in sinister glee as its sand-boils attacked the precious cane- and cotton-fields from below.

The Governor nodded his head slowly as his eyes scanned the great river, so peacefully silent now. Just like the voting strength of the people between elections, he mused. Yes, you had to keep the levee intact at all hazards—political levees, especially.

His friends were already laying the whispering foundation for his step from the governorship to the seat of the junior

United States Senator from Louisiana. (Political movements so very rarely originate with the candidate himself! It is always "my friends have urged upon me!") Nor had they misjudged his ambition. His plantation and his cotton factor's office in the city were in competent hands. He had the leisure—and the income—for national politics now.

The Little Feller was probably right. Politics was politics. You couldn't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, ever. Of course, you had to demand reasonable efficiency of the pay-roll. But also you had the right to expect it to deliver the votes for the organization in a pinch. Without organization, you got nowhere in that game. And an organization without the jobs—well, it might come in the millennium. Now and then in great crises, men would leave their businesses and fight political battles. But it was the organization that guarded your interests twenty-four hours a day and three hundred and sixty-five days a year. Petrie's name was only one of many on that typewritten sheet. Pity, the game wasn't played differently. But then, he didn't make the rules.

THE Governor swung suddenly straight in his swivel chair. After all, Joe Petrie was only a minor incident—even if he did rather like the weather-beaten old chap.

"Who's this man Mike McGuire you want to put in Petrie's job?" he queried abruptly.

"Well, Mike's no world-beater, Dick," the Little Feller admitted. "But he votes right. And his friends vote right. He's one of the boys in the Eighth Ward. Been working on the wharves and the river-front generally quite awhile now. Knows those oyster-patrol waters pretty well. And he's got a sort of hunch he'd make a hit somewhere in a blue cap with *'Captain'* on it."

The Little Feller laughed boyishly. That laugh was a revelation. Like magic the hard-bitten lines of the political fighter's face softened into a countenance intensely human and magnetic. You sensed how he could sway his ward-meeting audiences and lead his political cohorts like a hypnotist.

"How'd you come to pick him, Patrick?" asked the Governor.

"That's a story in itself, Dick," smiled Morath. "Mike's courtin' the Widda McShane's girl Mona, down in the Eighth. Came to call and sit out with Mona a couple weeks ago. The Widda emptied a bucket of cistern water on him and called him a lazy political dock-loafer.

"Mike was up at my office at seven o'clock the next morning, before my porter opened the doors. That bath gave him a life's ambition. I was castin' around for somebody to recommend for Petrie's place. I asked Mike if he thought he could handle the job. Could he? If he gets it, I think he's going to spend his first month's pay on a blue uniform and brass buttons like an admiral, just to show the Widda McShane that politics has its glories."

Involuntarily the Governor smiled and picked up his pencil.

"I hate to do it," he said, "but I reckon I'll have to," and down against the name of Joseph Petrie went the cabalistic mark that spelled the end of nearly two decades in the service of his State.

"McGuire will get his commission the first of the month," said the Governor.

The minor incident was over.

IN the doorway of the private office loomed a broad-shouldered figure of a man.

"Hello, Commissioner," said the Governor. "Draw up a chair and light a stogie. Patrick and I are nearly through swinging the ax."

"I've come to kidnap you," boomed the outdoor voice of old Alexander Winston, head of the State's Department of Conservation. "We've finished those surveys of the public hunting-grounds and the bird-and-game preserve at Pass-à-Loutre. Clubhouse all built; keeper's quarters all occupied. Everything's ready for your inspection. And you're overdue on your promise to run over the oyster-grounds situation out there by Lake Borgne and Mississippi Sound. I'm going to hold you to your word this time, Governor. We take the evening train to New Orleans and go out on the flagship *Pelican* in the morning."

"Now, listen, Commissioner—" began the Governor.

"I've listened," broke in Winston, "to more alibis on that trip than a bum politician springs after he picks a loser. And I've just checked up on your engagements with your private secretary. He shows a clean slate for the week-end. That's all. You're coming."

The Governor threw up his hands in mock terror.

"Don't shoot, Aleck. I'll climb down. I'm coming," said he. "By the way, we've just had to decorate a couple of your men with the Order of the Tin Can. Old Joe Petrie's among 'em. Jumped the fence last judicial election down in the city and gave aid and comfort to the enemy."

"Yes. The Little Feller told me it was coming," said Winston wryly. "Sorry. Petrie's a good man. But politics is politics."

"I suppose you want to kidnap me on that early evening train to New Orleans?"

"All you have to do is climb aboard your machine at the door. I've been over to the Mansion and had your bag packed."

"You take the money—win, place and show," said the Governor.

SLEEPILY in the foggy darkness of the hour before dawn, the following morning, the Governor awoke in his suite at the St. Charles, to the insistent ringing of his bedside telephone.

"Waiting for you in the lobby," sounded Commissioner Winston's voice roaringly in his ears. The Commissioner, men said, shook the west-bank levees when he stood on the east bank and spoke above a whisper. "Throw on some clothes, Dick, and come along. Breakfast on board the boat. All's ready to hop off down the river."

Speedily the Governor dressed. In the big official car he was whirled down to the Canal Street wharf, where the whole misty vista of the broad stream was tremulous with the rose-pink glory of the rising sun.

"Now that I've got you out of bed," grinned Winston, "I've got a confession to make. Late last night I got a report from Captain Higgins of the flagship *Pelican*. Something's gone wrong with her engines, and it'll take a week to get her in shape. But the *Eagle* was here, and we're going on her. She's smaller than the *Pelican*, of course, and you wont be half so luxurious. But it'll be good for your soul, and I knew if I didn't get you this week-end, it would be a month or two before I could get you away from the fleshpots."

"Play it straight across the board, now the game's open," smiled the Governor. "Now we've got this far, I'll see it through in a rowboat if we have to."

They climbed out of the machine and headed for the wharf apron. A stocky figure stepped toward them.

The man's hand stretched forth.

"McGuire's me name, Gov'ner," said he. "Mike McGuire of the Eight' Ward. The Little Feller phoned me las' night about the job. I wanted tuh t'ank yuh. Seein's how I'll have the boat by the first of the mont', I t'ought I'd go along this trip wit' yuh. It's O. K. wit' the Commishner."

The Governor was without his morning coffee, and the little sixty-foot *Eagle* looked mighty small, lying at the landing float—mighty small, after his memories of the *Pelican's* comfortable cabin.

"Yes, yes. Quite so. Glad to see you, McGuire," he said abruptly, and headed for the landing stairs, without even shaking hands. He was not altogether trained to practical politics, was the Governor.

"All right, Captain Petrie," resounded Commissioner Winston's voice as the last of the party crossed the rail.

"Cast off," came the command. The little *Eagle* quivered to the throb as her twin engines turned, swung out from the wharf, and headed downstream.

THROUGH the dense river traffic of a busy day's dawn, Petrie headed her with deft steersmanship as he leaned against the wheel in the pilot-house forward. Dark mahogany of face, his faded blue eyes centering a network of wrinkles from many years in the blazing sun of the South Coast's wide expanse of tumbled waters, he had spent his lifetime in the tangled maze of its bayous and rivers, its swamps and shallow bays. Its oyster-reefs he could find in the dark. Its oystermen, shrimpers and fishers he knew by their first names.

Bitterly heavy was his heart today as under his guiding touch the *Eagle* shot downstream on the last long cruise he was to command. But the dark old face showed no sign of the thoughts that were marching in steady procession behind its mask.

He it had been who had taken the *Eagle* out on her first oyster-reef patrol, when the conservation laws that guarded those reefs from unchecked raiding were the triumph of reform and the jest of old-line politicians of the State. The dark blue steel of the little one-pounder rapid-fire rifle on its conical navy mounting in the bow was a reminder of those days, when the hardy, lawless crews of the oyster-fleet, their trawling raids on the reefs hitherto unregulated, hotly resented State interfer-

ence with immemorial rights and fought back.

There had been battles on the South Coast in those times. Joe Petrie's ribs were yet scored with the ridges of a great scar, where had slashed the knife of one defiant oysterman who had raided at will with his trawls and challenged arrest. That oysterman had lain since that day in a tide-washed grave beneath the gnarled and twisted trees of Grand Chenière.

But the fighting days were over now. The little one-pounder was not fired, even in practice, by the *Eagle's* crew. Up and down the coast, from Isle Dernière to the Pearl River, the oystermen knew that Joe Petrie was "square"—that he "meant business." They stopped at his bare signal.

Down-river sped the little cruiser, while on her upper deck, beneath the taut-stretched awning, the Governor, filled with coffee and breakfast and content, riffled through the pages of the morning paper. Beside him, stretched also on a canvas deck-chair the Commissioner smoked his huge briar and held silence. Aft with the small crew he was soon to command, Mike McGuire swapped stories and spat accurately over the rail from the reservoir of a freshly shaven cheek bulging with plug.

The Governor looked up from his paper, crumpled it and tossed it overside into the swirling current.

"Thank the Lord, I'm free from trouble for a couple of days, anyway," said he. "Not a delegation or a committee—unless they take to seaplanes. By the way, Aleck, does Captain Petrie know that McGuire is his successor? A bit embarrassing, in a way, this shift of ours from the *Pelican* to the *Eagle*."

"Trust McGuire to let him know, if he hadn't learned already," said Winston shortly. "But as a matter of fact, I told Petrie about it last night."

"Raise a row?"

"Well, it hit him pretty hard after all these years, you know. But he took it quietly enough."

"What'll he do?"

"Oh, there's always something for a man who knows the South Coast like Petrie."

Somehow the Governor felt a sudden surge of irritation.

"Damn it all, Aleck," he exploded, "there are times when I disagree like the very devil with the Little Feller. He's a wonderful political leader, of course. We'd have been lost without him, this last campaign. But his whole political philosophy is so damn' cold-blooded. That eternal 'politics is politics' is beginning to get my goat."

"Dog eat dog, in the main," agreed Winston. "By the way, Dick, down below a few moments ago, Petrie asked me if he could have a few minutes with you alone."

"Why—" began the Governor, his voice a bit doubtful. He was beginning to shrink somewhat from the avalanche of pleas for special favor.

"Oh, he wont beg for his job, or anything embarrassing like that," interposed the Commissioner. "And knowing Petrie the way I do, I can guarantee he wont be abusive."

"I wasn't thinking of that," lied the Governor irritably. "But send him up."

A MOMENT later the weather-beaten figure in flannel shirt and belted blue denim trousers stood diffidently before him on the little upper deck. The Governor's irritation was in check.

"Hullo, Captain Petrie," he said cordially, with the customary handshake. "I'm sorry things turned out as they did."

"It was 'bout that I wanted to speak to yo', seh," said Petrie in his soft South Coast voice. "I aint a-askin' fo' reinstatement or anything lak that—though 'tween yo' an' me, Gov'neh, it's a pretty raw deal. But I s'pose politics is politics."

The Governor winced imperceptibly. There it was again.

"I know, o' co'se, yo'll fieh me fo' cause." Petrie's voice took on a faint tinge of bitterness. "Yo' might have a job provin' it in any co't if I wanted to fight back. But I aint a-fightin'.

"What I wanted to let yo' know was why I went out an' made that fight fo' Judge Williston. I done had a pretty clean slate on this coast fo' twenty-thirty yeahs, an' I aint a-wantin' to get it dirty now. When I quit yo' side an' made that fight, I had a mighty special reason fo' it.

"I done knowed Judge Williston eveh sence he was a tyke in sho't pants. Took him an' his fatheh on fishin' an' huntin' trips. An' a long time befo' he run fo' the Supreme Co't in this last fight, he done somethin' fo' me I aint a-neveh goin' fo'-get.

"I don't reckon yo' know my boy. He's doin' fine in N'Awlyins now. But he was

in a lotto' trouble awhile back. Just a kid clerkin' in the Company's canal office in Harvey. Theah was money missin'. A sma't office manageh had him 'rested.

"I didn' have much money. I went to Judge Williston. He wa'n't no judge then, jus' a practisin' lawyeh. He took that case, Gov'neh, an' he wouldn't take a cent o' my money. He got my boy out clean. Then they foun' who done took that money. It wasn't my boy.

"Gov'neh, I done tol' Judge Williston I'd go to hell fo' him any time he spoke up. I sho' would. When he come out fo' judge of the Supreme Co't this time, I tol' him I'd swing all my frien's fo' him. He says: 'Cap'n Joe, yo' lay off. If I lose, it'll cost yo' yo'r job. May anyway, even if I win.' I wo'ked my head off fo' him. An' I'm a-tellin' yo', Gov'neh, if he ran fo' anything from dog-catcheh to President, I'd do it again."

THE Governor spoke. Actually, he was thinking aloud.

"It's a pity you didn't vote for him quietly and say nothing. Nobody would have minded that." He felt like a cad the minute the words were out. There *were* times when the Little Feller's political doctrine irked—distinctly.

Joe Petrie didn't stiffen. He didn't even raise the soft tone of his South Coast voice. But his eyes looked steadily into the Governor's eyes.

"I aint a-boot-leggin' my frien'ship, Gov'neh," he said slowly. "When I backs a man, I plays him straight across the boa'd, an' out in the wide-open."

Impulsively the Governor thrust out a hand.

"Shake, Petrie," said he. "I'm damned if I blame you. You wait until I get back to the city and see if this thing can't be fixed up some other way."

"Thanks, Gov'neh. But it's all fixed. I done give the Commisshneh my resignation las' night. I got my own luggeh, an' I'm goin' shrimp-trawlin' fo' the Filabrou platfo'm. Only I wanted yo' to know why it was I backed Judge Williston."

And Captain Petrie left the upper deck, to resume the wheel in the little pilothouse.

Commissioner Winston, returning to his desk-chair beneath the awning, found the State's chief executive sitting in moody silence. When at last he talked, it was not of Joe Petrie.

The low-lying banks of the river swirled past them steadily. On their port bow loomed the gray concrete mass of the Lake Borgne canal lock, gateway to a cut-off on the east. Through the binoculars the Governor watched for a moment the little group of craft awaiting their turn. Then he rose with an exclamation of eagerness.

"That looks like the *Flying Fish* to me," he called to Winston. "Let's run in closer to the bank and see. Don and Dot said they were going to sail her over to the Biloxi regatta, and they may have taken this route instead of going 'cross Pontchartrain and out the Rigolets."

The *Flying Fish* it was. And the two sun-tanned figures of boy and girl on her tiny deck were the Governor's son and daughter, Donald and Dorothy, enthusiastic amateur sailors both. The girl in middy blouse and short white skirt, the boy in singlet and ducks, waved mightily as they recognized the figure on the upper deck as the *Eagle* neared them. There was a brief greeting, a moment of chatter, and then the *Eagle* with a toot of farewell from her diminutive siren, sheered off and sped downstream once more.

"Great kids," grinned Commissioner Winston. He had known them from babyhood. "Regular ducks. In, under and over water ever since they were born."

"Pretty good kids," conceded the Governor. And then, with businesslike concentration, he talked conservation legislation to the Commissioner until the huddle of buildings of the Pass-à-Loutre game preserve and public shooting-grounds came into sight.

THE inspection was soon over. Back aboard the *Eagle* they climbed.

"Now," said the Commissioner, "comes the real voyage. We're going out through the Port Eads jetties so you can see how the dredging is going on. And after that we'll swing out east in the Gulf and take in that Pearl River territory. Mississippi is pulling this sovereign State stuff and claiming one of the best oyster-reefs at its mouth on the theory that everything east of a straight line from the mouth of the river is hers. We're going to hold that those reefs are ours, even if they are off the Mississippi coast. For the river flows into the Gulf between the coast of Mississippi and the reefs, and the river is the State boundary line."

Afternoon darkened into evening as the

little cruiser swung out through the jetties and headed east past the great mud-lumps of Red Fish Bay, raw and naked islets thrust constantly anew from the soft bed of the Gulf by the gases that seethed and boiled below the silt-strata the ancient river poured by the thousands of tons into the sea.

Supper in the *Eagle's* little cabin aft, by the light of brass oil lamps swinging in their gimbals to the surge of the Gulf's great rollers. Then the Governor sank drowsily to sleep in his narrow bunk lulled by the soothing throb of the gasoline-driven engines.

His eyes opened suddenly as hands sought beneath his mosquito-bar and shook his shoulders vigorously.

"Good Lord, Aleck," he grumbled, "don't you do anything else but go round waking folks up in the dark?"

The oil-lamps still burned in the little cabin. A murky grayness, half the blackness of night, the rest the smothered light of dawn, dimmed their flicker.

"Better throw on some clothes, Dick," said the Commissioner. "Rotten luck! There's some real weather brewing."

Swiftly the Governor dressed, gulped the inevitable cup of strong black dripped coffee that stained the white of the ironware china, and climbed out through the aft hatch to mount the little upper deck. Bracing himself on one of the steel awning-frame rods, swinging easily to the rise and fall of the *Eagle* as she plowed sturdily through the big Gulf rollers, he glanced about the skyline.

There was some real weather brewing. No doubt of that.

"You've got me to blame for this, Dick," said the Commissioner, standing beside him, swathed in heavy sweater and low-pulled cap from which his great briar protruded, fuming. "Captain Petrie told me before we started that there was some dirty weather ahead. But it looked pretty good to me, and the weather bureau only predicted some minor disturbance."

"Petrie has it on the weather bureau, then?"

"These old-timers on the coast feel it in their bones, Dick. The barometer only started falling after midnight when we were cutting in past the Chandeleurs. We've been driving the old tub top speed. Thought we'd run for Dunbar, just over the Mississippi line. Good harborage there."

"Where are we now, Aleck?"

"Between Cat Island and Isle au Pitre, headin' for Grand Island Pass as fast as we can hop it."

Far off to starboard through the dirty yellow-gray haze that the dawn had brought, a faintly darker outline—the low-lying mass of Cat Island—loomed dimly in the murk. Isle au Pitre, to port, was wholly invisible, its low marshes blending with the haze.

All the portents were plain to those who have seen the South Coast weather. The oily smoothness of the big black swells, the indescribable greasy greenish-grayish-yellowish-brown of the skyline, the sickly light that filtered through from the smothered sun—all spelled *Storm*.

LEAVING the wheel in the hands of one of the crew for a moment, Captain Petrie joined the Governor and the Commissioner on the upper deck.

"Dirty," he said, with a comprehensive swing of his head toward the horizon. "Goin' to have a rough time of it."

"Think we'll make Dunbar?" asked the Governor.

Petrie shrugged dubious shoulders.

"Dunno, Gov'neh," said he. "We'll do ouah damndest. Goin' to have a monkey-an'-parrot time if we don'."

Impatiently the Governor strode up and down the little space of open deck between the one-pounder and the vegetable locker. About him worked the small crew of the *Eagle*, stripping, lashing and bracing. The taut awning had already been stripped from its frame, rolled and stowed below. The motor-yawl, swinging overside on its small davits, was swung inboard, set in its crotched planks and lashed to the deck. Doubled lashings and tight-twisted screws fastened the little one-pounder rifle to its rigid mount.

Up the aft ladder came Mike McGuire.

"Looks like trouble, Gov'ner," he husked.

The Governor looked at him keenly.

"McGuire, if you were in command today instead of Petrie, what would you do?"

"Run like hell for the shore."

"And if you couldn't make it?"

"Quitcher kiddin', Gov'ner. I dunno. These storms are damn' bad. If you're caught, you're caught."

"Gov'neh, yo're caught, I reckon." It was Petrie's voice speaking, a thin, dis-

dainful smile on his dark, seamed face. "Look yondeh."

A low, whining sort of moan sounded in their ears. The tops of the great rollers sweeping in from the point Petrie's outflung hand indicated, flattened with the pressure of the wind that roared above them. Starting far down in the scale, with that blood-curdling, whining moan, the voice of the storm ran the gamut of a full octave, to a shrill shriek. Then it died down to deadly and oppressive silence.

And before the Governor's eyes a man became transformed. Gone was the soft South Coast drawl of the voice of Captain Joseph Petrie. Sharp, clear and clean rang his orders. His little crew swirled about the *Eagle* in swift obedience.

It was the Governor's voice that sounded high and despairing above the thud of feet and the crackle of Petrie's commands.

"Oh, my God! Look there!"

Through the murk, dimly visible on the starboard bow, heeling far over to the pressure of the wind, flashed past a little boat of racing rig. A small figure in dingy white fought the tiller. Another, the white-clad duck of its legs showing below a crimson football sweater, wrestled with the halyards of the tight-reefed sail.

"Captain Petrie!" The Governor's voice rang sharp and agonized. "That's the *Flying Fish!* Signal them! Fire that gun! Run them down and take them aboard! For God's sake, do something!"

His face was drawn with sudden anguish.

"Theah aint a chance, Gov'neh," sounded Petrie's voice, against the renewed uproar of the wind. "The Lawd God Himse'f couldn't reach 'em in this boat with what's comin'."

The Governor's jaw thrust out in jutting dominance.

"Petrie, I'm Governor of this State!" he shouted above the chaos of sound. "This is a State boat. I tell you to go after them and pick them up!"

Once more the wind died down. And in the split-second space between the roaring blasts came Petrie's answer.

"I don' give a damn who you are, Gov'neh! I'm masteh of this boat! Yo' go below! Do yo' go, or do my men take yo'?"

And as the State's chief executive, shaking with his hopeless impotence, climbed down the little aft ladder, he caught one last flashing glimpse of the little sailboat as it vanished in the yellowish murk.

"Dick, oh, my God, Dick! I'm sorry! But Petrie's right. There wouldn't be a chance to reach 'em! This is a hurricane!"

Commissioner Winston sat beside him in the little cabin, his face working convulsively. He too had known and loved those two children from their babyhood.

Stretched full length on the cabin seat, the Governor shook, sobbing like a child.

THE gray murk inside the cabin changed to sudden blackness. One of the crew, balancing to the dizzy lurches of the little sixty-footer, lighted the oil lamps. Like a drunkard on the verge of collapse, the *Eagle* swung crazily to and fro. Then, as the aft hatchway crashed into place and was battened fast, Captain Petrie, dripping, battered, the blood welling from a deep cut above his eyes, stood among them.

"Keep them engines runnin' full speed ahead," he shouted to the oil-smeared engineer. "Yo', Armand, hold that wheel to keep her due south. Don' shift a point."

Through the open passageway of the little boat, from engine-room and wheelhouse came the answering calls of assent.

"We got about a Chinaman's chance," reported Petrie to Commissioner Winston. "I got ta'paulins lashed to all the windows. These seas'd smash 'em, sho'. An' I got sta'bo'd an' po't anchors out on 'bout fo'ty fathoms o' manila hawser. Thought she'd sho' capsize when we was placin' 'em. Now we got to keep her headed into it, engine's goin' top speed, till it blows oveh. It's ouah only chance. If we tried to run befoh this, it'd stand the *Eagle* on her nose an' capsize her firs' time she shivehed."

He went forward, and with a greasy bit of cotton waste tied about his head to keep the blood out of his eyes, bent with the engineer over the throbbing mechanism of the two gasoline engines on which their safety rested.

Never while his life lasts can the Governor forget those hours that followed. Insanely the little *Eagle* rose and sank, lurched and swayed. Bent taut and rigid as an iron bar, Armand fought the wheel, his eyes steady and red-rimmed on the little compass before him, holding her due south into the teeth of that hurricane. Outside, the giant seas swirled past, hissing with a venom that penetrated the tarpaulin-shrouded and hatch-battened

cabin. The roar of the wind, rising and sinking at first, merged toward the end into the thunder of a Niagara of sound, ceaseless, unending.

And ever beside the engineer stood Captain Petrie over those engines, with soothing oil-can and nursing hands, his blood-stained wad of cotton waste stanching the cut where he had been hurled against the rail, his mind intent with that of his engineer on the task of keeping those rhythmic gasoline explosions uninterrupted.

HOUR followed hour, while those scenes became stamped in flaming lines upon the Governor's mind. From time to time he would clench his hands and shiver in agony, wincing as there flitted before his eyes the flashing vision of the taut-reefed little sailboat, manned by two tiny figures that vanished into the shrouding yellow murk.

All thought of time had vanished, though the little round brass clock ticked away in the pilot-house. An occasional oath sounded from one of the crew, as the *Eagle* shook from the mighty buffet of some wave greater than the rest. From time to time, braced with legs wide apart before his tiny iron stove, the cook dripped coffee, laced it strongly from a bottle of whisky produced from the boat's medicine chest, and staggered with it from man to man of the group that crouched in the cramped quarters. Some sank in a sleep that was more a stupor of tautened nerves and enforced inaction.

And then, after a reeking, tossing eternity, came surcease. The roar of the wind lessened, lessened, died. Still the *Eagle* strove with the great waves that rushed at her in unending procession, charging like maddened regiments.

Above the throb of the engines sounded Petrie's voice:

"By God, Commishneh, we done licked it!"

"Dick, man!" Winston was shaking the Governor's shoulders again as he sat hunched in a corner of the cabin seat, staring blankly with set, lined face, at the wall opposite. "Dick, it's a miracle we're alive."

ANOTHER dawn was lighting the sky as they balanced themselves once more on the pitching, reeling upper deck of the *Eagle*. But the sun was rising in a sky washed clean of the hurricane's yellow murk. And the giant seas that hurled themselves in from the tossing Gulf were lessening with every passing hour.

Red of eye, deep-lined of face, haggard from his sleepless vigil, Captain Petrie joined them. And the Governor spoke for the first time in uncounted hours.

"Captain," said he, "you were right and I was wrong. If we'd gone after them, both boats would have gone down. I had no right to take the lives of you and your crew. But"—he gulped deeply—"do you think there's a chance of even recovering their bodies. I'm thinking of their mother, now."

"Gov'neh, yo' done seen one miracle. I aint a-promisin' yo' two. But I'll do eve'thing I can. I know the marshes wheah they was headed lak I know this boat. We're goin' thataway now."

"Captain,"—it was the Commissioner who was speaking—"words don't mean much after this. But your seamanship in throwing out those two anchors and keeping us headed into that hurricane between 'em is all that saved this boat and us. I know enough about these waters to know that."

Petrie shook his head.

"Jus' an ol' trick, Commishneh," he muttered. "What yo' got to thank is the man what made them anchor-cables an' them gazzoline engines. If them cables broke, or them gazzolines done stopped tu'nin'—"

His shrug was eloquent.

And then with hoarsened voice he called the orders that sent the little *Eagle* nosing her way through the hills and valleys of tumbled water up toward Grand Island Pass.

WITH heavy heart the Governor joined in the work of rescue. Here and there, flotsam of the hurricane, lay the luggers of the shrimping, fishing and oyster fleet of the South Coast, dark against the flooded marshes. With the sure instinct of the coast men, where they had been caught by the hurricane before they could run to safe harbor, they had chopped down the stumpy masts, battened themselves below, and let the storm carry them inland. The stout little cypress-built craft, hurled about like chips before the roaring fury of the storm, were lodged in the "floating prairie," where weeks of work would be required to bring them to open water once more. Some, carried far inland, would

bleach their ribs for years in the South Coast's blazing sun as bleached bones marked the trails of the Far West.

It was a motley horde that crowded on the *Eagle* as the day wore along. Light-hearted that they had come out of the portals of death, the coast men chattered to one another in their swift Cajun patois, helped in the rescue of others, and ate enormously of the *Eagle's* stores. Captain Petrie and his men took it all as a matter of course. Rescue work after storms was part of the Conservation Department's regular program.

No, they answered the Governor's ever-repeated queries. None had seen a sail-boat of racing rig. It was hardly probable, M'sieu' le Gouverneur, that craft of such a frailness had outridden a storm that tossed heavy luggers about like pirogues.

Afternoon was waning.

"Betteh make the neahest town," Captain Petrie was saying to Winston, as he viewed the throng crowding the *Eagle* to her bulging rail.

THEN the shout of Mike McGuire split the air.

"There's another lugger yonder up the Pass," he called. "They're wavin' a red flag! Looks like a red shirt to me."

On chugged the *Eagle*. The Governor had snatched the binoculars. Out toward the rescue-boat, leaping from clump to clump of the coarse roseau cane lest they slip and vanish in the bottomless depths of fluid gray slime beneath, came the crew of the lugger. And in the lead splashed a girl with loosened hair, with mud-smeared skirt and middy-blouse that had once been white. Behind her leaped a youth waving the "red shirt" that had been Mike McGuire's identification of a football sweater.

The Governor straightened, started to call out—and collapsed in utter unconsciousness. . . . .

The last of the *Eagle's* precious whisky brought him to his feet again. While the rescued ones gulped scalding coffee, their story was swiftly told. Caught in the storm when a broken rudder had delayed them in the Lake Borgne Canal, the two had been driven before it with reefed sail. They surged up to a lugger caught in their own plight.

"Daddy, it was glorious seamanship," bubbled Dorothy. "We knew she had a better chance than we did. So Don literally ran her down. We scrambled aboard while the poor old *Flying Fish* was going to pieces. And we've been stuffed into her forepeak in the smelliest bunch of blankets you ever dreamed—for years and years. And with two shrimpers who don't speak anything but Cajun!"

OH, it was a gorgeous story! The headlines flared through the New Orleans streets when the *Eagle*, chugging through the wrecked railroad bridge at the Rigolets, plowed around through Lake Pontchartrain and landed her cargo at the Southern Yacht Club.

They had most of the details—those reporters who had also been sleepless since the storm first lashed the coast.

But there was one detail they missed, a few days later—a detail that certain rewrite men would have given much to have had to shape lovingly into a real story.

Again, in the inner and private office of the suite that was labeled "GOVERNOR" at the State capitol in Baton Rouge, sat two men. Again one was the official occupant of that office, the other the Little Feller.

But this time it was the Governor who was doing the talking.

"It may interest you to know, Patrick," he was saying, "that I've just given old Captain Higgins of the Conservation flagship *Pelican* an office-job with the department. It amounts to a pension, I guess. And I'm signing the order that puts Captain Joseph Petrie in command of the *Pelican*. He's consented to take the job."

"Dick, you're a hopeless sentimentalist," said the Little Feller. "I know all about that rescue job Petrie did. But he don't vote right. Politics is politics, I'm telling you. The boys in the city, now—"

But the Governor had risen to his full height. It was considerable height. His clenched fist had thudded on the top of the great mahogany desk.

"Politics be damned," he roared. "Petrie voted for Williston, did he? I'd have licked the tar out of him if he'd voted for anybody else, after what I know. I don't give two whoops in Halifax if he votes for a black-and-tan Republican the rest of his natural life! Politics is politics, is it? Well, gratitude is gratitude and decency is decency. And you can tell the boys in the city for me that if they don't like that, they can go to hell!"

Free Lances in Diplomacy

Mr. New has access to inside information on international affairs that makes his stories unique and authoritative. This one, "An Echo from the Russian Debacle," is one of special interest.

By Clarence Herbert New

TO certain men and women whose fingers seek, from force of habit, the pulse of international affairs, the breaking-up of the Genoa Conference resembled the close of a theater-performance —with Paris in the position of the onlooker who finds himself caught in the vortex of erupting humanity before he realizes it. For with the straight flight of homing pigeons three-quarters of the diplomats, delegates, political lobbyists, secret-agents and the like, who had kept Genoa and neighboring towns humming like the telephone-exchange of an angry beehive, proceeded to the French capital by various routes. The moves in the game of world-politics had been outwardly made upon an Italian chess-board. But the hands which guided them had reached out from the one center of world-intrigue in this present year. Moscow, Berlin, Budapest, Rome, London, Tokio, Brussels, Washington—these presumably control and instruct their representatives in other countries. Yet before, after and during any international conference one finds those representatives in Paris, conferring with others of their kind—sometimes cabling or telegraphing home tentative decisions as to the course they should pursue, sometimes holding unofficial conversations *without* telegraphing home.

ON the second evening after the wind-up of the Conference at Genoa, a party of eight sat down to dine in a house on the East side of the Rue Vaneau, temporarily occupied by a Berliner whose real name was Von Grünwald, but who was supposed to be the brother of a Russian artist, Trepanoff—one of three lessees on the books at the Préfecture. The artist was supposed to have been in America for a month or so, expecting to return and take up his residence in the dwelling, which had been in charge of a music-teacher during his absence. The pseudo-brother had come to Paris with the object of overseeing a few necessary repairs before the lessee's return, and was occasionally entertaining some of his own Parisian friends in the meantime. A reasonable enough explanation, of course. There was nothing about

it which gave M. le Préfet any legal excuse for interfering or even questioning the statement.

At the table, Von Grünwald, posing as the Trepanoff brother and temporary master of the house, would naturally have been the host. But the Berliners and Soviet heads order such things differently. Von Ebeling was his superior in a certain Charlottenburg organization, by several grades; so he sat at the head of the table and curtly treated the other Prussians as subordinates. Karanov he accepted as a political equal because he had been a Genoa delegate and was one of the Moscow circle under Lenine; but Von Ebeling considered himself a gentleman, so crammed full of *Kultur* that he was near bursting with it, while Karanov, born a moujik, had barely gone through one of the Chicago primary-schools as a boy, had been compelled to attend grammar-school in New York for a year, and had made Red pamphlets his sole education since that time. That is to say, he was born "cattle," in the Prussian's estimation, and was still "cattle" in spite of his political influence. In this opinion Von Ebeling was undoubtedly right; but the curious feature which these two opposites shared was that one was dangerous to any civilization because of his excessive training in a single narrow groove, while the other was equally dangerous from lack of any particle of brain which could be trained in anything but destructiveness.

The Prussian found Mouravief more difficult to class. He was fat, his skin appearing to exude oil, his hair was much too long and *trop au naturel* for some requirements of well-bred people. He had stuck his fat legs under the table, tucked the corner of a napkin inside his collar, firmly grasped his knife and fork with the manner of one anticipating a gastronomic treat and impatient for it to begin. But —the man frequently surprised one by careless observations which revealed much hidden thinking capacity and wide experience. Though they had reached Paris by different routes, Von Ebeling at once resumed a discussion which had been interrupted at the breaking-up of the conference.

"ARE you still of the opinion, Mouravief, that your course at Genoa was defensible—upon any real grounds?"

"Absolutely! The smell of that roast chicken is driving me crazy! Also, your German woman should fetch the soup at once. . . . . For example—state where you think we were at fault?"

"Well, you went to Genoa for recognition of your Soviet government and a loan of several billions—in cash. It was probably a good move to reveal at Rapallo the secret agreement which Germany and Russia have had these three years—but the agreement is not worth much until you get your foreign loans, in order to buy from us the machinery and other materials which you so badly need. The loan was really your chief object—and it implied preliminary recognition. The English were disposed to grant a tentative recognition and open up trade relations. Italy was ready to do business. France could have been won over—in time. In fact, the situation, as it developed, was exceedingly good for Russia—much better than we dreamed you'd get from the Entente. But with everything going your way, you balk like a lot of mules at the only consideration upon which any outside nation will do business with you. Recognition of debts to foreigners, adequate protection to their lives and property, stable conditions within your country!"

"My friend," replied Mouravief, "you entirely lose sight of the main consideration. The greatest loan to Russia which the Entente is in position to offer for some time is a paltry sixty millions in gold! It would disappear in the flood of our necessities before we could really account for receiving it. We must have a loan of billions! To get them, we must force America to contribute—from sheer economic necessity. Well—America was not represented. No conference in Europe is anything but a farce until America *is* represented. So—we make the monkey of proceedings at Genoa. We chuck the bluff —to gain time. Sooner or later America must be represented in conference, must furnish the loan which is worth considering by Russia. Then perhaps we promise recognition of foreign debts, protection to life and property. It is a ridiculous promise, of course, because we haven't force enough to see that it is carried out. Must protect ourselves first, you know. But what's a promise in the way of business? Eh?"

"Hmph! You're rather more positive about getting that big loan from America than I am, Mouravief! America is feed-

ing and distributing seed to more than two-thirds of Russia now! What's the matter with putting that money in the Reval and Libau banks into circulation, eh? You have a good many billions there in gold!"

"That is a most delicate question, Von Ebeling—I'm surprised at you! Suppose I were to ask where all the money has gone which was formerly possessed by the German Junkers—why some of it is not used for the reparations payments—eh? Oh, I know all about the princes, the *Herzogs* and the *Grafs* who are working today as clerks and even servants! I take off the hat to you, my friend—you are certainly most thorough in everything you do! To keep your money with any chance of safety, you must give the appearance of having it not—of real poverty, of condescending to work and rub shoulder with the common cattle. And you do it! You make the most beautiful job of it! And all the while those little millions,—which must be preserved for the German Junkers and not wasted on the most damned enemies of the Fatherland,—they lie all snug in some place you know about. You lose the interest—which is most sad, but can't be helped; but you keep the principal. And you keep him safe. Well, the Russian Soviet is not going to all this risk and trouble for its health, either! Its leaders have a little money at Reval, a little at Libau, some in Sweden, some in London. Myself and Karanov, we make a little money by honest industry—which we have succeeded in getting out of Russia and depositing in very solid banks in most solid countries, for our old age. We do not say where—that would be foolish, even among friends like around this table. And we do not throw that money away in Russian finances! No!"

"Hmph! It is known among the outside nations that more than half your countrymen and women are living on seeds, which have little nourishing quality—that, in order to keep warm, they must drag such bits of wood as they can get several miles through the snow, in sleds, that half the houses in Petrograd and Moscow are nothing but shells, every bit of the woodwork inside having been consumed for such purposes, that what food was left from the last harvest has been taken by the cities, leaving the country people to starve—"

"Ah, yes—yes. It is true. But the Soviet must live—the cattle must contribute. America is keeping them alive—so it's really none of our affairs. Somehow—'the Lord will provide!'"

"MOURAVIEF," observed Von Ebeling, "you've given me some material for thought in this idea of yours to block any conference until America is forced to come in and sit at the council-table. In a way, there is reason in it—and subtlety. I'm not prepared to condemn your course entirely, until I see how it works out. But aside from that, were it not for one accomplishment on your part, our Junta would have nothing more to do with your Soviet in Moscow. As propagandists among the other nations, you are very nearly in the same class with us Germans—which is the highest compliment I can pay you in that line. You are undermining the morale of other governments to an extent they do not dream as yet—and in that way you are playing our game, the pan-German game. For that assistance, we continue to associate with and work with you—for a time. But your ideas of government are insane! You are already very close to the end of your rope. When the smash comes, and it will come as surely as the sun shines,—as surely as the French Reign of Terror came and went,—you and others of the Circle will be somewhere outside of Russia, if you are alive. It will make little difference in the relations between Germany and Russia; self-interest will bind the two countries even more closely together in mutual defense against the world—eventually in a conquest of the globe. But the development of Russia will not come about under any such travesty of government as you have forced upon it with machine-gun and bayonet. There must be law and order, government by all the people under a constitution—a playing the game according to the rules of other nations."

"Oh—I do not say no, Von Ebeling! There may have been a few among us—weak minds, with no thinking capacity—who believed at first that a nationalized, communistic government was possible, even taking human nature as it is. But if they are incapable of learning anything else, they've seen the folly of that. As for the rest—we've played the game for what there was in it, just as you are playing it in Germany. And there has been enough for modest wants—oh, yes! As

for our being out of Russia at the final moment—well, we said at Genoa, you remember, that we'd never dare to go back without the big loan we were sent to get. That was for news-publicity, of course—not to be taken seriously.

"Yet the Soviet diplomats must continue to represent the Soviet at the Hague next month. There are many unofficial conferences and conversations to be arranged in Paris before then. It would be a waste of our time and diplomatic influence if many of us went back to Moscow at present, even for a day or so. Of course some will go—a few who have made all possible arrangements to get out again quickly at the first hint of danger. But I think most of the Russians who were in Italy will have far too much on their hands even to think of going back for some time. It is—really, you know—much pleasanter here in Paris. There are not so many nerve-jarring things constantly before one's eyes. Come! Let us change the subject—eh? Suggest something pleasant for the evening—something to make us forget the mental strain and grilling work of the last two months. What is there to do? Eh?

"WELL," responded Von Ebeling, "I had in mind something to suggest. There is no opera tonight, nothing particularly good at the theaters. But there is a costume-dance at the studio of an artist in the Impasse du Main. Dev'lish interesting woman—strikingly handsome. Signs her canvases Julie Moncœur—but that's not her name. Speaks Russian altogether too well for anyone born west of Kiev or Odessa. Von Grünwald is invited for this evening, with any guests who happen to be staying with him. And the invitation came about in this way: When I ran up to Paris a fortnight ago, I met this woman in another studio. They addressed her as 'Madame.' She recognized me, called me by name, in a whisper, though I hadn't been introduced as Von Ebeling at all. She referred to occurrences in Petrograd and Moscow which she couldn't possibly have known unless she'd been through the revolution with the rest of you. She said you and Karanov undoubtedly would come to Paris from Genoa and would presumably see me here, more or less—suggested that I bring you both to call upon her some evening. Von Grünwald met her at the house of a mutual acquaintance which is occasionally placed at our disposal when we desire to meet some of our organization in a spot which is above suspicion. She seemed to know that he was associated with us—hence the invitation for tonight. It may have been a chance shot on her part, but I'm under the impression that she has been, at one time or another, one of your organization, a valuable member of it, and is now masquerading here under another name in order to further our interests, if opportunity comes her way."

"Hmph! If she was ever a member of the Soviet organization, she still is one! A person does not leave us whenever the notion occurs to him—and continue to live!"

"No? At times, Mouravief, you are childish with your bugaboo of terrorism! There are individuals, particularly women, so brilliantly efficient in anything they undertake that you can't even afford to *threaten* them! Such people serve an organization like ours because it interests them for the time being; they have the sort of cold nerve which makes them valuable or dangerous, and they do as they please. Sometimes you carry out the threat and kill one of them—only to realize your folly afterward. Now, I'm under the impression that one of you may recognize this Madame Moncœur as a woman you've known very well during the debacle. A woman who disappeared—very likely supposed dead. If you think you recognize her, it should be a very simple matter to lead the conversation in such a way as to make you positive. If she's what I think she is—don't make the mistake of trying threats. She'd laugh at you. Women like that die when they must, without fear—and defy you with their last breath! *Au contraire*—use every inducement to enlist her coöperation, any way she sees fit to give it. From what I saw of her, I'd give much if she were of the high command in Charlottenburg, and I'm by no means positive she's not one of us, at that!"

LEAVING the Prussians and the Reds to finish their dinner, some description of an occurrence five or six weeks before is necessary properly to understand various events which followed. The Trevor mansion, as all Paris knows, is in the center of a beautiful garden surrounded by a twelve-foot stone wall on the Avenue

de Neuilly. As nothing but its Norman-Gothic roofs and turrets can be seen over the wall, it has been taken by strangers for a convent or an asylum. But the Trevors have had most excellent reasons for insuring privacy in their Paris residence, and the French Government heartily approves whatever steps they take to obtain it.

The Honorable George and "Madame Nan" were discussing world-conditions with three of their intimate friends one evening in the early part of April when delegates to the Genoa conference were assembling—discounting in advance any definite results which might be obtained from it. Raymond Carter, formerly Chargé d'Affaires at the American Embassy, was summing up conditions as he saw them:

"England is exceedingly anxious to open up trade with Russia and will take a few gambling risks to do it. Italy wants Russian oil and other commodities if she can get them. France wants to collect her German reparations payments and is determined to block anything which might interfere with them. The smaller states want, positively must have, guarantees confirming and establishing present boundaries. The United States has nothing whatsoever to gain from Russia, her trade being negligible, and is now doing more than even the Russians have any right to expect in the way of feeding them and supplying seed for their crops. Japan is playing a waiting game in regard to Siberia. She'll eventually get Vladivostok, with some territory north of it—which will be more safely and better administered in her hands than any bolshevik republic possibly could be. Looking at all these considerations, they seem to focus upon some kind of a working arrangement with the Soviet—possibly a probationary recognition with guarantees of safety and payment of debts to outsiders. There'll be no other question of importance before the Genoa conference because, until something is settled in regard to eastern Europe, it isn't much use to discuss anything else. Possibly they may not reach a definite conclusion at all—"

"Hmph! I'll venture to say it's certain they wont, Raymond! After weeks of wasted time, they'll adjourn—to meet again in some other place. I rather look for three or four conferences this summer—with nothing conclusive until the United States is argued, partly forced, into granting recognition to Lenine on terms of absolute equality and loaning him billions to pour into the Russian rat-hole. Of course it's sheer insanity to do it!"

"You don't think that each conference may bring all of the other states a little closer together in a defensive formation against the Russo-German alliance which we know exists?"

"I'M hoping for that, of course—mean to do everything in my power to insure such a consolidation. But there are too many diverse interests to harmonize, too many age-old enmities ready to flame up at a word, too much danger of disease and disintegration spreading from Russia outward. Oh, it's not impossible! The most hopeful sign at present is the apparent trend toward getting down to a working, productive basis in America, France and the British Empire. Once the mass of people in every country become willing, again to give a decent day's work for their food, clothing, lodgings and luxuries, civilization is practically safe for some time. And that's the meat of the whole world-condition! There are but two main classes of human beings—the workers and the willfully incompetent loafers. Take away the rewards of industry in the form of savings, property bought with savings, assured and adequate income produced by good healthy work and thrifty habits,—as every communist or bolshevist scheme does take them away,—and you destroy all incentive for the worker to work. He'll say: 'To hell with such a way of living!' and either shoot himself, turn highwayman or start out to become supreme high boss of the local soviet, with fat pickings on the side. The one thing you can gamble he wont do in any circumstances is divide the results of his own honest labor with the yellow quitter who *wont* work!"

"Have you any idea that 'our own little circle' can accomplish anything in this chaotic mess, George?"

"Probably more than anybody would believe possible. Consider what we've actually accomplished in the past six months! No use repeating the items in detail, but it seems to me that the five of us so long intimately associated have scored several rather paralyzing checks upon the disintegrating forces at work in every country! From the way Nan has

been acting for the past week or so, I fancy she has something in mind which may be equally successful, if it can be carried out. Isn't it about time you gave us a hint, Nan?"

"H-m-m—If I can get out of Lammy what I confidently expect to get, you'll soon begin to catch the idea and see what I'm after in a general way. Come over here, Lammy, and look through a couple of these filing-cases with me—the ones devoted to photographs of assorted Russians."

EARL Lammerford pushed over a couple of chairs to the wide shelf which ran the length of the wall under the filing-cases and took down the ones she pointed out. The five old friends were in Trevor's sound-proofed and electrically protected library in an isolated corner of the upper floor—a room which contained, in addition to controlling-boards of the most powerful radio-equipment yet built, probably the most remarkable collection of maps, charts and biographical data between any four walls in Europe. The Earl himself had been considered for years a walking encyclopedia of world-celebrities, having trained both observation and memory to a point which made his brain something almost superhuman. Without even glancing at names or data written upon the backs of the photographs, he tossed one after another upon a growing pile as he mentioned the name and some personal recollection of each. Presently, as he paused for a second or two, looking at the picture of a handsome brunette in her thirties, Madame Trevor stopped him:

"I fancy she may be the one I'm after, Lammy! What's the last you heard of her?"

"H-m-m—let me think a bit. Never saw her but twice. Tatiana Balkanoff—actress at the Imperial Theater in the old days, born in some little town near the Roumanian border, figure-artist of considerable promise, had she settled down to painting as a profession. An exceptional woman! A friend of Kerensky during the first revolution. More or less associated with the Reds—but refused to go all the way in some of their extreme ideas. Too valuable to Lenine for him to have her killed, though she balked pretty often against his orders. To the best of my recollection, she disappeared during one of those red nights in Moscow when so many were killed in the street-fighting—and hasn't been heard of since."

"Does that cover about all the data you can give me concerning her?"

"Oh, I can describe rather closely her little mannerisms, repeat bits of gossip concerning her and some of the revolutionary leaders. H-m-m—I say! If one could get hold of Pemberton Barremore,—your old friend of the Associated Press,—I fancy he'd give us a lot concerning Tatiana Balkanoff! She took quite a fancy to him. In fact, I believe he threatened to shoot one of the Reds if he annoyed the girl any further. Pem carried his life in his hands, those days in Petrograd and Moscow, but he managed to send out the most vivid descriptions of the revolution, and what came after, that ever got to the outside world—had to do some shooting on his own account, an' do it first! Now, it just happens I heard today that Barremore has been sent over to write up conditions in Egypt and the Sudan under the new régime. Landed in Liverpool yesterday. He'd be sure to leave an address at the Savage Club in London. Suppose we get the Club by radio an' see what they can tell us? Eh?"

WITH the magnificent equipment at the other side of the library, it was a matter of less than half an hour to put a connection through to the Savage Club and ascertain that Barremore was to have left for Paris by the afternoon plane—Croydon to Le Bourget—and might be found at the Continental. Inquiries over the city telephone system resulted in getting Barremore in his room at the hotel and bringing him out to the Avenue de Neuilly in half an hour. He had meant to call upon the Trevors anyhow, before leaving for Brindisi next day. After being shown the photograph of Tatiana Balkanoff and given to understand that Madame Trevor had a definite object in getting all the information she could relating to the actress-artist, Barremore began telling what he remembered—amounting to a great deal.

"After the revolution, it was generally understood in Moscow that she was the mistress of Mouravief—but I happen to know that was a lie! Never mind how I know; I had pretty conclusive proof. The yarn got about in this way: The outside world heard a lot about the nationalization of women in Russia, but such a decree was never passed—the women simply wouldn't

stand for it, and the men found they couldn't force it through. What did happen was this: The Soviet made the marriage ceremony just an acknowledgment before a commissar. A man and woman simply went to him, said they were man and wife, paid an insignificant fee for a worthless certificate—and that ended the matter. Divorce was easier. The man didn't even have to tell the woman she was divorced; he simply quit—took another woman before the commissar next day and went through another farcical marriage.

"Now, you yourselves know what conditions have existed in Russia since 1916. In times when it is almost impossible to get food, clothing or warmth, when nobody knows whether his or her throat may be cut before night, conventional barriers disappear. People live for the passing moment, live as vividly as they can. So at least ninety per cent of the Russian women under thirty will frankly admit having been 'married' once or twice. They didn't pass any nationalization decree, but the distinction is only a matter of terms. Oddly enough, I believe Tatiana Balkanoff to have been one of the ten per cent who were not married—though she agreed at one time to marry me. Things began to happen right afterward—we never quite got around to it.

"But in regard to the Mouravief story: Tatiana was independent, brilliant, with a perfectly scorching tongue when she turned it loose. She was really too valuable to the Reds for any of them to kill her—unless she got sufficiently disgusted to turn against them. If she ever did, they knew that no threats would stop her. The suspicions were spread about until the Circle ordered her arrest—she probably would have been shot in whatever cold and rotten prison they placed her, just to save further trouble. But they didn't catch her. She walked into Mouravief's bedroom one night, partly undressed—and went to sleep in the other bed, after telling him she proposed staying there for a while to keep her throat from being cut—"

"And she was really handsome—perfect figure! I can easily understand what gradually percolated through Mouravief's thick mind!"

"Exactly! The tomcat licking his chops as he watched the canary! He told her to make herself perfectly at home, cleared off one corner of the bureau for her hairpins and things—and presently ventured across to the side of her bed in his pajamas for a little confidential talk. But he became gradually conscious that something cold and hard was making a dent in his side—noticed that it was a thirty-eight-caliber automatic. She told him, in a friendly matter-of-fact way, that she proposed going to sleep immediately, using his room and name for protection—and that if he took any advantage of her, she would find some means of killing him even if he took away every weapon she had. There would be plenty of chances to obtain others.

"Mouravief, of course, like all fellows of his sort, was yellow clear through. Whether she meant it or not, she bluffed him to a standstill. For a week she didn't leave that suite of rooms—and he personally fetched her as good food as you'd find in a Paris hotel. For another month she occupied the same room with him—was supposed to be his mistress—and went about Moscow with impunity. Then, after six frightful, bloody nights in the city streets, she disappeared. As far as I know, she hasn't been located since—probably considers it safer to live somewhere under an assumed name for the present."

HERE Nan startled them all with a quiet but dramatic statement:

"Her throat was cut—her body horribly mutilated—during the fourth of those frightful nights. I was sure I recognized her among several other corpses; and a peculiar scar on her left breast, made by the stiletto of a jealous woman in Odessa some years before, settled it. She had shown me that scar during the previous week. Aside from that, there was a small hand-bag under the body with powder, hairpins and a note addressed to her by some one who had merely signed it 'P. B.' It might have been from Pem, here—though I didn't recognize the writing at the time. With the assistance of another woman, I dragged the body through the lower hallway of an empty house and buried it in the rear yard. It was the fact that I knew Tatiana Balkanoff to be dead, when Lammy turned up her picture, which made me decide to use her identity for a certain purpose I have in mind! Now—go on further, Pem! Tell me everything you can think of in regard to her."

As Barremore went on talking, one forgotten incident after another came back

to him—(Nan rapidly jotting down the salient point of each). He had known the Russian girl four or five years, off and on. His success in getting inside information past the bolshevik censors had led the Associated Press to send him back through the country five times—from as many different ports of entry; and each time, either he had looked the girl up or she had most unexpectedly communicated with him. He might have married her. On sober reflection, outside of the country, he was glad he hadn't, because, deep down in his heart, was an old Missouri love-affair which, within the past eighteen months, had worked around to a point where he finally got the girl. But during the Russian phase, he had been fascinated by Tatiana and in position to know a great deal of her more intimate affairs. And Madame Trevor had seen enough of the girl to have a vivid recollection of her voice and more noticeable mannerisms. When Barremore and Raymond Carter asked how she happened to be risking her life in Moscow at the time, Earl Lammerford and Sir Abdool Mohammed Khan began to laugh.

"You ought to know her well enough by this time, Barremore, to make such a question superfluous! Trevor an' Abdool were taking a quiet 'look-see' through the Balkans—I had just been clear through the country from Vladivostok, west. But there were sorts of information as to the activities of German and Hungarian agents which we couldn't get because their tracks were too well covered in every direction except their relations with the Russian women. That's where Nan scored—heavily. She got information which eventually reached some of the outside chancelleries in time to block a good deal of mighty dangerous influence. Of course she took the chance of not getting out alive, but she's been doing that, more or less, ever since she was a little girl helping her father in the Secret Service of India."

WHILE the men were discussing some of Nan's diplomatic adventures, she left the room to order refreshments sent up there, as they supposed—taking the picture of Tatiana with her. In ten minutes, a couple of the household Afghans appeared with loaded trays and began to arrange appetizing things upon one end of the big table. Meanwhile the mistress of the house had gone to her own suite, looked rapidly over some twenty gowns hanging in a big closet, selected one; then, propping the photograph against a triple mirror on her dressing-table, she busied herself with making a few slight but carefully studied changes in her facial appearance. A slight fullness in certain muscles was obtained by injecting a tiny drop of an East Indian drug just under the skin. A line was deepened slightly, here and there, with a flesh-colored pencil of darker shade. Her hair was taken down and rearranged in an entirely different manner. From a small drawer in a cabinet she took a ring set with two diamonds and a superb ruby—also, a jade pin of odd, artistic design.

When she had slipped on the dress she had chosen and gone up to the library again, the men had just pulled their chairs around one end of the big table. None of them would have said that she had been out of the room more than five or six minutes. Actually, it had been about thirty—but she had learned the value of quick changes in personal appearance where such ability frequently meant the difference between life and death.

Nothing was lighted in the room save the two shaded candelabra on the long table, so that while they were subconsciously aware of her coming in the door, they didn't look up and wouldn't have seen her face clearly if they had. The Earl moved out the vacant chair at his side for her, as he talked—and pushed it in as she seated herself. It never occurred to one of them that the lady, by any possibility, could be other than Mrs. Trevor until Barremore glanced up from the other side of the table—gasped, chokingly, and dropped his coffee-cup.

"My God!" he stammered.

Noting his shock and the surprise of all present the woman began speaking in a low, rich contralto which carried throughout the room yet seemed to be repressed.

"So, M'sieur Pemberton—we meet again! In Moscow, I supposed that I was engaged to you—that I was to be your wife when we were safely out of the country. You were even quite extravagant for a newspaper man, in the matter of this ring! I knew that you must have an independent income when you gave it to me—you see, women who have been upon the stage of the Imperial Theater in Petrograd learn to know something of jewels and their value. This ring has been my

dearest possession—I would have died before permitting anyone to take it from me, because it was a pledge from the man I loved—an American gentleman, as I supposed. You disappeared during the first of those horrible nights in the Moscow streets! I supposed they had murdered you! I asked for news of you, here and there, when I dared. I searched the streets for your body—and was shot, myself—left for dead upon a pile of corpses. But I got out of Russia alive, recovered in a Roumanian hospital, came to Paris, where I have been supporting myself by my canvases and illustrations. And last week—I learn for the first time that you did not die in Moscow, that you are alive—in excellent health—and have been married for over a year to another woman! It seems you took no trouble to search for me."

BARREMORE'S face had become ghastly; beads of perspiration dotted his forehead. He really hadn't made the exhaustive search through the horrors which are present-day Russia for Tatiana Balkanoff which he more certainly would have made for his Missouri wife—but the whole affair with her had been unreal, a temporary passion in the midst of lurid tragedy. In the saner light of outside civilization, he had accepted the fact of her total disappearance as ending the affair as far as he was concerned. But now, here in Paris, among friends whose personal honor was beyond price, the Virginian felt himself a cad. In a moment Trevor broke the painful silence:

"Let up on him, Nan! You've got him going, and it isn't fair! He doesn't know your ability in this line as we do—and from what I've heard of his acquaintance with that Russian girl, he has nothing whatever to reproach himself with! Any one of us would have done the same! She was no wife for an American, fascinating as she undoubtedly was. Now apologize!"

There was a familiar laugh—and a voice which somehow didn't associate itself with the supposed Russian in the least.

"I certainly do apologize, Pem! I really didn't believe I could fool you to this extent. Even fooled Lammy too—which is the highest compliment of all, because he's a tough, sophisticated old bird. —I did, Lammy! You know I did! But I want to use this impersonation where the least slip may not only defeat the serious object I'm after, but cost me my life as well—so I just had to know how good it was."

Barremore relaxed, wiping the perspiration from his face and neck. There was a noticeable sigh of relief, as if he had wakened from a nightmare—and he managed to grin a little.

"You certainly had me going, Mrs. Trevor! I never saw any such perfect reproduction of another personality in my life! Don't understand yet where you got that ring and pin; I'd swear to them, anywhere! Picked out those stones in the ring myself, and had them set as I wished—"

"I took them from her, of course—before calling that other woman to help bury her."

"Well, I'm going to give you a word of caution even if it seems impertinence. If you spring this on people who knew Tatiana in Moscow, you stand a first-rate chance of being messily killed for things she knew—for things she may have done which were a menace to those rotters. They wont question your identity for a second! What's the game, anyhow—if you don't mind telling us?"

"Just this: We've simply got to have inside information on Russo-German plans for months and years ahead. There'll be nothing much done at Genoa—which means another conference, or adjournment to some other place, possibly several of them. They're playing a game of bluff for big stakes, both of them, with what seems to me an excellent mutual understanding. The peace of the world depends upon our ability to handle Russia and Germany as they are. With no other countries on the globe is there any real danger of war or conquest. All other boundaries can be adjusted without fighting, all other international debts. And one of the burning questions within Russia itself is the looting of money and jewels by Soviet leaders for themselves, while they leave the people to starve. I've a scheme in mind to accomplish something with parts of that loot in one or two cases, though it's almost too much to hope for."

ALL this clearly explains to the reader how Madame Julie Moncœur happened to lease the big studio in the Impasse du Main, and who she actually was at the time of the exodus from Genoa to Paris, several weeks later. She had, in the meantime, adroitly managed to make the ac-

quaintance of Von Grünwald, as the supposed Trepanoff brother, and Von Ebeling—who would have knifed her and taken his chances, had he but known the details of certain affairs in which she or her husband had so cleverly blocked him.

The studio itself had been chosen with an eye to certain requirements in general plan. It was the living-room of a small apartment which had the usual Parisian arrangement—a dark passage along the rear, with a kitchen range, and from this passage doors opening into each one of the four rooms *en suite*. From the first and largest room, used as the studio, a door opened directly upon the stairway hall of the building. From the end of the dark passage, also, a door—locked from the inside—opened upon the stairway hall. The idea, of course, is to give one's *bonne* access from the outer hall of the building to the dark passage, with its cooking-range and pantry, without disturbing the occupants of the living and sleeping-rooms. This general plan of apartment is so common in Paris and other Continental cities that the American system of planning would arouse comment.

Returning, now, to the dinner-party in the Rue Vaneau: six of them presently got into a car at the curb and were driven to the Impasse du Main at the other side of the Luxembourg. The big studio was filled with men and women of various nationalities, in costume and dominoes, when the Russians and Germans arrived—not overcrowded, but comfortably enough filled to permit of têtes-à-tête here and there without their being noticeable. Von Ebeling and one other Berliner had met Tatiana Balkanoff upon a few occasions when nothing had occurred particularly to fix her name in their memories—her face was quite familiar, but not so easily placed. Von Grünwald had met her only in Paris, with no knowledge of any other name or circumstances. Mouravief, Karanov and Slinski, on the contrary, had known her exceedingly well—had been associated with her politically to an extent which made recognition certain at first glance. But owing to the dominoes which masked all the faces for a couple of hours, none of them immediately got this glance.

What Mouravief and Slinski did get, however, was something equally startling. The guests had been requested to leave wraps and coats in Madame's dressing-room—after adjusting their dominoes before coming upstairs to her floor. Upon the wall of this room, over the dressing-table, were half a dozen photographs in silver frames. And one of these was the picture of Tatiana Balkanoff with the imprint of a well-known Moscow photographer in the days of the Empire. The two men all but had heart-failure when they saw it.

"*Diable! Nom d'un nom!* Who would have thought of running across *her* picture in a place like this! Where did this Madame Moncœur ever know the girl—I remember nobody of that name among her acquaintances!"

"Von Ebeling said she was Russian; this name, undoubtedly, is an assumed one. The acquaintance must have been in the old days, anyhow, because that is the picture she had taken before the war—when playing at the Imperial Theater. Hein! It gets on one's nerves, none the less! It is like seeing a ghost!"

"You're sure it would be a ghost, are you, Slinski? Sure there could have been no chance for recovery and escape?"

"Ugh! Her head was hanging merely by the bones of the neck—one shot had gone through the heart before that! You paid well enough for the service—and got your money's worth. Mouravief—I have the feeling that a woman is walking over my grave—in suède shoes, with Louis heels! There's something here which I do not like—a mystery! Who is this Julie Moncœur? We must be on our guard with her!"

FOR another moment or two they looked at the picture in silence, letting their cigarettes go out. All the guests had arrived by this time and were fully occupied in the studio—there was little chance of anyone coming back into the dressing-room just then. And it was only after duly weighing this improbability that Madame decided to risk a brief unmasking. Drawing the door nearly shut behind her, she spoke in a tone which made both men jump as if they had been shot, and with blanched faces slowly turn around.

"Mouravief! Slinski! This is a meeting I hadn't thought likely to occur for some time—until I heard from Von Ebeling that you were coming to him from Genoa. You knew of course that I had disappeared, leaving no trace in Russia. But you probably didn't know why—or

how. Some of the Soviet underlings—fools, who hadn't brains enough to know better—kept lying to the Inner Circle about me until they finally consented to have me shot, so long as none of them was mixed up in the details. I was warned in time to get out of the house where they came for me, but nearly lost out, an hour afterward, in the streets. There was only an occasional electric burning—the streets were too dark for positive recognition at a short distance, and I had noticed a woman near me who seemed to be of my general type—it is probable that she resembled me closely. I couldn't judge as to that. They shot her, first, and then—did other things, horrible things! I escaped as quickly as I could—with a bullet through my side-muscles—but crossed the Roumanian border."

The two men had listened in a daze. It simply couldn't be possible that the woman was alive! And yet—there she stood in solid, bewitching flesh! It seemed to both that they had never seen her more lovely. And from her story, she evidently hadn't a suspicion of their attempt to put her out of the way. Well—if that were the case, it seemed they had nothing to fear from her! After all, suppose she had been lied about for mere revenge upon the part of some man to whom she would not surrender herself? Such cases were common enough. Her brains and intelligence certainly had been valuable to the Inner Circle at one time. Gradually some measure of reassurance crept back into them—until they were able, stumblingly, to express their amazement and pleasure (?) at seeing her again. As she resumed her domino and turned to leave the room, she said:

"I arranged to get you here this evening because there should be some basis of understanding between us—at once. I am in position—with my acquaintance, here, among politicians of various countries—to pick up exceedingly valuable information from time to time. Whether I pass it on to the Inner Circle depends a good deal upon you and the others in Moscow. In any circumstances I would give you only as much or as little as I saw fit—because I doubt if there are brains enough among you to be trusted with certain facts. But if you expect to get any coöperation from me at all, I must have pretty safe assurance that none of you is planning to cut my throat in some forgetful moment when I'm not on guard! That sort of thing is annoying—unsettling to one's nerves! Now—we'd best not be seen talking with each other again this evening. Pass the word to Karanov and warn him. Tomorrow afternoon, you, Mouravief, will come to me here, alone—to make some definite arrangement."

WHEN she had left them, the two were in a dripping perspiration, trembling in every nerve. Even then, neither would have been willing to swear he hadn't been talking with a ghost, but gradually conviction came to them that her explanation of how the other woman had been mistaken for her, and murdered, was plausible enough. It could have happened—very easily. Something kept hammering in Slinski's brain that he really had killed Tatiana Balkanoff, but the evidence of his senses told him he was a fool to dream it.

In the studio, a few moments later, a masked *Duke of Buckingham* drew Madame into a corner, whispering that Mouravief had managed to send into France and deposit with the Crédit Lyonnaise seven millions of gold rubles, in the form of ingots. The account stood in the name of François Delavergne, but the bank management knew the Russian perfectly well by sight, some of the officials having met him upon more than one occasion. On the scrap of paper slipped into her hand was a facsimile of the signature used in drawing checks upon this big account, and the *Duke* assured her that, with two little identification-marks in the lower corner, a single transfer-check for the sum on deposit would be honored if presented by a responsible person. This information drew a low exclamation from Madame:

"Good work, George! Good work! I suppose you used the influence of your recently formed syndicate of banking-houses—and I'd wager a thousand francs that the French Government itself couldn't have obtained any such confidential information concerning a depositor. I mean to use it—use it quick!"

NOW, what Madame Nan Trevor had in mind concerning Mouravief—after getting all of Barremore's data upon him and Tatiana—was first to ascertain whether he would prove an easy subject to hypnotize, as she thought very likely. A girl born in the Secret Service of India—constantly mixing with bazaar Orientals, in boy's clothes—could scarcely escape

picking up the powerful hypnotic ability so noticeable in the Eastern races. The Orient is the habitat of hypnotism, carried to a degree which Occidentals wouldn't consider possible. So the fat Russian was as clay, next afternoon, under her influence.

She first made him unconscious, then restored just enough ability in moving and thinking to make him her abject tool, responsive to every suggestion. While in this condition, she induced him to show her his pocket check-book with a memorandum of gold-francs to the amount of 14,685,221 on deposit with the Crédit Lyonnaise to the credit of François Delavergne—and had him make out a check for the full amount to M. Herbert Hoover —Chairman Russian Relief. Then—with some changes in dress and facial appearance, putting on a fairly thick veil—she induced him to take her with him, in the car he had just bought, to the Crédit Lyonnaise, procure an interview with the manager of the Paris Branch, and request him to make immediate and formal transfer of the money to the Hoover Committee in other banks. She said but a few words during the transaction—being there, presumably, as a witness only. The manager couldn't have identified her afterward. Then she took Mouravief back to her studio and put him into a heavy sleep for twenty-four hours.

MOURAVIEF and Slinski, both, were dangerous men to every other government—potentially dangerous in any future conference of the powers to which they might be sent. Also there was sure to be danger in her particular case when Mouravief recovered his normal senses and discovered what had happened to his Russian loot. There are people all about us who would commit cold-blooded murder without hesitation if they considered it for their interest to do so—but sane, well-bred men and women are not of this class. Nan Trevor most certainly was not—though in her dangerous secret-service activities she had been compelled to shoot men in self-defense. After considering the two murderers in various lights, she finally hit upon a plan which seemed likely to give them their deserts without having their blood on her hands.

Sending to the Préfecture for a couple of exceptionally intelligent secret agents who had been placed at her disposal before, and concealing them in the dark passage back of her suite, where they could see and hear whatever occurred, she then telephoned Slinski, asking him to come to her studio at once. Scenting a political complication, he didn't lose a minute getting there. When he rang the bell, she stepped out into the hall and whispered a moment before admitting him:

"Are you armed, Slinski? Mouravief is here! He tells me that it was *you* who killed that woman in Petrograd, supposing her to be me—and that you stood out for ten thousand gold rubles to do it! Swears he will kill you at sight. Of course I don't believe a word of it, and I don't mean to see you killed without warning. If he makes a move toward starting anything—be ready for him! If you don't settle the thing now, he'll catch you at some unexpected moment, off your guard. Now—come in—quietly!"

To Mouravief—still under hypnotic influence to some extent—she had previously said that Slinski told her he had been offered a thousand gold rubles if he, Slinski, would cut her throat—Mouravief seeming to think that amount should be quite sufficient, but subsequently increasing it to ten thousand. She had also told him that the murderer claimed to have refused the job, but knew another man had been found to do the work—that the Inner Circle had learned she was absolutely loyal, had greatly regretted her supposed death, and had determined to get rid of Mouravief in some place outside of Russia—also her belief that Slinski had been one of those selected to kill him.

Under such conditions the meeting of Mouravief and Slinski could have had but the one result. Coming into the studio by opposite doors, each had sprung for the other. Neither of them lived until the ambulance summoned by the agents of the Préfecture arrived. As for Madame Julie —it was most regrettable that such an affair should have occurred in her studio. She had been quite right to send for M. le Préfet's assistance when the men insisted upon coming there in spite of her objections. The affair was kept out of the newspapers by Government orders—and there was no mention of her name in connection with the affair, or description of her studio.

And the money looted by Mouravief from bank-deposits and heirlooms of butchered Russian families went back—to feed the starving Russian people.

Bunkered on Bai-o-hae

A joyous story, by a writer with a real sense of humor, dealing with a canny Scot who diverted the attention of a cannibal chieftain by means of a little golf-match.

By Elmer Brown Mason

SAFFRON, scarlet and orange, purple, carmine and cobalt, all the glory of sunset, gray swirl of mist, white fleece of cloud, sparkle of sea and blue of sky —night swept them all beneath the horizon, blended them behind the darkness until transmuted, they flowed out in a flood of silver moonlight over the gold-green of the phosphorescent sea. The stars swung low in the southern sky; a school of flying fish left the water in a golden radiance, dripping a path of brilliance beneath them, to be lost at last in the glowing wake of the schooner *Storm Cloud*, drawing slowly away from the island of Bai-o-hae.

A Kanaka, naked save for a strip of bright loin cloth, was at the wheel. The captain and mate, clad in singlets and ducks that had once been white but which now resembled a dusty, secondhand sunset, sat on camp-chairs amidships, their bare feet elevated to the rail, a bottle of rum on the deck between them.

"Lonely place, that," the captain said, setting down his glass and motioning to the island behind them. "Don't see how MacTavish has stood it for six years."

The mate did not answer at once. Instead he turned and stared across the water at the white of the trader's store that gleamed in the moonlight on Bai-o-hae.

"Pretty girls there," he remarked finally.

"He don't have nothin' to do with 'em —that's another thing I don't understand —and he aint a rum-hound either. How can a white man live away from other white men and not fall for liquor or women? Answer me that?"

The mate did not try. Instead, he switched to another tack:

"Fine lot of copra—every pound sun-dried—we get from him four times a year. He must be pretty rich."

"Man cannot live by breadfruit and money alone," the captain answered, with the conscious air of presenting a quotation.

"There are plenty of goats on the island,

and besides, he's Scotch," the mate retorted, and reached for the rum-bottle.

MEANWHILE, Andrew MacTavish sat in the office of his trader's store on Bai-o-hae, letters and invoices on the desk before him. He was a tall man, lanky and of a melancholy cast of countenance out of which shone two cold blue eyes. His long head was covered with a thick, sandy thatch. Though he usually conformed to the style of dress—or rather undress—of the South Seas, he was clad this evening in white ducks, singlet and even shoes—a concession to the arrival of the *Storm Cloud* and to the reading of mail from the outside world. And after the custom of solitary white men in far places, he talked aloud to himself. His words conveyed no information to the other occupant of the room, however. He-Who-Laughs-in-His-Sleep, MacTavish's personal servant and general factotum, understood no English,—not to mention Scotch,—and was used to his master's soliloquies in an unknown tongue.

At the present moment MacTavish was holding a debate and alternately taking both sides of the question.

"Conseederin' the preenciple o' savin' the most interestin' thing for the last, shall I read the lassie's letters or open yon?" he asked himself, his eyes moving from the package of pink envelopes in his hand to several large packing-cases on the floor.

For a moment he pondered silently, then resumed aloud:

"These letters, noo, they come every three months to me here, and they are from the lassie who's waitin' for me near Glasgie—at Prestwick, to be preceese, where's the grandest course of a' the warld. They will tell me that she is still waitin', ask word o' my weel-bein', gi' me the texts an' the length o' the sermon the meenister has preached each Lord's Day at the New Kirk. 'Tis no denyin' they are absorbin'." He paused, then resumed, taking up the other side of the argument:

"In a manner o' speakin', there's no denyin' I can tell, with the exception, it may be, o' the arrangement o' the words, exactly what each will say. On the other hand, yon *is* somethin' new." He glanced affectionately at the packing-cases. "Losh! Losh! Six years since— But let be; 'tis o'er. Ay, after due considerin', I will first read the lassie's letters an' save you for the last."

Andrew MacTavish took up the pink envelopes, and arranging them according to the date of the Prestwick postmarks, opened them in order. One will do for a sample. Indeed the others differed so little that it was a wonder the trader should so conscientiously read every word.

Dear Andy:

I am well and pray that you are the same. The weather has been misty since last Lord's Day, but was clear on this. The text this morn was: "Your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." 1 Peter, 5: 8. The minister spoke for an hour and twenty-seven minutes under eleven heads. It was an excellent discourse by which all were much refreshed.

It is only four years, now, till you will come back, and I shall be waiting for you. Mother tells me it is wrong for me to do so and encourages Sandy MacGregor to call Saturday nights. I pay him no heed.

Your lass,

JANET.

When the last of these letters had been read, Andrew MacTavish laid them aside, glanced longingly at the packing cases, hesitated, then sternly took up a pen and wrote:

Dear Janet:

I have your seventeen letters by this quarter's boat, the *Storm Cloud*. I am rejoiced to hear that you are well as am I.

Two years ago I nearly made up my mind to tell you something, but I was not entirely sure of it then. I have been thinking of it ever since, and last year I was sure but wanted to wait a decent length of time before telling you. You see unexpected news, good or bad, is like to be a shock. Also it is not seemly to speak of important matters without due consideration. Bearing this in mind, I have delayed. The news is that copra prices have been so good that I shall be able to return in two years instead of four.

I consider Sandy MacGregor's conduct deplorable, and I am resolved to tell him so unless I change my mind before I return.

With sincere affection,

ANDREW MACTAVISH.

Deliberately the trader sealed the envelope and addressed it in a bold hand to—

Miss Janet Burns,
17 High Street,
Prestwick,
Scotland,
Great Britain.

Then, with a suddenness that woke up He-Who-Laughs-in-His-Sleep, MacTavish sprang to his feet.

"Bring me a chisel and a hammer," he directed in the Marquesan tongue, and turned to his packing cases.

NAIL by nail he carefully opened them all before touching their contents, then, with a sigh of pure bliss, unwrapped the first of the bundles within the largest case, picked up one of the four similar articles it held, and stood straight in the lamplight wiggling a mashie above the floor.

"Losh!" he whispered in pure delight, then "Losh!" again. An eight-inch centipede scuttled out from the wall. The mashie, with a quick clip shot, sent it out the door.

Other bundles were unwrapped, boxes within boxes opened, until Andrew MacTavish stood among a collection of golf-clubs—four of each kind—boxes of balls, all the paraphernalia of the king of outdoor sports. Then, slowly and lovingly, he repacked all but one set of clubs and a dozen balls, humming to himself, the while, a little tune that dealt with woe, desertion and death according to the accepted usage of Scotch minstrelsy.

Outside the moonlight played over the white building, weaving the vines into ghost-dances, touching the nail-heads of the porch floor till it seemed studded with diamonds. It silvered a lithe figure that stole close to the trader's door, played over it while a voice rose, timidly at first, then more boldly:

I teie nie mahana
No tere no oc e Hati
Na te Moana!

It was the "Himene Tatou Arearea," and the voice was sweet as the scent of the hibiscus.

Within, Andrew MacTavish raised his head with a gesture of annoyance. There was a timid knock on the door. He-Who-Laughs-in-His-Sleep crossed over and flung it open, revealing a girl clad in a *cahu* of white fiber on which were impressed scarlet flowers and ferns, a girl dusky-fair as the shadowy night, with eyes languorous as love itself and soft as those of a fawn. The door closed, and there was the murmur of voices. In a few minutes it opened again, and the servant slipped within.

"It is Flower-of-a-Thousand-Dreams," He-Who-Laughs-in-His-Sleep told his master. "She saw your light burning late and comes, as is her custom, to ask if you will marry her."

"Tell her I am going to marry a girl of my own people," MacTavish answered wearily.

"She said to tell you, if you sent her that answer, as you have done before, that she is willing to be the second wife in your household, and prays that you will marry her now or her heart will break. She is very fair," He-Who-Laughs-in-His-Sleep added of his own volition, "and she has been asking you to marry her for six years."

"Tell her I will talk with her before the monsoon," the trader directed, knowing well the uselessness of becoming involved in argument on this subject. Picking up the golf-clubs, he went into his sleeping-room. Before he put out the light, once more he looked the clubs over lovingly, then laid them where he would see them the first thing of all in the morning.

Happily he closed his eyes. Then a disturbing thought made him open them again in the moonlight-shot darkness.

"Losh, the indeelicacy o' yon lassie!" he sighed.

THE song of birds, the roar of surf on the outer reef coming muted through a mile of sunshine—a veritable golden voice of the sea—the croon of He-Who-Laughs-in-His-Sleep as he set the breakfast-table, woke Andrew MacTavish from a dream of the Prestwick links where he was playing marvelously with Flower-of-a-Thousand-Dreams for caddy.

Conscious, even before his thoughts took definite form, that the day promised something unusually pleasant, he twisted a saffron-colored *pareu* around his waist—it matched his hair beautifully—and ran down to the sandy beach. The creamy foam laughed about his ankles, and then he was swimming through the limpid water, reveling in its cool caress on his healthy skin. He remembered Janet far away across the seas, gave a careless thought to Flower-of-a-Thousand-Dreams — 'twas no denyin' he had a way wi' women—but his mind dwelt mostly on the golf-clubs back in the store, on the course toward the mountain that the natives had been putting in shape for over six months. It was a good nine-hole course. True, the weather was main hot for golf, and there was no one to play with. Still, it was always cool for a couple of hours in the evening, and he could teach some of these good-natured, lazy savages.

Flower-of-a-Thousand-Dreams was waiting for MacTavish when he got back to the store. She was clad in a purple *cahu*

ornamented with white embroidered hibiscus blooms, and held a grass-plaited basket of fresh guavas in her hands, which she presented to him, her soft eyes seeking his.

"He-Who-Never-Smiles sent word that he would speak of marriage before the monsoon," she suggested timidly.

"The monsoon is many months away," he answered gently. "Losh, but yon's a bonny lassie!" he said aloud in his own tongue, and accepted the basket of guavas.

"Flower-of-a-Thousand-Dreams waits the words that will bring her from the darkness of the cruel god Po, into the sunshine of happiness," the girl answered humbly, and slowly walked away.

MACTAVISH breakfasted leisurely on the porch in the sunshine, butterflies hovering above his sandy thatch of hair, humming birds darting back and forth among the vines. As he ate, he talked aloud to himself:

"There's the dryin' copra to be inspected —'twull tak' but an hour—an' 'tis a' there is to do this day. I shall then try the new clubs. Losh, how wull it feel to ha' a driver in my hand again? He-Who-Laughs-in-His-Sleep wull be my caddy. I wad weel like to teach him the game, he bein' inteelligent, in a manner o' speakin', but 'twad never do. He wad become desrespectful, mayhap. No, he shall be my caddy."

Perversely his mind flew back to that vision of the night, in which Flower-of-a-Thousand-Dreams seemed to be following over the links at Prestwick while he made par hole after par hole. He dismissed the fantasy with a shake of his head, and again spoke aloud:

" 'Tis a foursome I must be organizin'. I wull be considerin' who it shall be." He paused in thought too deep for words, then resumed, after a perceptible interval: "There's Prince Laughter-Laughter-Always. 'Tis a matter o' policy, ye'll understand, that the ruler—in a manner o' speakin' only—should be one o' them. Aiblins I doubt me if he is seerious eno' to make a real gowfer. 'Twull do him guid, though, seein' he is o'er fat. Then there's Man-Who-Ate-His-Sister-in - Law-by - Marriage. Losh, yon's the best of the lot—seerious an' as lang in length as mysel'. Who shall the third be? Ay, yon's the question."

MacTavish's forehead wrinkled; he sat forward, his hand to his brow, an attenuated and lengthened replica of "The Thinker." Heart-of-Flowers? No, he was wrapped up in his domestic affairs—had too many wives. He-Who-Chases-Sharks? Too quick-tempered for the ancient and honorable game. Great-Mouth, the kava-drinker? No, he was always drunk. "Na that I ha' any deceeded objection to a wee snifter noo an' then," MacTavish said aloud, "but 'tis neecessary to draw the line somewhere." How about Finder-of-Rum? The trader abandoned his thoughtful attitude and sat up. Finder-of-Rum was intelligent, owned most of the cocoanut-trees below the mountain. But he was Flower-of-a-Thousand-Dreams' father!

"'Twad only gi' the puir lassie encouragement," he said aloud, and sighed. "Weel, I'll no think o' the fourth for the present." He rose to his feet and called He-Who-Laughs-in-His-Sleep to go with him to inspect the copra drying in the sun.

WHO shall say what emotions filled the soul of Andrew MacTavish as he stood on the first tee of his private golf course in the beautiful island of Bai-o-hae! With the happy deliberation of a lover who takes the ardently yielding maiden of his choice to his arms, the trader glanced about him at the smiling natives clustered around the golf-bag-bearing person of his servant, at the mountain in the distance, at the Marquesan forest, at the goats straying across the landscape; then his eyes came back to the little white ball at his feet. Slowly, almost sensuously, he waggled the head of his driver above it, came back slow, then, with the full St. Andrews swing, head down and following through, he drove. There was the sharp, clean smack of a perfectly hit ball,—no sweeter sound in nature to the ears of a Scotchman,—an exclamation of wonder from the watching natives, and MacTavish shaded his eyes with his hand and looked down the course.

"Twa hundred eighty yards, ay, o'er twa hundred eighty yards," he said aloud. "'Tis na sa bad."

There was an excited outburst of questions from the Marquesans. Was the little white ball magic? Was it better than a gun? Would He-Who-Never-Smiles deign to kill a goat with it, next time he hit it?

MacTavish paused to address them in their own tongue.

The magic that made the little white ball go straight and far was good magic. Talk was bad, though. The Marquesans

did not talk and shout questions when in the presence of their gods. They must not do so now.

A respectful silence fell over the group, save for a long sigh from Flower-of-a-Thousand-Dreams, and they followed up the ball. The lie was good. A quarter-arm mashie shot sent it dead on the green —but it took two putts before the Scotchman sunk it.

"Na sa guid." MacTavish shook his head and walked to the next tee.

This hole was the pride of his heart. From the tee it sloped downward for four hundred yards, crossed a small stream, then went up a steep incline for another hundred to a high bunker immediately behind which was the green. The tee itself was a *paepac*—a high platform of huge, smooth basalt stones topped with turf, once the foundation on which a native house had stood, and older even than the ancient and honorable game of golf. MacTavish cautioned He-Who-Laughs-in-His-Sleep to watch the ball carefully, and drove, getting his distance but slicing badly.

"Woosh!" he exclaimed disgustedly. "'Tis eno' to make a mon sweer." Then he added to his servant: "Go ahead to the ball but do not touch it when you get to it. It is *tapu* to touch balls after the club has struck them."

"Where is the ball?" He-Who-Laughs-in-His-Sleep demanded innocently, gazing down the fairway.

"I told you to watch where it fell," MacTavish answered sharply.

"It goes so swiftly from the war club of He-Who-Never-Smiles," the man answered apologetically, "and I would rather watch you."

"Woosh!" the Scotchman said disgustedly, abandoning the Marquesan tongue, and walked down the course.

MACTAVISH could not find the ball. He-Who-Laughs-in-His-Sleep could not find it. No one could find it. The crowd even stopped looking and stood watching the trader, expectant for the next move. The women, grouped slightly behind, were silent, staring at him with softly curious eyes.

"It canna' be," MacTavish said aloud. "I canna' lose a ball like that when they cost such a power o' siller. Na, na, I canna'." He reverted to the Marquesan language before taking another ball from his pocket. "I will give—no, no! Who finds what I have lost shall be high in my favor."

Immediately Flower-of-a-Thousand-Dreams detached herself from the group of women and came to him.

"There is what He-Who-Never-Smiles sought," she said, and pointed to where the ball lay half hidden beneath a leaf, at his feet.

On the next hole the Scotchman pulled to the left, and the ball was again lost. When everyone had given up the hunt, Flower-of-a-Thousand-Dreams again pointed out where it lay. MacTavish remembered his dream of the night before with an uncomfortable feeling. Would this girl end by carrying his golf-bag after all?

"Continueel association wi' me wull only make her mare lovin'," he assured himself gravely. Then, as was his custom, he argued upon the other side:

"But I canna' keep on losin' gowf-balls as I nearly lost yon."

The fourth hole was a birdie three, might be made in two with a little luck. It was a hundred-and-fifty-yard mid-iron shot over a low bunker. The trouble was that the green was snuggled tight against a high cliff, and an overplay would bounce back the ball from the rock, as MacTavish at once found out. He did not care to delay, either, in this locality, for it was on the boundary that separated the coast tribe from the Marquesans who dwelt in the mountains—an unfriendly lot under the leadership of the Eater, whose main wife had a more than local reputation for the talent embodied in her name, She-Who-Skillfully-Cooks-the-Long-Pig-That-Speaks.

MacTavish glanced apprehensively up at the jungle-clothed mountain before he lowered his head and addressed his ball with a mashie.

"How beautiful is the hair of He-Who-Never-Smiles!" a woman's voice murmured.

"Chatterer!" said MacTavish between clenched teeth, made his stroke, and heroically kept his head lowered after the ball had left the face of his club.

About him rose cries of dismay; he looked up to see the natives running in every direction. Cutting him off from the coast came a throng of mountain Marquesan warriors, the Eater at their head.

The trader loosened the heavy automatic in the sheath by his side, thanking

Providence that he had resisted the temptation to leave it behind, and praying that it would not jam, as automatics in the tropics so often do.

The Eater was advancing toward him, but he did not seem actually hostile.

"Kaoha!" MacTavish called the greeting at a venture.

"Kaoha!" the Eater answered cordially. "What does He-Who-Never-Smiles do with the queer-shaped war-clubs? Is it white man magic? I came to make war upon you, but now I fear."

"It is indeed a very powerful magic I am making," the trader answered. "Come, I will show you."

They advanced together to the fifth tee, and with a prayer to the god of golfers that his drive might be something to awe the watchers, MacTavish swung his club. As at the first hole it was a perfect stroke, and the ball soared and soared, to strike the ground finally with a bounce that carried it far on.

"There is indeed powerful magic in a war-club that sends so light and small a thing so far," The Eater observed respectfully. "Now let me strike with the war club."

For a moment the Scotchman hesitated. It was an awful thing to have to trust the best of his four drivers into the hands of an amateur. But the Eater was certainly one to be propitiated, especially under the circumstances. MacTavish handed over the club and himself teed up a ball. The chief from the mountain made a tremendous swipe at it—and fanned empty air.

"Not so hard," warned the Scotchman. "You will break the club and hit nothing. Keep your eye on the ball."

Again the Eater swung, and missed—still again, and moved the ball six inches, though the tee disappeared forever.

Instantly MacTavish forgot all else but the awkwardness of the man in front of him.

"Son-of-a-father-who-couldn't-even-catch-a-fish, descendant of a race of earthworms," he yelled. "Keep your eye on the ball and don't press!"

The savage looked up startled, fearful.

"Why must I keep my eye on the ball?" he demanded innocently.

"The ignorance o' a heathen! No great wonder missionaries grow gray!" MacTavish said in English, then returned to Marquesan, speaking patiently: "You must watch the ball, or Po, the god of darkness, will snatch it away as your club approaches it. If your eye is upon it, he dare not touch it."

"Aue!" the Eater exclaimed in wonderment. "It is indeed a magic making! Come, I will try once more, doing all that He-Who-Never-Smiles tells me to do."

Who can resist the subtle flattery of instructing! MacTavish labored with his pupil earnestly: made him rivet his eyes on the ball, taught him to come back slowly, his savage body molded to an iron-like rigidity, then to swing freely with loosened muscles. And the Eater whacked out a two-hundred-and-fifty-yard drive at the fourth attempt!

"You'll learn," MacTavish said enthusiastically. "Yes, you'll learn—in time. Come tomorrow evening, two hours before sunset, and we will try again. Come to my house. There shall be no harm to you."

"I will come," the Eater agreed without a moment's hesitation. "There shall be no more war between us, but we shall make this magic against Po, god of darkness, together."

Ceremoniously he rubbed noses with the trader; most politely he smelled him with little sniffs indicating pleasure, then, waving to his warriors, turned back to the mountain.

MacTavish looked after him approvingly.

"Yon wull make a gowfer—in time, ye understand. He has the teemperament: seeriousness an' enthusiasm. Ay, yon wull make a gowfer. Where is my bag?" He glanced about him.

Flower - of - a - Thousand - Dreams was standing patiently back of him, the strap of the golf-bag over one bare, shapely shoulder.

A NEW life had dawned for the lonely trader in that far-away island of the South Seas. Time no longer hung heavy on his hands. And also, with the advent of golf, peace and happiness descended on Bai-o-hae. No longer were the men of the coast harried by the men of the mountain. Indeed, war was forgotten. Swords had not exactly been welded into plowshares, since there are no swords in the Marquesas, and plowing is an unnecessary refinement; but many a war-club of heavy iron-wood had been whittled down into an excellent driver. No longer the matrons of Bai-o-hae reproached their husbands for sleeping the day through instead

of bringing fish from the sea or fruit from the forest. Instead they themselves fished or plucked the luscious tropic fruits among the murmuring leaves, that their husbands might participate longer in the sacred rites of that ceremonial so poetically described in the liquid syllables of the Marquesan tongue as Whack-Follow-Swear-Whack-Follow.

Everyone played. Of course the main event was the aristocratic foursome in the evenings, when the sun had sufficiently sunk for some hint of coolness to sift through the balmy air. There were other contests, though, all day long, when the children of the tropics, immune to the most ardent heat, followed the ball over Andrew MacTavish's nine-hole course. Bogey for the nine holes was set at thirty-seven—a stiff Bogey. MacTavish once did it in thirty-six, and gave a feast at which was first seen the Fore-o-whoosh, a dance entirely new in terpsichorean annals of Polynesia. The Scotchman was unquestioned champion, quite unbeatable, and arbiter of the course, Flower-of-a-Thousand-Dreams, his faithful and adoring caddy, always at his elbow.

The Bai-o-haeans took to the game readily, however, and some were treading closely on his heels, chief of whom was the Eater from the mountain.

Even MacTavish gave him credit in his monologues:

"Yon's a gowfer," he mused. "Ay, yon's a real gowfer. Of course it's reediculous o' him to make offerin's to the god Bogey, to whom he has raised that stone pile as an altar on the beach, but it shows, in a manner o' speakin', that the mon's seerious—a most excellent thing in a gowfer. Then that forty-one he did this eve is na sa bad. I might e'en,"—he looked about him cautiously as though there might be hungry ears stretched out from the night to drink in his words,—"I might e'en say, though ye understand that I am no, in a manner o' speakin', actually sayin' it, I might e'en say that that forty-one was guid."

In regard to that forty-one the Eater held the same opinion, though in a more exaggerated form. And he brought this opinion to his abode in the mountains after spreading it among his clansmen on the way. Singer-Whose-Voice-Is-as-the-Roar-of-the-Sea was even making it into a heroic chant as the Eater reached his home.

"'Tis indeed a wondrous thing," She-Who-Skillfully-Cooks-the-Long-Pig-That-Speaks, his main wife, agreed for the sixth time, "but even the greatest of men must eat. Come, my lord of the driv-a, my master of the putt-a, I have prepared a meal worthy even of your greatness."

IT was not altogether tactful of She-Who-Skillfully-Cooks-the-Long-Pig-That-Speaks thus to break in on him. The moment was really too great for material things. The Eater proved false to his name. While he told again of the magnificent approach he had made on the fourth hole, he let a yard of delicious raw sea-centipede wriggle from his hand and escape into the brush, after biting little Eater, seventh, severely on the leg. The warm *poi* stiffened on his fingers as he swept them through the air in a reproduction of that drive at the home tee. The succulent piece of meat, perfectly browned and sprinkled with pepper and ground up oyster-shells slipped unheeded from its platter of pandanus leaves as he showed how he made the thirty-foot putt.

Authorities to the contrary, it is women, not men, who are the materialists. She-Who-Skillfully-Cooks-the-Long-Pig-That Speaks had spent an hour digging up that sea-centipede from beneath a rock seven feet under water; the meat had been secured with difficulty owing to the objection of three visitors from another island who did not want to go back home without the plumpest of their party. The Eater's wife was peeved.

Marquesans, however, are a gentle race not given to quarreling or argument. She-Who-Skillfully-Cooks-the-Long-Pig-That Speaks did not upbraid her husband and assure him with tears that she might just as well not be married at all, now that he had taken up that horrid golf; nor did she threaten to go back to to her mother. Quite the contrary! She simply slipped behind him and smote him lustily on the head with what had once been a war-club but was now a brassie-niblick.

When the Eater regained consciousness, he arose with dignity and departed into the forest, where he sat all night reflecting on marriage as a failure and trying to soothe his injured feelings—and head—by listening to the voice of the Singer-Whose-Voice-is-as-the-Roar-of-the-Sea declaiming his praises from a mountain-top a mile away.

"KEEP your head down," MacTavish directed as sharply as the soft syllables of the Marquesan speech would permit. "You didn't even look at the ball when you drove."

"*Pakeka!* Is it not a good drive?" demanded the Eater sulkily, watching the ball bound down the course over two hundred yards away.

"Yes, 'tis a good drive, but it was only luck," MacTavish answered, a puzzled expression on his face. He was playing a two-ball foursome with Man-Who-Ate-His-Sister-in-Law-by-Marriage as partner against Prince Laughter-Laughter-Always and the Eater, and was one down on the seventh hole. It was not this that astonished him, though; it was the Eater's conduct during the whole game. He acted like a bear with a sore head. Come to look at him, he *did* have a sizable bump just above his right eyebrow. No member of the foursome had ever thought to question his suggestions before. . . . .

They had walked down to the balls, their caddies—and the entire population of the island—following. The trader put his ball on the green with a full midiron shot, and sauntered to where his opponents' lay some ten yards farther on.

"Better use a midiron," he suggested casually.

"Give to Prince Laughter-Laughter-Always a mashie," ordered the Eater of his blue-tattooed caddy, whose brilliant smile revealed teeth filed to the sharpest of points.

"You'll never make it with a mashie," MacTavish objected.

"Is He-Who-Never-Smiles whacking the whack?" snapped the Eater. "Do I not know better which war-club to use than he? Can I not beat him at the sacred ceremonial of Whack-Follow-Swear-Whack-Follow any time?"

For a moment surprise held MacTavish silent. It was not only his preëminence at golf that had been questioned, but much more serious, he realized, the dignity and authority of all white men in Polynesia were at stake.

"Impotent gnat, faded flower of the skunk-cabbage, shadow of a long-eaten sea-slug that throws no shadow!" he finally burst forth, "you could no more beat me than you could tie an evening tie properly. Bat-eared son of an anemic dog-fish, you—"

"Words should not be heard while the ball is in play," the Eater interrupted calmly, and since MacTavish himself had made this rule, he was forced to be silent.

Prince Laughter-Laughter-Always whirled the mashie twice around his head,—a trick that the Scotchman had tried in vain to break him of,—swept it down, uttering at the same time a wild whoop, and the ball rose and rose, hung in the air, swooped down, hitting the green with plenty of back-spin, and settled within two inches of the hole.

"Am I not the best chooser of clubs?" sneered the Eater.

"'Tis another accident," MacTavish answered obstinately.

"Ta! Ta! Ta! And would it be an accident if He-Who-Never-Smiles should play alone with me, and I should beat him—as I can," the chief from the mountain suggested disagreeably.

"No, it would be a calamity," the Scotchman answered.

"Of your greatness, will you attempt it, *Menike?*"

"I will think it over," MacTavish replied.

INDEED, he was thinking it over, and as usual, he thought aloud in English—the English of the country of haggis and heather.

"Aiblins is it undeegnified, in a manner o' speakin', for me to accept a challenge from yon heathen? 'Tis a question deefecult to decide. But I know that I can beat him, barrin' some act o' the Deity. It would be a guid lesson for him. I must make him pay weel for his impudence. Ay, make him pay weel. An' for his sinfu' pride, too. 'Twas that forty-one did it."

"Has He-Who-Never-Smiles the courage to play against me, or is he afraid?" the Eater asked softly, as he holed out on the ninth green—with Prince Laughter-Laughter-Always winning the match by three up.

"Well"—MacTavish hesitated, "well, yes I will play you." He made a sudden resolution. "Yes, I will play you tomorrow evening."

The Eater used the single-syllabled euphonious word which means, in the soft Marquesan tongue: "Great, you're a better sport than I thought you were."

"But on the one condition," the Scotchman added, "that you make a sizable side bet on the match."

The seven Marquesan words that mean "Done!" shot from between the Eater's lips. "I will play the *Menike* for all I have in the world to eat, against the very best he can offer to eat," he added.

"Losh!" MacTavish soliloquized aloud, "He-Who-Laughs-in-His-Sleep must have told 'em o' that case o' canned salmon I've been savin'. Weel, no matter. It's safe eno'."

"I'll go you," he answered calmly, reverting to the native language.

"My household shall feast on red meat," the Eater prophesied joyously. "She-Who-Skillfully-Cooks-the-Long-Pig-That Speaks will be pleased. And a good thing, too! She has been anything but loving lately."

"Ay, he kens o' yon salmon," MacTavish assured himself.

"Auc! The Storm Cloud!" exclaimed Flower-of-a-Thousand-Dreams, slipping the strap of the golf-bag from her bare shoulder to point where the little schooner was entering the bay.

AS Andrew MacTavish walked back from the golf-course, he finally decided that he was angry.

" 'Tis na that he thinks he can play gowf. He *should* think that he can play, in a manner o' speakin', ye'll understand, since I taught him; but that he should think that he could play wi' me! 'Tis plain impudence. An' he saw me make that thirty-six!"

There was a timid touch on his arm; a soft voice spoke:

"May a most sorrowful one speak to He-Who-Never-Smiles?"

"It is not yet the time of the monsoon," Andrew MacTavish objected hastily.

" 'Tis not of that," Flower-of-a-Thousand-Dreams sighed. " 'Tis of tomorrow. Will not He-Who-Never-Smiles let me take his place and play the Eater? He-Who-Never-Smiles must not be beaten."

"Most certainly not," MacTavish objected. "What chance would you have against him?"

"In the early morning, before the doves have begun to fly, Flower-of-a-Thousand-Dreams piously goes around the magic way in thirty-four, thirty-five or thirty-six whacks, never more," the girl answered simply.

"Losh!" exclaimed MacTavish, and again, "Losh! An' I ken these heathen are no ceevilized eno' to lie! 'Tis more than extraordinary! Association wi' me, na doot." In the Marquesan tongue he answered the girl:

"No, you cannot take my place. The game is not for women."

Flower-of-a-Thousand-Dreams bowed her head meekly in yielding, then spoke again, albeit more timidly than before:

"Can we not speak a little, a very little, of love?"

"Certainly not," the Scotchman answered promptly.

That night, of course, MacTavish had to entertain the captain and mate of the *Storm Cloud*. It was not a very lively evening, however. In the morning he superintended the loading of his copra into the schooner, and the swiftness with which he got it on board was a caution. He did not want the crew of the *Storm Cloud* on the island that evening, and the little schooner got away as quickly as possible.

All day long propitiating smoke had been rising from the altar the Eater had built on the beach to the new god Bogey. Also word came to the trader that the women in the mountains, under the leadership of She-Who-Skillfully-Cooks-the-Long-Pig-That-Speaks, had been dancing the Fore-o-whoosh the night through. Of course that kind of thing was all nonsense, the Scotchman mentally assured himself as he walked toward the first tee in the evening coolth. Something told him that he was going to be off his game, though. If the Eater should make another forty-one! That case of canned salmon he had meant to save for his own table. Still, he must win in order to keep the island peaceful. There would be no holding the mountain men if the Eater. . . . . He brushed away the thought as Flower-of-a-Thousand-Dreams knelt to tee up his ball.

THERE was not a yard's difference between the two drives as MacTavish and his opponent walked down the fairway, followed by the entire population of Bai-o-hae. They were both on the green with midirons, and halved the hole in a par three. The second hole also was halved, due to the fact that the Scotchman missed a three-foot putt.

"Now shall the god Bogey show favor to his worshiper," the Eater announced, with a sidelong glance at MacTavish as they were approaching the third tee.

" 'Tis time yon heathen began to realize

what he's up against," The Scotchman soliloquized beneath his breath. "I do no like the manner he looks at me, an' 'tis vara impolite—e'en in a heathen—for him to keep lickin' o' his lips. 'Tis nervousness mayhap', aiblins 'tis the thought o' the canned salmon. . . . . I must, ay, make the green wi' my drive."

MacTavish actually did reach the green, but luck was against him. His ball struck a rock and bounced back nearly a hundred yards. The Eater made a beautiful approach shot, dead to the hole, and was down in three, making him one up.

"Stewed shall She-Who-Skillfully-Cooks-the-Long-Pig-That-Speaks prepare my meat," he announced triumphantly. "Yes, stewed, so there be no toughness."

"Stewed!" repeated MacTavish. "I never heard of stewing canned salmon before."

"Canned salmon?" interrogated the Eater. "Why does the *Menike,*"—he sucked in his breath contemptuously at the word,—"why does the *Menike* speak of—*Aue!*" he broke off. "Can He-Who-Never-Smiles beat that drive?"

Again the hole was halved, but on the fifth, MacTavish squared the match with one under Bogey, while the Eater got into difficulties near the brook. The Scotchman gave a sigh of relief as he addressed his ball on the sixth tee. Then he stepped back from it.

"What do you mean, you never heard of canned salmon?" he asked. "Surely that was what you had in mind when you thought to win!"

"Ta! Ta! Ta! Not so," the Eater answered offensively, "—that is, unless He-Who-Never-Smiles happens to be a fish."

MacTavish gave him a black look, as he stepped back to his ball. For a moment he addressed it, then drove. He hardly glanced to see where it had gone, so busy was his mind, and unconsciously he spoke aloud:

"Sa it's na salmon yon heathen is playin' for. Then what is it? Stewed! *Stewed!*" he repeated, then again: "Stewed! so it shall na be tough." A great light began to dawn on him. "Losh! Losh! But I ha' it," he gasped. "Ay, I ha' it! 'Tis my ain person I'm playin' for. I'm playin' na to be eaten, that's what I'm doin'! Whoosh, but 'tis plain eerie!"

"Aue!" came a cry of amazement from the crowd, and the trader looked up. *"Aue!* screamed Flower-of-a-Thousand-Dreams, wringing her hands. "A goat has eaten the ball of He-Who-Never-Smiles!"

MacTavish stared—then ran. He was too late, however. A bearded billy, the patriarch of the flock, held the ball between softly mumbling lips, then he gulped. The Scotchman could plainly see the little sphere slipping down his throat.

"Fore!" came a cry from behind him, and the Eater's ball whistled by his head.

MacTavish stood in deep meditation, his hand to his chin.

" 'Tis a circumstance na covered by the rules of gowf," he murmured. " 'Tis unpreecedented. Weel, I'll ha' to lose a stroke an' drop another ball. Yon was a guid drive the heathen made, too."

He took a ball from his pocket and dropped it over his shoulder.

"What does the *Menike?*" demanded the Eater with sudden suspicion.

"I'm dropping a new ball. The goat has swallowed mine."

"He-Who-Never-Smiles must not do that," the Eater objected. " 'A ball must always be played from where it lies,' " he quoted.

"But the ball lies in the goat," demurred MacTavish.

"Then play it from within the goat," the Eater answered.

The Scotchman gazed at the animal speculatively. It was a tough-looking goat, the toughest-looking goat he had ever seen. Perhaps, however, if he whacked the goat sternly the ball might reappear, though even then he would lose a stroke. He raised his brassie. The goat did not delay long enough to meet his eye, but shot for the mountain.

"Your hole," MacTavish acknowledged gloomily, glancing up at an equally gloomy sky from which the sun had fled. "Looks like rain," he announced to hide his chagrin.

"The sky whispers of the monsoon," the Eater said anxiously. "May it not bring woe to Bai-o-hae by delaying the feast." And he gave the Scotchman a sidelong glance, licking his lips suggestively.

"Let's hurry," MacTavish urged with something like a shiver.

ONE down on the eighth tee, MacTavish watched his opponent make a perfect drive. As he got off his own, the wind rose with a great sigh, as though waking from a long sleep. Both reached

the green on their seconds, and lay some twenty yards from the hole. It was the Eater's shot; he rimmed the cup. MacTavish looked up, met Flower-of-a-Thousand-Dreams' anguished eyes, and sank his putt with a slow following stroke. Again the match was squared.

The wind was up, the sky dark. The crowd was silent now, tense with excitement as the two players stood on the last tee. Before them stretched the ninth hole, a Bogey four, with a high bunker exactly three hundred yards away.

The Eater's drive was short—under two hundred yards. MacTavish saw his opportunity. He put all his strength and all his skill into the stroke.

"The *Aue!*" of amazement from the gallery told him, before he dared to raise his head, that the drive had gone straight and far. Then a little whimpering sound from Flower-of-a-Thousand-Dreams warned him that something was wrong. He peered down the fairway, but could not see where his ball lay.

The Eater cleared the bunker handily with his brassie, the wind, now nearly a hurricane, helping him, and MacTavish followed his caddy, who was hurrying ahead. Then he stopped and stared, his heart sinking fathoms deep. The ball was snuggled close to the high wall of sod. He was as thoroughly bunkered as man had ever been in the whole history of golf!

"Give me a niblick," he shouted to Flower-of-a-Thousand-Dreams, his voice barely audible above the wind.

For a moment he contemplated the ball, then swung back gently, forward with a snap, and the ball rose—rose straight in the air and came down not two inches from where it had been. Again he struck. The ball skittered to the top of the bunker, hung, then rolled back to the foot again. Once more! This time his eye was not so good, or it may have been the wind on his face. The ball sank deep into the soft ground beneath his iron.

"The *Menike* has taken eleven strokes to cross the bunker while I—I am near the green in two!" The Eater's triumphant voice was barely audible above the wind. "Is it over?"

"It is over," the Scotchman answered, and gazed ahead to try and locate his ball.

"I will send He-Who-Never-Smiles word when the time is for him to come to the feast," the Eater shouted with a leer, then hurriedly drew back at the expression on the Scotchman's face.

Flower-of-a-Thousand-Dreams was signaling him that the ball was lost.

THE wind had fallen, but inky-black darkness wrapped the trader's store on the beautiful island of Bai-o-hae. Within, inky-black depression filled the soul of Andrew MacTavish, the trader, as he pushed away untouched a plate of canned salmon—rarest of delicacies in the South Seas — that He-Who-Laughs-in-His-Sleep had placed before him.

"Ay, twa new balls," he mourned aloud. "Why must I ha' used new balls for yon contest? Vanity, ay, vanity; 'twas naught else. Weel, they're gone, an' there's na profit in cryin' o'er spilt milk—though two new gowf-balls canna' be compared to spilt milk in na manner o' speakin'. But 'tis na the only missfortune. I lost the match. Ay, I lost the match. Losh! Yon's a bad beesiness, a vara bad beesiness!"

He paused to listen to a sound wafted down to him from the mountain, a half wail, half war-chant.

"They'll be dancin' the Fore-o-whoosh this minute," he muttered, "waitin' for me, na doot."

He ruminated silently for a time, then spoke aloud once more.

"An' I made a bet wi' yon heathen, a bet that he could ha' the best food I ha' to offer if he won—which he did. It is to be obsairved that I didn't ken 'twas me ain person he was lookin' on as food. Na, na, I had na a suspeecion. But I lost the match. A bet is a bet, e'en wi' a heathen."

The sound of the celebration on the mountain waxed louder and louder. MacTavish shook his head slowly.

" 'Tis a vara bad beesiness," he said again, "a vara, vara bad beesiness! An' Andy MacTavish, mon, 'twas your sinfu' pride, I'm thinkin', that has brought you to this. 'Pride,' says the Guid Book, 'goeth before deestruction,' which, in a manner o' speakin', is correct. Ou, ay, vara correct! 'Twas your sinfu' pride in gowf, Andy, that has been your overthrowin'. Ay, you thinkin' naught could overcome you, leastwise naught that you instructit your ain self. 'Sharper than a serpent's tooth.' " MacTavish broke off suddenly, and shivered at the word "tooth."

Then, after his custom, he took up the argument from the other side:

"'Tis na denyin' that I belong, in a manner o' speakin', to yon heathen, a bet bein' a bet. But ha' I na remedy? Is there na person who has a preevious claim to you, Andy MacTavish? There is. You are pledged to a lassie, a guid Christian lassie, at Prestwick. Will ye gie what belongs to a Christian to a heathen to flatter a sinfu' pride in payin' a unco weeked bet? Na, na," he concluded triumphantly, "na, na. If yon heathen wants me, he must take me by force—an' I ha' twa guid guns!"

THE trader rose to his feet somewhat comforted. Nevertheless an unwonted nervousness seemed to have him in its grip. He listened to the chant from the mountain for a moment, shivered, then resolutely turned into his office to sort over what the *Storm Cloud* had brought, and to read his mail.

Methodically he checked the invoices against the goods, and last of all picked up the small bag in which came his personal mail. This time he had saved the pink letters for the last. He undid the string and shook the bag above the table. A single envelope fell out.

"One!" he exclaimed in surprise. "An' the lassie always writes me every Laird's Day at four o' the clock. I canna' understand it."

He tore open the envelope, settled back in his chair, and read:

Dear Andy:

I am well and hope that you are the same. The weather has been good this last week. The text, this morn, was from I. Timothy, 3: 11: "Even so must their wives be grave, nor slanderers, sober, faithful in all things." The minister spoke for an hour and twenty-one minutes. It was an excellent discourse by which all were much refreshed.

JANET.

P. S. This will be the last letter I write to you. Sandy MacGregor has inherited eighteen hundred and forty-eight pounds, eleven shillings, and seven pence (£1848, s. 11, d. 7) from his uncle, who led an evil life in the Americas. Mother could not bear to see so much silver wasted in riotous living (he bought two pairs of boots at once, a wicked extravagance since the ones he was wearing could have been patched) as he said he would do unless I married him. Of course I know you will have more money than this; on the other hand, you might be gathered in by the Lord before you came back, and Mother says "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush," so we shall publish the bans this day week. I hope you will do nothing reckless when you read this, as I hear that there are drink and temptations of which a modest lassie cannot speak in those far-away lands.

Respectfully,

JANET BURNS.

MacTavish laid down the letter. There was a queer silence over the world. He wondered what it could be—his grief shutting out all else, no doubt. Then he realized that the chant from the mountain had ceased. He shut his eyes and tried to visualize Janet as he had last seen her, but somehow the vision would not come. Instead an irrelevant picture of the links on Bai-o-hae, with Flower-of-a-Thousand-Dreams carrying his bag of clubs, obtruded itself.

"Ah, weel," he sighed finally, "Janet was a guid lassie, a vara guid lassie. Na doot her mither was maint inseestent. An' yon's a power o' siller, ye'll ken—ay, a power o' siller!"

He paused, visualizing the figures, then the actual sum in English bank-notes, gold, silver, and seven copper pennies.

"There's na denyin' that it makes a change in my plans," he soliloquized. "There's na denyin' it. An' it may ha' its effect on my life, in a manner o' speakin'. On my life," he repeated slowly, "ou, ay, on my life! I ha', noo, na logiceel reason for na bein' eaten by yon heathen, ye'll ken. Janet, Janet, what ha' you done to me!"

MACTAVISH sprang to his feet, listening intently.

"Is that you, He-Who-Laughs-in-His-Sleep?" he called sharply.

"No," answered a soft voice, and Flower-of-a-Thousand-Dreams stood in the doorway. There were white blossoms in her hair. From one shoulder hung a shimmering white *paru* over which were scattered tiny crimson leaves like rose-petals. Her eyes were soft as dark shadows, her lips crimson as the sunset, her skin golden-amber glowing from the quick blood beneath.

"I come to ask He-Who-Never-Smiles to take me for wife. I have waited long," she said humbly.

MacTavish gazed at her sorrowfully.

"Yon's one lassie wi' a faithful heart in a world o' deception," he meditated aloud in his own language; then, speaking in Marquesan: "It is too late to talk of such things, Flower-of-a-Thousand-

Dreams; you know well that I lost the match, and—"

"I come to pray that I be wife, even second wife, in the household of He-Who-Never-Smiles," Flower-of-a-Thousand-Dreams interrupted gently.

"The puir creature! Mayhap she does na understand the fate that awaits me," MacTavish mused, "or it may be that grief has crazed her. I'll just humor the puir bonnie lassie. "You are willing to be my second wife?" he asked aloud in the native tongue.

"Yes," she whispered, her lips tremulous.

There was another silence.

"I—I would be willing to be the third wife in your household," Flower-of-a-Thousand-Dreams ventured finally, but her lips were no longer tremulous; they had changed to a straight line.

MacTavish shook his head.

"There will be no third wife," he said sadly. "I fear me there will be not even a first one! Listen, now, Flower-of-a-Thousand-Dreams; do you not know that the Eater prepares a feast tonight, and I, I—" He hesitated, ended desperately: "I am it."

A smile of wonder, of pure delight, came over the face of Flower-of-a-Thousand-Dreams.

"*Aue!* He has not heard," she cried. Then flinging up her arms in a gesture of amazement, she caught the trader's hand and pulled him to the open door. All was blackness, but through the dark came a sound that was no longer a chant of battle, but a wail of anguish.

"Up there in the mountain," Flower-of-a-Thousand-Dreams said in a hushed voice, "there is terrible weeping and great praying to the gods for forgiveness that sacrilege was meditated on the sacred person of He-Who-Never-Smiles. Listen, I will tell you how it is so. When the wind fell as the sea took the sun, the mountain people made a great fire, told so to do by the main wife of the Eater. Beneath the fire were stones to grow hot—this is the fashion of She-Who-Skillfully-Cooks-the-Long-Pig-That-Speaks when there is long pig to be prepared. And all the people chanted while the Eater danced the Fore-o-whoosh alone. From the bushes suddenly came a sound, a warning sound, a very great sound indeed. But the Eater danced on. Then from the darkness broke a goat, a mighty and quarrelsome goat, the very goat who ate the ball of He-Who-Never-Smiles. Straight for the Eater it came. . . . . *Aue, aue!*" Flower-of-a-Thousand-Dreams stuttered in her excitement.

"Yes, yes, what happened then? Be *quick,*" MacTavish exhorted her.

Flower-of-a-Thousand-Dreams stole a step nearer and laid her hand lightly on his arm.

"And then," she said, "the goat struck the Eater mightily with his head, sending him violently into the fire. Giving that war-cry which is the cry of the mountain people when they prepare to slay mightily, the Eater rose from the fire and ran wildly after the goat, shaking his spear and calling on Po, god of darkness, to have the goat in his keeping. Swiftly ran the Eater, more swiftly still the goat, until they came to the cliff of which He-Who-Never-Smiles knows, the one that leans out—thus!" She swayed her slender body toward him. "There the goat leaped and gained the other side, but the Eater went down and down." She paused, then added pensively; "the rocks are very sharp below."

"THERE'S a chance, I'll say na mare, there's a chance of recoverin' one ball —seein' yon goat is still leevin'," mused MacTavish in his own tongue, then spoke in Marquesan:

"What then?"

"Then all who saw how the Eater had run to his death fell on their faces and cried out to be forgiven. Tonight, all night, they will cry aloud, and tomorrow they will come down from the mountain to tell of their love and ask what punishment He-Who-Never-Smiles demands. For surely it was a grievous sin, and they should be punished," Flower-of-a-Thousand-Dreams ended warmly.

"Losh!" MacTavish said again slowly, and then again, "Losh! There's na denyin' yon was a grand gowfer, a grand gowfer," he mused. "'Tis a peety, an' exceedin' peety—but convenient, ye'll mind—ou, ay, vara convenient."

Flower-of-a-Thousand-Dreams again laid her hand upon his arm.

"The monsoon has come and gone," she whispered timidly, with downcast eyes.

MacTavish stared at her; his face softened.

Flower-of-a-Thousand-Dreams raised her eyes fearfully to his.

"Aue, aue!" she cried. "He-Who-Never-Smiles is smiling!"

"The Zeppelin's Passenger," "The Cinema Murder" and "The Great Prince Shan" are some of the many books that have won for Mr. Oppenheim his reputation as one of the very cleverest writers living.

THE EVIL

By E. Phillips

(What Has Already Happened:)

THE noted barrister Francis Ledsam had just won the acquittal of Oliver Hilditch from the charge of murdering his business partner Jordan, when an attractive woman spoke to him, insisted on an immediate interview; and in the little tea-shop across from the Old Bailey, to which Ledsam escorted her, she explained that she was Hilditch's wife—and that Hilditch was guilty—guilty not only of Jordan's murder but of many other atrocious crimes.

That night Ledsam was dining at Claridge's with his friend the novelist Andrew Wilmore, when to his astonishment Hilditch and his wife entered and dined together, apparently on the best of terms. More, as Ledsam was leaving, Hilditch stopped him, presented him to his wife, and requested that he dine with them soon at their own house.

Horrified, yet intensely curious concerning these strange people, Ledsam accepted. And the next night found him at the murderer's well-appointed dinner-table.

Another shock followed; after dinner Hilditch coolly confessed the murder and showed the weapon with which it was done—a stiletto cleverly concealed in a golf-club handle. Protesting, Ledsam begged to be excused and left the house, but before his departure Hilditch made another astonishing confession:

"My death," he observed calmly, "is the one thing in the world which would make my wife happy."

Late that night Ledsam was awakened by the telephone—over which Mrs. Hilditch informed him that her husband had committed suicide with the same weapon that had killed Jordan.

ALTHOUGH he suspected Mrs. Hilditch had killed her husband, Ledsam kept silent at the inquest concerning his reasons for this belief. He decided, however, to renounce his career: he would never again defend a man accused of crime unless he knew him innocent. He would, moreover, devote himself to fighting crime and criminals.

You will find here one of the most enthralling stories this or any other magazine ever printed. Even if you missed the first installment you can easily pick up the thread of the story here.

SHEPHERD

Oppenheim

He was discussing this decision with his friend Wilmore at Soto's one evening when a tall man interrupted him with a cynical remark which showed he had overheard, and then introduced himself as Sir Timothy Brast, Mrs. Hilditch's father. He further remarked that if Ledsam were looking for a crime, he had only to wait about Soto's; he prophesied that a crime would be committed there that night.

And sure enough, only a little while afterward a young woman named Daisy Hyslop sent her escort Victor Bidlake to fetch a taxi—and a few moments later Bidlake was carried back into the vestibule with a bullet through his heart.

Because of Brast's prophecy, Ledsam suspected him somehow guilty; but the event seemed to prove otherwise. A fortnight later, in Soto's American bar, and in the presence of Ledsam and Brast, a young man named Fairfax was arrested by the police for the murder—and immediately made confession by swallowing a fatal dose of poison.

(The Story Continues in Detail:)

CHAPTER XIV

THE greatest tragedies in the world, provided they happen to other people, have singularly little effect upon the externals of our own lives. There was certainly not a soul in Soto's that night who did not know that Bobby Fairfax had been arrested in the bar below for the murder of Victor Bidlake, had taken poison and died on the way to the police-station. Yet the same number of dinners were ordered and eaten, the same quantity of wine drunk. The management considered that they had shown marvelous delicacy of feeling by restraining the orchestra from their usual musical gymnastics until after the service of dinner. Conversation, in consequence, buzzed louder than ever. One speculation in particular absorbed the attention of every single person in the room—why had Bobby Fairfax, at the zenith of a very successful career, risked the gallows and actually accepted death for the sake of killing Victor Bidlake, a young man with whom, so far as anybody knew, he had no quarrel?

There were many theories; many people who knew the real facts and whispered them into a neighbor's ear, only to have them contradicted a few moments later. Yet curiously enough, the two men who knew most about it were the two most silent men in the room, for each was dining alone. Francis, who had remained only in the hope that something of the sort might happen, was conscious of a queer sense of excitement when, with the service of coffee, Sir Timothy, glass in hand, moved up from a table lower down and with a word of apology took the vacant place by his side. It was what he had desired, and yet he felt a thrill almost of fear at Sir Timothy's murmured words. He felt that he was in the company of one who, if not an enemy, at any rate had no friendly feeling toward him.

"My congratulations, Mr. Ledsam," Sir Timothy said quietly. "You appear to have started your career with a success."

"Only a partial one," Francis acknowledged; "and as a matter of fact, I deny that I have started in any new career. It was easy enough to make use of a fluke and direct the intelligence of others toward the right person, but when the real significance of the thing still eludes you, one can scarcely claim a triumph."

SIR TIMOTHY gently knocked the ash from the very fine cigar which he was smoking.

"Still, your ground-work was good," he observed.

Francis shrugged his shoulders.

"That," he admitted "was due to chance."

"Shall we exchange notes?" Sir Timothy suggested gently. "It might be interesting."

"As you will," Francis assented. "There is no particular secret in the way I stumbled upon the truth. I was dining here that night, as you know, with Andrew Wilmore, and while he was ordering the dinner and talking to some friends, I went down to the American bar to have a cocktail. Miss Daisy Hyslop and Fairfax were seated there alone and talking confidentially. Fairfax was insisting that Miss Hyslop should do something which puzzled her. She consented reluctantly, and Fairfax then hurried off to the theater. Later on, Miss Hyslop and the unfortunate young man occupied a table close to ours, and I happened to notice that she made a point of leaving the restaurant at a particular time. While they were waiting in the vestibule, she grew very impatient. I was standing behind them and I saw her glance at the clock just before she insisted upon her companion's going out himself to look for a taxicab. Ergo, one inquires at Fairfax's theater. For that exact three quarters of an hour he is off the stage. At that point my interest in the matter ceases. Scotland Yard was quite capable of the rest."

"Disappointing," Sir Timothy murmured. "I thought at first that you were overmodest. I find that I was mistaken. It was chance alone which set you on the right track."

"Well, there is my story, at any rate," Francis declared. "With how much of your knowledge of the affair are you going to indulge me?"

Sir Timothy slowly revolved his brandy-glass.

"Well," he said, "I will tell you this: The two young men concerned—Bidlake and Fairfax—were both guests of mine recently at my country house. They had discovered for one another a very fierce and reasonable antipathy. With that recurrence to primitivism with which I have always been a hearty sympathizer, they agreed, instead of going round their little world making sneering remarks about each other, to fight it out."

"At your suggestion, I presume?" Francis interposed.

"Precisely," Sir Timothy assented. "I recommended that course, and I offered them facilities for bringing the matter to a crisis. The fight, indeed, was to have come off the day after the unfortunate episode which anticipated it."

"Do you mean to tell me that you knew—" Francis began.

Sir Timothy checked him.

"I knew nothing," he said, "except this: They were neither of them young men of much stomach, and I knew that the one who was the greater coward would probably try to anticipate the matter by attacking the other first if he could. I knew that Fairfax was the greater coward—not that there was much to choose between them—and I also knew that he was the injured person. That is really all there is about it. My somewhat theatrical statement to you was based upon probability, and not upon any certain foreknowledge. As you see, it came off."

"And the cause of their quarrel?" Francis asked.

"There might have been a hundred reasons," Sir Timothy observed. "As a matter of fact, it was the eternal one. There is no need to mention a woman's name, so we will let it go at that."

THERE was a moment's silence—a strange, unforgetable moment for Francis Ledsam, who seemed by some curious trick of the imagination to have been carried away into an impossible and grotesque world. The hum of eager conversation, the popping of corks, the little trills of feminine laughter, all blended into one sensual and not unmusical chorus, seemed to fade from his ears. He fancied himself in some subterranean place of vast dimensions, through the grim galleries of which men and women with evil faces crept like animals. And towering above them, unreal in size, his scornful face an epitome of sin, the knout which he wielded symbolical and ghastly, driving his motley flock with the leer of the evil shepherd, was the man from whom he had already learned to recoil with horror. The picture came and went in a flash. Francis found himself accepting a courteously offered cigar from his companion.

"You see, the story is very much like many others," Sir Timothy murmured, as he lighted a fresh cigar himself and leaned back with the obvious enjoyment of the cultivated smoker. "In every country of the world, the animal world as well as the human world, the male resents his female being taken from him. Directly he ceases to resent it, he becomes degenerate. Surely you must agree with me, Mr. Ledsam?"

"It comes to this, then," Francis pronounced deliberately, "that you stage-managed the whole affair."

Sir Timothy smiled.

"It is my belief, Mr. Ledsam," he said, "that you grow more and more intelligent every hour."

Sir Timothy glanced presently at his thin gold watch and put it back in his pocket regretfully.

"Alas," he sighed, "I fear that I must tear myself away. I particularly want to hear the last act of 'Louise.' The new Frenchwoman sings, and my daughter is alone. You will excuse me?"

Francis nodded silently. His companion's careless words had brought a sudden dazzling vision into his mind. Sir Timothy scrawled his name at the foot of his bill.

"It is one of my axioms in life, Mr. Ledsam," he continued, "that there is more pleasure to be derived from the society of one's enemies than of one's friends. If I thought you sufficiently educated in the outside ways of the world to appreciate this, I would ask if you cared to accompany me."

Francis did not hesitate for a moment.

"Sir Timothy," he said, "I have the greatest detestation for you, and I am firmly convinced that you represent all the things in life abhorrent to me. On the other hand, I should very much like to hear the last act of 'Louise,' and it would give me the greatest pleasure to meet your daughter. So long as there is no misunderstanding—"

Sir Timothy laughed.

"Come," he said, "we will get our hats. I am becoming more and more grateful to you, Mr. Ledsam. You are supplying something in my life which I have lacked. You appeal alike to my sense of humor and my imagination. We will visit the opera together."

CHAPTER XV

THE two men left Soto's in company, very much in the fashion of two ordinary acquaintances sallying out to spend the evening together. Sir Timothy's limousine was in attendance, and in a few minutes they were threading the purlieus of Covent Garden. It was here that an incident occurred which afforded Francis considerable food for thought during the next few days.

It was a Friday night, and one or two wagons laden with vegetable produce were already threading their way through the difficult thoroughfares. Suddenly Sir Timothy, who was looking out of the window, pressed the button of the car, which was at once brought to a standstill. Before the footman could reach the door, Sir Timothy was out in the street. For the first time Francis saw him angry. His eyes were blazing. His voice—Francis had followed him at once into the street—shook with passion. His hand had fallen heavily upon the shoulder of a huge carter, who, with whip in hand, was belaboring a thin scarecrow of a horse.

"What the devil are you doing?" Sir Timothy demanded.

The man stared at his questioner, and the instinctive antagonism of race vibrated in his truculent reply. The carter was a beery-faced, untidy-looking brute, but powerfully built and with huge shoulders. Sir Timothy, straight as a dart, without overcoat or any covering to his thin evening clothes, looked like a stripling in front of him.

"I'm whippin' 'er, if yer want to know," was the carter's reply. "I've got to get up the 'ill, 'aven't I? Garn and mind yer own blankety-blanked business!"

"This is my business," Sir Timothy declared, laying his hand upon the neck of the horse. "I am an official of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. You are laying yourself open to a fine for your treatment of this poor brute."

"I'll lay myself open for a fine for the treatment of something else, if you don't quit 'old of my 'oss," the carter retorted, throwing his whip back into the wagon and coming a step nearer. "D'yer 'ear? I don't want any swells interferin' with my business. You 'op it. Is that strite enough? 'Op it, and damn' quick!"

SIR TIMOTHY'S anger seemed to have abated. There was even the beginning of a smile upon his lips. All the time his hand caressed the neck of the horse. Francis noticed with amazement that the poor brute had raised her head and seemed to be making some faint effort at reciprocation.

"My good man," Sir Timothy said, "you seem to be one of those brutal persons unfit to be trusted with an animal. However—"

The carter had heard quite enough. Sir Timothy's tone seemed to madden him. He clenched his fist and rushed in.

"You take that for interferin', you damn' toff!" he shouted.

The result of the man's effort at pugilism was almost ridiculous. His arms appeared to go round like windmills beating the air. It really seemed as though he had rushed upon the point of Sir Timothy's knuckles, which had suddenly shot out like the piston of an engine. The carter lay on his back for a moment. Then he staggered viciously to his feet.

"Don't," Sir Timothy begged, as he saw signs of another attack. "I don't want to hurt you. I have been amateur champion of two countries. Not quite fair, is it?"

"Wot d'yer want to come interferin' with a chap's business for?" the man growled, dabbing his cheek with a filthy handkerchief but keeping at a respectful distance.

"It happens to be my business also," Sir Timothy replied, "to interfere whenever I see animals ill treated. Now, I don't want to be unreasonable. That animal has done all the work it ought to do in this world. How much is she worth to you?"

Through the man's beer-clogged brain a gleam of cunning began to find its way. He looked at the limousine, with the two motionless servants on the box, at Francis standing by, at Sir Timothy, even to his thick understanding the very prototype of a "toff."

"That 'oss," he said, "aint what she was, it's true, but there's a lot of work in 'er yet. She may not be much to look at, but she's worth forty quid to me—ay, and one to spit on!"

Sir Timothy counted out some notes from the pocketbook which he had produced, and handed them to the man.

"Here are fifty pounds," he said. "The mare is mine. —Johnson!"

The second man sprang from his seat and came round.

"Unharness that mare," his master ordered. "Help the man push his trolley back out of the way, then lead the animal to the mews in Curzon Street. See that she is well bedded down and has a good feed of corn. Tomorrow I shall send her down to the country, but I will come and have a look at her first."

The man touched his hat and hastened to commence his task. The carter, who had been busy counting the notes, thrust them into his pocket with a grin.

"Good luck to yer, Guvnor!" he shouted out in valedictory fashion. "'Ope I meets yer again when I've an old crock on the go."

Sir Timothy turned his head.

"If ever I happen to meet you, my good man," he threatened, "using your whip upon a poor beast that's doing its best, I promise you you wont get up in two minutes, or twenty. . . . . We might walk the last few yards, Mr. Ledsam."

The latter acquiesced at once, and in a moment or two they were underneath the portico of the opera-house. Sir Timothy had begun to talk about the opera, but Francis was a little *distrait*. His companion glanced at him curiously.

"You are puzzled, Mr. Ledsam?" he remarked.

"Very," was the prompt response.

Sir Timothy smiled.

"You are one of these primitive Anglo-Saxons," he said, "who can see the simple things with big eyes, but who are terribly worried at an unfamiliar constituent. You have summed me up in your mind as a hardened brute, a criminal by predilection, a patron of murderers. Ergo, you ask yourself why should I trouble to save a poor beast of a horse from being chastised, and go out of my way to provide her with a safe asylum for the rest of her life? Shall I help you, Mr. Ledsam?"

"I wish you would," Francis confessed.

They had passed now through the entrance to the opera-house and were in the corridor leading to the grand tier boxes. On every side Sir Timothy had been received with marks of deep respect. Two bowing attendants were preceding them. Sir Timothy leaned toward his companion.

"Because," he whispered, "I like animals better than human beings."

MARGARET HILDITCH, her chair pushed back into the recesses of the box, scarcely turned her head at her father's entrance.

"I have brought an acquaintance of yours, Margaret," the latter announced, as he hung up his hat. "You remember Mr. Ledsam?"

Francis drew a little breath of relief as he bowed over her hand. For the second time her inordinate composure had been assailed. She was her usual calm and indifferent self almost immediately, but the gleam of surprise, and he fancied not unpleasant surprise, had been unmistakable.

"Are you a devotee, Mr. Ledsam?" she asked.

"I am fond of music," Francis answered, "especially this opera."

She motioned to the chair in the front of the box, facing the stage.

"You must sit there," she insisted. "I prefer always to remain here, and my father always likes to face the audience. I really believe," she went on, "that he likes to catch the eye of the journalist who writes little gossipy items, and to see his name in print."

"But you yourself?" Francis ventured.

"I fancy that my reasons for prefering seclusion should be obvious enough," she replied a little bitterly.

"My daughter is inclined, I fear, to be a little morbid," Sir Timothy said, settling down in his place.

Francis made no reply. A triangular conversation of this sort was almost impossible. The members of the orchestra were already climbing up to their places, in preparation for the overture to the last act. Sir Timothy rose to his feet.

"You will excuse me for a moment," he begged. "I see a lady to whom I must pay my respects."

Francis drew a sigh of relief at his departure. He turned at once to his companion.

"Did you mind my coming?" he asked.

"Mind it?" she repeated with almost insolent nonchalance. "Why should it affect me in any way? My father's friends come and go. I have no interest in any of them."

"But," he protested, "I want you to be interested in me."

She moved a little uneasily in her place. Her tone, nevertheless, remained icy.

"Could you possibly manage to avoid personalities in your conversation, Mr. Ledsam?" she begged. "I have tried already to tell you how I feel about such things."

SHE was certainly difficult. Francis realized that with a little sigh.

"Were you surprised to see me with your father?" he asked a little inanely.

"I cannot conceive what you two have found in common," she admitted.

"Perhaps our interest in you," he replied. "By the by, I have just seen him perform a quixotic but a very fine action," Francis said. "He stopped a carter from thrashing his horse, knocked him down, bought the horse from him and sent it home."

She was mildly interested.

"An amiable side of my father's character which no one would suspect," she remarked. "The entire park of his country house at Hatch End is given over to broken-down animals."

"I am one of those," he confessed, "who find this trait amazing."

"And I am another," she remarked coolly. "If anyone settled down seriously to try and understand my father, he would need the spectacles of a De Quincey, the outlook of a Voltaire, and the callousness of a Borgia. You see, he doesn't lend himself to any of the recognized standards."

"Neither do you," he said boldly.

She looked away from him across the house, to where Sir Timothy was talking to

a man and woman in one of the ground-floor boxes. Francis recognized them with some surprise—an agricultural duke and his daughter, Lady Cynthia Milton, one of the most beautiful and famous young women in London.

"Your father goes far afield for his friends," Francis remarked.

"My father has no friends," she replied. "He has many acquaintances. I doubt whether he has a single confidant. I expect Cynthia is trying to persuade him to invite her to his next party at the Walled House."

"I should think she would fail, wont she?" he asked.

"Why should you think that?"

Francis shrugged his shoulders slightly.

"Your father's entertainments have the reputation of being somewhat unique," he remarked. "You do not, by the by, attend them yourself?"

"You must remember that I have had very few opportunities so far," she observed. "Besides, Cynthia has tastes which I do not share."

"As, for instance?"

"She goes to the National Sporting Club. She once traveled, I know, over a hundred miles to go to a bull-fight."

"On the whole," Francis said, "I am glad that you do not share her tastes."

"You know her?" Margaret inquired.

"Indifferently well," Francis replied. "I knew her when she was a child, and we seem to come together every now and then at long intervals. As a débutante, she was charming. Lately it seems to me that she has got into the wrong set."

"What do you call the wrong set?"

He hesitated for a moment.

"Please don't think that I am laying down the law," he said. "I have been out so little, the last few years, that I ought not, perhaps, to criticize. Lady Cynthia, however, seems to me to belong to the extreme section of the younger generation, the section who have a sort of craze for the unusual, whose taste in art and living is distorted and bizarre. You know what I mean, don't you—black drawing-rooms, futurist wall-papers, opium-dens and a cocaine-box! It's to some extent affectation, of course, but it's a folly that claims its victims."

She studied him for a moment attentively. His leanness was the leanness of muscular strength and condition, his face was full of vigor and determination.

"You at least have escaped the abnormal," she remarked. "I am not quite sure how the entertainments at the Walled House would appeal to you, but if my father should invite you there, I should advise you not to go."

"Why not?" he asked.

She hesitated for a moment.

"I really don't know why I should trouble to give you advice," she said. "As a matter of fact, I don't care whether you go or not. In any case, you are scarcely likely to be asked."

"I am not sure that I agree with you," he protested. "Your father seems to have taken quite a fancy to me."

"And you?" she murmured.

"Well, I like the way he bought that horse," Francis admitted. "And I am beginning to realize that there may be something in the theory which he advanced when he invited me to accompany him here this evening—that there is a certain piquancy in one's intercourse with an enemy, which friendship lacks. There may be complexities in his character which as yet I have not appreciated."

THE curtain had gone up and the last act of the opera had commenced. She leaned back in her chair. Without a word or even a gesture, he understood that a curtain had been let down between them. He obeyed her unspoken wish and relapsed into silence. Her very absorption, after all, was a hopeful sign. She would have him believe that she felt nothing, that she was living outside all the passion and sentiment of life. Yet she was absorbed in the music. Sir Timothy came back and seated himself silently. It was not until the tumult of applause which broke out after the great song of the French *ouvrier,* that a word passed between them.

"Cavalisti is better," Sir Timothy commented. "This man has not the breadth of passion. At times he is merely peevish."

She shook her head.

"Cavalisti would be too egotistical for the part," she said quietly. "It is difficult."

Not another word was spoken until the curtain fell. Francis lingered for a moment over the arrangement of her cloak. Sir Timothy was already outside, talking to some acquaintances.

"It has been a great pleasure to see you like this unexpectedly," he said, a little wistfully.

"I cannot imagine why," she answered, with an undernote of trouble in her tone. "Remember the advice I gave you before. No good can come of any friendship between my father and you."

"There is this much of good in it, at any rate," he answered, as he held open the door for her. "It might give me the chance of seeing you sometimes."

"That is not a matter worth considering," she replied.

"I find it very much worth considering," he whispered, losing his head for a moment as they stood close together in the dim light of the box, and a sudden sense of the sweetness of her thrilled his pulses. "There isn't anything in the world I want so much as to see you oftener—to have my chance."

There was a momentary glow in her eyes. Her lips quivered. The few words which he saw framed there—he fancied of reproof—remained unspoken. . . . . Sir Timothy was waiting for them at the entrance.

"I have been asking Mrs. Hilditch's permission to call in Curzon Street," Francis said boldly.

"I am sure my daughter will be delighted," was the cold but courteous reply.

Margaret herself made no comment. The car drew up and she stepped into it—a tall, slim figure, wonderfully graceful in her unrelieved black, her hair gleaming as though with some sort of burnish, as she passed underneath the electric light. She looked back at him with a smile of farewell as he stood bareheaded upon the steps, a smile which reminded him somehow of her father, a little sardonic, a little tender, having in it some faintly challenging quality. The car rolled away. People around were gossiping rather freely.

"The wife of that man Oliver Hilditch," he heard a woman say, "the man who was tried for murder and committed suicide the night after his acquittal. Why, that can't be much more than three months ago."

"If you are the daughter of a millionaire," her escort observed, "you can defy convention."

"Yes, that was Sir Timothy Brast," another man was saying. "He's supposed to be worth a cool five millions."

"If the truth about him were known," his companion confided, dropping his voice, "it would cost him all that to keep out of the Old Bailey. They say that his orgies at Hatch End— Our taxi. Come on, Sharpe."

Francis strolled thoughtfully homeward.

CHAPTER XVI

FRANCIS LEDSAM was himself again, the lightest-hearted and most popular member of his club, still a brilliant figure in the Courts, although his appearances there were less frequent, still devoting the greater portion of his time to his profession, although his work in connection with it had become less spectacular. One morning, at the corner of Clarges Street and Curzon Street, about three weeks after his visit to the opera, he came face to face with Sir Timothy Brast.

"Well, my altruistic peerer into other people's affairs, how goes it?" the latter inquired pleasantly.

"How does it seem, my arch-criminal, to be still breathing God's fresh air?" Francis retorted in the same vein. "Make the most of it. It may not last forever."

Sir Timothy smiled. He was looking exceedingly well that morning, the very prototype of a man contented with life and his part in it. He was wearing a morning coat and silk hat; his patent boots were faultlessly polished, his trousers pressed to perfection, his gray silk tie neat and fashionable. Notwithstanding his waxen pallor, his slim figure and lithe, athletic walk seemed to speak of good health.

"You may catch the minnow," he murmured. "The big fish swim on. By the by," he added, "I do not notice that your sledge-hammer blows at crime are having much effect. Two undetected murders last week, and one the week before. What are you about, my astute friend?"

"Those are matters for Scotland Yard." Francis replied with an indifferent little wave of the hand which held his cigarette. "Details are for the professional. I seek that corner in hell where the thunders are welded and the poison gases mixed. In other words, I seek for the brains of crime."

"Believe me, we do not see enough of one another, my young friend," Sir Timothy said earnestly. "You interest me more and more every time we meet. I like your allegories; I like your confidence,

which in anyone except a genius would seem blatant. When can we dine together and talk about crime?"

"The sooner the better," Francis replied promptly. "Invite me, and I will cancel any other engagement I might happen to have."

Sir Timothy considered for a moment. The June sunshine was streaming down upon them and the atmosphere was a little oppressive.

"Will you dine with me at Hatch End tonight?" he asked. "My daughter and I will be alone."

"I should be delighted," Francis replied promptly. "I ought to tell you, perhaps, that I have called three times upon your daughter but have not been fortunate enough to find her at home."

Sir Timothy was politely apologetic.

"I fear that my daughter is a little inclined to be morbid," he confessed. "Society is good for her. I will undertake that you are a welcome guest."

"At what time do I come and how shall I find your house?" Francis inquired.

"You motor down, I suppose?" Sir Timothy observed. . . . . "Good! In Hatch End anyone will direct you. We dine at eight. You had better come down as soon as you have finished your day's work. Bring a suitcase and spend the night."

"I shall be delighted," Francis replied.

"Do not," Sir Timothy continued, "court disappointment by overanticipation. You have without doubt heard of my little gatherings at Hatch End. They are viewed, I am told, with grave suspicion, alike by the moralists of the City and, I fear, the police. I am not inviting you to one of those gatherings. They are for people with other tastes. My daughter and I have been spending a few days alone in the little bungalow by the side of my larger house. That is where you will find us—the Sanctuary, we call it."

"Some day," Francis ventured, "I shall hope to be asked to one of your more notorious gatherings. For the present occasion I much prefer the entertainment you offer."

"Then we are both content," Sir Timothy said, smiling. *"Au revoir!"*

Francis walked across Green Park, along the Mall, down Horse Guards Parade, along the Embankment to his rooms on the fringe of the Temple. Here he found his clerk awaiting his arrival in some disturbance of spirit.

"There is a young gentleman here to see you, sir," he announced, "—Mr. Reginald Wilmore his name is, I think."

"Wilmore?" Francis repeated. "What have you done with him?"

"He is in your room, sir. He seems very impatient. He has been out two or three times to know how long I thought you would be."

Francis passed down the stone passage and entered his room—a large, shady apartment at the back of the building. To his surprise it was empty. He was on the point of calling to his clerk, when he saw that the writing-paper on his desk had been disturbed. He went over and read a few lines written in a boy's hasty writing:

Dear Mr. Ledsam:
I am in a very strange predicament and I have come to ask your advice. You know my brother Andrew well, and you may remember playing tennis with me last year.
I am compelled—

At that point the letter terminated abruptly. There was a blot and a smudge. The pen lay where it seemed to have rolled—on the floor. The ink was not yet dry. Francis called to his clerk.

"Angrave," he said, "Mr. Wilmore is not here."

The clerk looked around in surprise.

"It isn't five minutes since he came out to my office, sir!" he exclaimed. "I heard him go back again afterward."

Francis shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps he decided not to wait and you didn't hear him go by."

Angrave shook his head.

"I do not see how he could have left the place without my hearing him, sir," he declared. "The door of my office has been open all the time, and I sit opposite to it. Besides, on these stone floors one can hear anyone so distinctly."

"Then what," Francis asked, "has become of him?"

The clerk shook his head.

"I haven't any idea, sir," he confessed.

LEDSAM plunged into his work and forgot all about the matter. He was reminded of it, however, at luncheon-time, when, on entering the dining-room of the club, he saw Andrew Wilmore seated alone at one of the small tables near the wall. He went over to him at once.

"Hullo, Andrew," he greeted him, "what are you doing here by yourself?"

"Bit hipped, old fellow," was the depressed reply. "Sit down, will you?"

Francis sat down and ordered his lunch.

"By the way," he said, "I had rather a mysterious visit this morning from your brother Reggie."

Wilmore stared at him for a moment, half in relief, half in amazement.

"Good God, Francis, you don't say so!" he exclaimed. "How was he? What did he want? Tell me about it at once? We've been worried to death about the boy."

"Well, as a matter of fact I didn't see him," Francis explained. "He arrived before I reached my rooms,—as you know, I don't live there,—waited some time, began to write me this note,"—drawing the sheet of paper from his pocket,—"and when I got there, had disappeared without leaving a message or anything."

Wilmore adjusted his *pince-nez* with trembling fingers. Then he read the few lines through.

"Francis," he said, when he had finished them, "do you know that this is the first word we've heard of him for three days?"

"Great heavens!" Francis exclaimed. "He was living with his mother, wasn't he?"

"Down at Kensington, but he hasn't been there since Monday," Andrew replied. "His mother is in a terrible state. And now this—I don't understand it at all."

"Was the boy hard up?"

"Not more than most young fellows are," was the puzzled reply. "His allowance was due in a few days, too. He had money in the bank, I feel sure. He was saving up for a motorcar."

"Haven't I seen him once or twice at restaurants lately?" Francis inquired, "—Soto's, for instance?"

"Very likely," his brother assented. "Why not? He's fond of dancing, and we none of us ever encouraged him to be a stay-at-home."

"Any particular girl he was interested in?"

"Not that we know of. Like most young fellows of his age, he was rather keen on young women with some connection with the stage, but I don't believe there was any one in particular. Reggie was too fond of games to waste much time that way. He's at the gymnasium three evenings a week."

"I wish I'd been at the office a few minutes earlier this morning," Francis observed. "I tell you what, Andrew. I have some pals down at Scotland Yard, and I'll go down and see them this afternoon. They'll want a photograph, and to ask a few questions, I dare say, but I shouldn't talk about the matter too much."

"You're very kind, Francis," his friend replied, "but it isn't so easy to sit tight. I was going to the police myself this afternoon."

"Take my advice and leave it to me," Francis begged. "I have a particular pal down at Scotland Yard who I know will be interested, and I want him to take up the case."

"You haven't any theory, I suppose?" Wilmore asked, a little wistfully.

FRANCIS shook his head.

"Not the ghost of one," he admitted. "The reason I am advising you to keep as quiet as possible, though, is just this. If you create a lot of interest in a disappearance, you have to satisfy the public curiosity when the mystery is solved."

"I see," Wilmore murmured. "All the same, I can't imagine Reggie getting mixed up in anything discreditable."

"Neither can I, from what I remember of the boy," Francis agreed. "Let me see, what was he doing in the City?"

"He was with Jameson and Scott, the stockbrokers," Wilmore replied. "He was only learning the business and he had no responsibilities. Curiously enough, though, when I went to see Mr. Jameson he pointed out one or two little matters that Reggie had attended to, which looked as though he were clearing up, somehow or other."

"He left no message there, I suppose?" Francis queried.

"Not a line or a word. He gave the porter five shillings, though, on the afternoon before he disappeared—a man who has done some odd jobs for him."

"Well, a voluntary disappearance is better than an involuntary one," Francis remarked. "What was his usual program when he left the office?"

"He either went to Queen's and played rackets, or he went straight to his gymnasium in the Holborn. I telephoned to Queen's. He didn't call there on the Wednesday night, anyhow."

"Where's the gymnasium?"

"One Hundred and Forty-seven Holborn. A lot of city young men go there late in the evening, but Reggie got off earlier than most of them and used to have the

place pretty well to himself. I think that's why he stuck to it."

Francis made a note of the address.

"I'll get Shopland to step down there some time," he said. "Or better still, finish your lunch and we'll take a taxi there ourselves. I'm going to the country later on, but I've half an hour to spare. We can go without our coffee and be there in ten minutes."

"A great idea," Wilmore acquiesced. "It's probably the last place Reggie visited, anyway."

CHAPTER XVII

THE gymnasium itself was a source of immense surprise to both Francis and Wilmore. It stretched along the entire top story of a long block of buildings, and was elaborately fitted with bathrooms, a restaurant and a reading-room. The trapezes, bars and all the usual appointments were of the best possible quality. The manager, a powerful-looking man dressed with the precision of the prosperous city magnate, came out of his office to greet them.

"What can I do for you, gentlemen?" he inquired.

"First of all," Francis replied, "accept our heartiest congratulations upon your wonderful gymnasium."

The man bowed.

"It is the best appointed in the country, sir," he said proudly. "Absolutely no expense has been spared in fitting it up. Every one of our appliances is of the latest possible description, and our bathrooms are an exact copy of those in a famous Philadelphia club."

"What is the subscription?" Wilmore asked.

"Five shillings a year."

"And how many members?"

"Two thousand."

The manager smiled as he saw his two visitors exchange puzzled glances.

"Needless to say, sir," he added, "we are not self-supporting. We have very generous patrons."

"I have heard my brother speak of this place as being quite wonderful," Wilmore remarked, "but I had no idea that it was upon this scale."

"Is your brother a member?" the man asked.

"He is. To tell you the truth, we came here to ask you a question about him."

"What is his name?"

"Reginald Wilmore. He was here, I think, last Wednesday night."

While Wilmore talked, Francis watched. He was conscious of a curious change in the man's deportment at the mention of Reginald Wilmore's name. From being full of bumptious, almost condescending good-nature, his expression had changed into one of stony incivility. There was something almost sinister in the tightly closed lips and the suspicious gleam in his eyes.

"What questions did you wish to ask?" he demanded.

"Mr. Reginald Wilmore has disappeared," Francis explained simply. "He came here on leaving the office last Monday. He has not been seen or heard of since."

"Well?" the manager asked.

"We came to ask whether you happen to remember his being here on that evening, and whether he gave anyone here any indication of his future movements. We thought, perhaps, that the instructor who was with him might have some information."

"NOT a chance," was the uncompromising reply. "I remember Mr. Wilmore being here perfectly. He was doing double turns on the high bar. I saw more of him myself than anyone. I was with him when he went down to have his swim."

"Did he seem in his usual spirits?" Wilmore ventured.

"I don't notice what spirits my pupils are in," the man answered, a little insolently. "There was nothing the matter with him so far as I know."

"He didn't say anything about going away?"

"Not a word. You'll excuse me, gentlemen—"

"One moment," Francis interrupted. "We came here ourselves sooner than send a detective. Inquiries are bound to be made as to the young man's disappearance, and we have reason to know that this is the last place at which he was heard of. It is not unreasonable, therefore, is it, that we should come to you for information?"

"Reasonable or unreasonable, I haven't got any," the man declared gruffly. "If Mr. Wilmore's cleared out, he's cleared out for some reason of his own. It's not my business, and I don't know anything about it."

"You understand," Francis persisted,

"that our interest in young Mr. Wilmore is entirely a friendly one?"

"I don't care whether it's friendly or unfriendly. I tell you I don't know anything about him. And," he added, pressing his thumb upon the button for the lift, "I'll wish you two gentlemen good afternoon. I've business to attend to."

FRANCIS looked at him curiously.

"Haven't I seen you somewhere before?" he asked, a little abruptly.

"I can't say. My name is John Maclane."

"Heavyweight champion about seven years ago?"

"I was," the man acknowledged. "You may have seen me in the ring. . . . . Now, gentlemen, if you please."

The lift had stopped opposite to them. The manager's gesture of dismissal was final.

"I am sorry, Mr. Maclane, if we have annoyed you with our questions," Francis said. "I wish you could remember a little more of Mr. Wilmore's last visit."

"Well, I can't, and that's all there is to it," was the blunt reply. "As to being annoyed, I am only annoyed when my time's wasted. —Take these gents down, Jim. Good afternoon!"

The door was slammed to and they shot downward. Francis turned to the lift man.

"Do you know a Mr. Wilmore who comes here sometimes?" he asked.

"Not likely!" the man scoffed. "They're comin' and goin' all the time from four o'clock in the afternoon till eleven at night. If I heard a name, I shouldn't remember it. This way out, gentlemen."

Wilmore's hand was in his pocket, but the man turned deliberately away. They walked out into the street.

"For downright incivility," the former observed, "commend me to the attendants of a young men's gymnasium!"

Francis smiled.

"All the same, old fellow," he said, "if you worry for another five minutes about Reggie, you're an ass."

AT six o'clock that evening Francis turned his two-seater into a winding drive bordered with rhododendrons, and pulled up before the porch of a charming two-storied bungalow, covered with creepers, and with French windows opening from every room on to the lawns. A manservant who had heard the approach of the car was already standing in the porch. Sir Timothy, in white flannels and a Panama hat, strolled across the lawn to greet his approaching guest.

"Excellently timed, my young friend," he said. "You will have time for your first cocktail before you change. My daughter you know, of course. Lady Cynthia Milton I think you also know."

Francis shook hands with the two girls who were lying under the cedar tree. Margaret Hilditch seemed to him more wonderful than ever in her white-serge boating clothes. Lady Cynthia, who had apparently just arrived from some function in town, was still wearing muslin and a large hat.

"I am always afraid that Mr. Ledsam will have forgotten me," she observed, as she gave him her hand. "The last time I met you was at the Old Bailey, when you had been cheating the gallows of a very respectable wife-murderer. Poynings, I think his name was."

"I remember it perfectly," Francis assented. "We danced together that night, I remember, at your aunt's, Mrs. Malcolm's, and you were intensely curious to know how Poynings had spent his evening."

"Lady Cynthia's reminder is perhaps a little unfortunate," Sir Timothy observed. "Mr. Ledsam is no longer the last hope of the enterprising criminal. He has turned over a new leaf. To secure the services of his silver tongue, you have to lay at his feet no longer the bags of gold from your ill-gotten gains, but the white flower of a blameless life."

"This is all in the worst possible taste," Margaret Hilditch declared in her cold, expressionless tone. "You might consider my feelings."

LADY CYNTHIA only laughed.

"My dear Margaret," she said, "if I thought that you had any, I should never believe that you were your father's daughter. Here's to them, anyway," she added, accepting the cocktail from the tray which the butler had just brought out. "Mr. Ledsam, are you going to attach yourself to me, or has Margaret annexed you?"

"I have offered myself to Mrs. Hilditch," Francis rejoined promptly, "but so far I have made no impression."

"Try her with a punt and a concertina after dinner," Lady Cynthia suggested.

"After all, I came down here to better my acquaintance with my host. You flirted with me disgracefully when I was a débutante, and have never taken any notice of me since. I hate infidelity in a man. Sir Timothy, I shall devote myself to you. Can you play a concertina?"

"Where the higher forms of music are concerned," he replied, "I have no executive ability. I should prefer to sit at your feet."

"While I punt, I suppose?"

"There are backwaters," he suggested.

Lady Cynthia sipped her cocktail appreciatively.

"I wonder how it is," she observed, "that in these days, although we have become callous to everything else in life, cocktails and flirtations still attract us. You shall take me to a backwater after dinner, Sir Timothy. I shall wear my silver-gray and take an armful of those black cushions from the drawing-room. In that half-light, there is no telling what success I may not achieve."

Sir Timothy sighed.

"Alas," he said, "before dinner is over you will probably have changed your mind."

"Perhaps so," she admitted, "but you must remember that Mr. Ledsam is my only alternative, and I am not at all sure that he likes me. I am not sufficiently Victorian for his taste."

THE dressing-bell rang. Sir Timothy passed his arm through Francis'.

"The sentimental side of my domain," he said, "the others may show you. My rose-garden across the stream has been very much admired. I am now going to give you a glimpse of the Walled House, an edifice the possession of which has made me more or less famous."

He led the way through a little shrubbery, across a further strip of garden and through a door in a high wall, which he opened with a key attached to his watch-chain. They were in an open park now, studded with magnificent trees, in the farther corner of which stood an imposing mansion with a great domed roof in the center, and broad stone terraces, one of which led down to the river. The house itself was an amazingly blended mixture of old and new, with great wings supported by pillars thrown out on either side. It seemed to have been built without regard to any definite period of architecture, and yet to have attained a certain coherency—a far-reaching structure, with long lines of outbuildings. In the park itself were a score or more of horses, and in the distance beyond, a long line of loose boxes with open doors. Even as they stood there, a sorrel mare had trotted up to their side and laid her head against Sir Timothy's shoulder. He caressed her surreptitiously, affecting not to notice the approach of other animals from all quarters.

"Let me introduce you to the Walled House," its owner observed, "so called, I imagine, because this wall, which is a great deal older than you or I, completely incloses the estate. Of course, you remember the old house—the Walled Palace, they called it? It belonged for many years to the Lynton family, and afterward to the Crown."

"I remember reading of your purchase," Francis said, "and of course I remember the old mansion. You seem to have wiped it out pretty effectually."

"I was obliged to play the vandal," his host confessed. "In its previous state, the house was picturesque but uninhabitable. As you see it now, it is an exact reproduction of the country home of one of the lesser known of the Borgias—Sodina, I believe the lady's name was. You will find inside some beautiful arches, and a sense of space which all modern houses lack. It cost me a great deal of money, and it is inhabited, when I am in Europe, about once a fortnight. You know the river name for it? 'Timothy's Folly'!"

"But what on earth made you build it, so long as you don't care to live there?" Francis inquired.

SIR TIMOTHY smiled reflectively.

"Well," he explained, "I like sometimes to entertain, and I like to entertain, when I do, on a grand scale. In London, if I give a party, the invitations are almost automatic. I become there a very insignificant link in the chain of what is known as Society, and Society practically helps itself to my entertainment, and sees that everything is done according to rule. Down here things are entirely different. An invitation to the Walled House is a personal matter. Society has nothing whatever to do with my functions here. The reception-rooms, too, are arranged according to my own ideas. I have, as you may have heard, the finest private gymnasium in England. The ballroom and

music-room and private theater, too, are famous."

"And do you mean to say that you keep that huge place empty?" Francis asked curiously.

"I have a suite of rooms there which I occasionally occupy," Sir Timothy replied, "and there are always thirty or forty servants and attendants of different sorts who have their quarters there. I suppose that my daughter and I would be there at the present moment but for the fact that we own this cottage. Both she and I, for residential purposes, prefer the atmosphere there."

"I scarcely wonder at it," Francis agreed.

THEY were surrounded now by various quadrupeds. As well as the horses, half a dozen of which were standing patiently by Sir Timothy's side, several dogs had made their appearance and after a little preliminary enthusiasm had settled down at his feet. He leaned over and whispered something in the ear of the mare who had come first. She trotted off and the others followed suit in a curious little procession. Sir Timothy watched them, keeping his head turned away from Francis.

"You recognize the mare the third from the end?" he pointed out. "That is the animal I bought in Covent Garden. You see how she has filled out?"

"I should never have recognized her," the other confessed.

"Even Nero had his weaknesses," Sir Timothy remarked, waving the dogs away. "My animals' quarters are well worth a visit, if you have time. There is a small hospital, too, which is quite up to date."

"Do any of the horses work at all?" Francis asked.

Sir Timothy smiled.

"I will tell you a very human thing about my favorites," he said. "In the gardens on the other side of the house we have very extensive lawns, and my head groom thought he would make use of one of my horses which had recovered from a serious accident and was really quite a strong beast, for one of the machines. He found the idea quite a success, and now he no sooner appears in the park with a halter than, instead of stampeding, practically every one of those horses comes cantering up with the true volunteering spirit. The one which he selects, arches its neck and goes off to work with a whole string of the others following. Dodsley—that is my groom's name—tells me that he does a great deal more mowing now than he need, simply because they worry him for the work. Gratitude, you see, Mr. Ledsam—sheer gratitude. If you were to provide a dozen almshouses for your poor dependents, I wonder how many of them would be anxious to mow your lawn. . . . . Come, let me show you your room now."

They passed back through the postern gate into the gardens of the Sanctuary. Sir Timothy led the way toward the house.

"I am glad that you decided to spend the night, Mr. Ledsam," he said. "The river sounds a terribly hackneyed place to the Londoner, but it has beauties which only those who live with it can discover. Mind your head. My ceilings are low."

FRANCIS followed his host along many passages, up and down stairs, until he reached a little suite of rooms at the extreme end of the building. The manservant who had unpacked his bag stood waiting. Sir Timothy glanced around critically.

"Small but compact," he remarked. "There is a little sitting-room down that stair, and a bathroom beyond. If the flowers annoy you, throw them out of the window. And if you prefer to bathe in the river tomorrow morning, Brooks here will show you the diving pool. I am wearing a short coat myself tonight, but do as you please. We dine at half-past eight."

Sir Timothy disappeared with a courteous little inclination of the head. Francis dismissed the manservant at once as being out of keeping with his quaint and fascinating surroundings. The tiny room with its flowers, its perfume of lavender, its old-fashioned chintzes and its fragrant linen, might still have been a room in a cottage. The sitting-room, with its veranda looking down upon the river, was provided with cigars, whisky and soda and cigarettes—a bookcase, with a rare copy of Rabelais, an original Surtees, a large paper Decameron, and a few other classics. Down another couple of steps was a perfectly white bathroom, with shower and plunge. Francis wandered from room to room, and finally threw himself into a chair on the veranda to smoke a cigarette. From the river below him came now and then the sound of voices. Through the trees on his right he could catch a glimpse, here and there, of the strange pillars and green-domed roof of the Borghese villa.

CHAPTER XVIII

IT was one of those faultless June evenings when the only mission of the faintly stirring breeze seems to be to carry perfumes from garden to garden and to make the lightest of music among the rustling leaves. The dinner-table had been set out of doors, underneath the odorous cedar-tree. Above, the sky was an arc of the deepest blue through which the web of stars had scarcely yet found their way. Every now and then came the sound of the splash of oars from the river; more rarely still, the murmur of light voices as a punt passed up the stream.

The little party at the Sanctuary sat over their coffee and liqueurs long after the fall of the first twilight, till the points of their cigarettes glowed like little specks of fire through the enveloping darkness. Conversation had been from the first curiously desultory, edited, in a way, Francis felt, for his benefit. There was an atmosphere about his host and Lady Cynthia, shared in a negative way by Margaret Hilditch, which baffled Francis. It seemed to establish more than a lack of sympathy—to suggest, even, a life lived upon a different plane. Yet every now and then their references to everyday happenings were trite enough. Sir Timothy had assailed the recent craze for drugs, a diatribe to which Lady Cynthia had listened in silence for reasons which Francis could surmise.

"If one must soothe the senses," Sir Timothy declared, "for the purpose of forgetting a distasteful or painful present, I cannot see why the average mind does not turn to the contemplation of beauty in some shape or other. A night like tonight is surely sedative enough. Watch these lights, drink in these perfumes, listen to the fall and flow of the water long enough, and you would arrive at precisely the same mental inertia as though you had taken a dose of cocaine, with far less harmful an aftermath."

Lady Cynthia shrugged her shoulders.

"Cocaine is in one's dressing-room," she objected, "and beauty is hard to seek in Grosvenor Square."

"The common mistake of all men," Sir Timothy continued, "and women too, for the matter of that, is that we will persist in formulating doctrines for other people. Every man or woman is an entity of humanity, with a separate heaven and a separate hell. No two people can breathe the same air in the same way, or see the same picture with the same eyes."

Lady Cynthia rose to her feet and shook out the folds of her diaphanous gown, daring alike in its shapelessness and scantiness. She lighted a cigarette and laid her hand upon Sir Timothy's arm.

"Come," she said, "must I remind you of your promise? You are to show me the stables at the Walled House before it is dark."

"You would see them better in the morning," he reminded her, rising with some reluctance to his feet.

"Perhaps," she answered, "but I have a fancy to see them now."

Sir Timothy looked back at the table.

"Margaret," he said, "will you look after Mr. Ledsam for a little time? You will excuse us, Ledsam? We shall not be gone long."

THEY moved away together toward the shrubbery and the door in the wall behind. Francis resumed his seat.

"Are you not also curious to penetrate the mysteries behind the wall, Mr. Ledsam?" Margaret asked.

"Not so curious but that I would much prefer to remain here," he answered.

"With me?"

"With you."

She knocked the ash from her cigarette. She was looking directly at him, and he fancied that there was a gleam of curiosity in her beautiful eyes. There was certainly a little more abandon about her attitude. She was leaning back in a corner of her high-backed chair; and her gown, although it lacked the daring of Lady Cynthia's, seemed to rest about her like a cloud of blue-gray smoke.

"What a curious meal!" she murmured. "Can you solve a puzzle for me, Mr. Ledsam?"

"I would do anything for you that I could," he answered.

"Tell me, then, why my father asked you here tonight. I can understand his bringing you to the opera—that was just a whim of the moment; but an invitation down here savors of deliberation. Studiously polite though you are to one another, one is conscious all the time of the hostility beneath the surface."

"I think that so far as your father is concerned, it is part of his peculiar disposition," Francis replied. "You remem-

ber he once said that he was tired of entertaining his friends—that there was more pleasure in having an enemy at the board."

"Are you an enemy, Mr. Ledsam?" she asked curiously.

He rose a little abruptly to his feet, ignoring her question. There were servants hovering in the background.

"Will you walk with me in the gardens?" he begged. "Or may I take you upon the river?"

She rose to her feet. For a moment she seemed to hesitate.

"The river, I think," she decided. "Will you wait for three minutes while I get a wrap. You will find some punts moored to the landing-stage there in the stream. I like the largest and most comfortable."

Francis strolled to the edge of the stream, and made his choice of punts. Soon a servant appeared with his arms full of cushions, and a moment or two later, Margaret herself, wrapped in an ermine cloak. She smiled a little deprecatingly as she picked her way across the lawn.

"Don't laugh at me for being such a chilly mortal, please," she enjoined. "And don't be afraid that I am going to propose a long expedition. I want to go to a little backwater in the next stream."

SHE settled herself in the stern and they glided down the narrow thoroughfare. The rose-bushes from the garden almost lapped the water as they passed. Behind, the long, low cottage, the deserted dinner-table, the smooth lawn with its beds of scarlet geraniums and drooping lilac shrubs in the background, seemed like a scene from fairyland, to attain a perfection of detail unreal, almost theatrical.

"To the right when you reach the river, please," she directed. "You will find there is scarcely any current. We turn up the next stream."

There was something almost mysterious, a little impressive, about the broad expanse of river into which they presently turned. Opposite were woods and then a sloping lawn. From a house hidden in the distance they heard the sound of a woman singing. They even caught the murmurs of applause as she concluded. Then there was silence, only the soft gurgling of the water cloven by the punt-pole. They glided past the front of the great unlit house, past another strip of woodland, and then up a narrow stream.

"To the left here," she directed, "and then stop."

They bumped against the bank. The little backwater into which they had turned seemed to terminate in a bed of lilies whose faint fragrance almost enveloped them. The trees on either side made a little arch of darkness.

"Please ship your pole and listen," Margaret said dreamily. "Make yourself as comfortable as you can. There are plenty of cushions behind you. This is where I come for silence."

Francis obeyed her orders without remark. For a few moments, speech seemed impossible. The darkness was so intense that although he was acutely conscious of her presence there, only a few feet away, nothing but the barest outline of her form was visible. The silence which she had brought him to seek was all around them. There was just the faintest splash of water from the spot where the stream and the river met, the distant barking of a dog, the occasional croaking of a frog from somewhere in the midst of the the bed of lillies. Otherwise the silence and the darkness were like a shroud. Francis leaned forward in his place. His hands, which gripped the sides of the punt, were hot. The serenity of the night mocked him.

"So this is your paradise," he said, a little hoarsely.

She made no answer. Her silence seemed to him more thrilling than words. He leaned forward. His hands fell upon the soft fur which encompassed her. They rested there. Still she did not speak. He tightened his grasp, moved farther forward, passion surging through his veins, his breath almost failing him. He was so near now that he heard her breathing, saw her face, as pale as ever. Her lips were a little parted, her eyes looked out, as it seemed to him, half in fear, half in hope. He bent lower still. She neither shrank away nor invited him.

"Dear!" he whispered.

Her arms stole from underneath the cloak; her fingers rested upon his shoulders. He scarcely knew whether it was a caress or whether she were holding him from her. In any case it was too late. With a little sob his lips were pressed to hers. Even as she closed her eyes, the scent of the lilies seemed to intoxicate him.

He was back in his place without conscious movement. His pulses were quiv-

ering, the joy of her faint caress living proudly in his memory. It had been the moment of his life, and yet even now he felt sick at heart with fears, with the torment of her passivity. She had lain there in his arms; some quaint inspiration had told him that she had sought for joy in that moment and had not wholly failed. Yet his anxiety was tumultuous, overwhelming. Then she spoke, and his heart leaped again. Her voice was more natural. It was not a voice which he had ever heard before.

"Give me a cigarette, please—and, I want to go back."

He leaned over her again, struck a match with trembling fingers and gave her the cigarette. She smiled at him very faintly.

"Please go back now," she begged. "Smoke yourself, take me home slowly and say nothing."

HE obeyed, but his knees were shaking when he stood up. Slowly, a foot at a time, they passed from the mesh of the lilies out into the broad stream. Almost as they did so, the yellow rim of the moon came up over the low hills. As they turned into their own stream, the light was strong enough for him to see her face. She lay there like a ghost, her eyes half closed, the only touch of color in the shining strands of her beautiful hair. She roused herself a little as they swung around. He paused, leaning upon the pole.

"You are not angry?" he asked.

"No, I am not angry," she answered. "Why should I be? But I cannot talk to you about it tonight."

They glided to the edge of the landing-stage. A servant appeared and secured the punt.

"Is Sir Timothy back yet?" Margaret inquired.

"Not yet, madam."

She turned to Francis.

"Please go and have a whisky and soda in the smoking-room," she said, pointing to the open French windows. "I am going to my favorite seat. You will find me just across the bridge there."

He hesitated, filled with a passionate disinclination to leave her side even for a moment. She seemed to understand, but she pointed once more to the room.

"I should like very much," she added, "to be alone for five minutes. If you will come and find me then—please!"

Francis stepped through the French windows into the smoking-room, where all the paraphernalia for satisfying thirst were set out upon the sideboard. He helped himself to whisky and soda and drank it absently, with his eyes fixed upon the clock. In five minutes he stepped once more back into the gardens, soft and brilliant now in the moonlight. As he did so, he heard the click of the gate in the wall, and footsteps. His host, with Lady Cynthia upon his arm, came into sight and crossed the lawn toward him. Francis, filled though his mind was with other thoughts, paused for a moment and glanced toward them curiously. Lady Cynthia seemed for a moment to have lost all her weariness. Her eyes were very bright; she walked with a new spring in her movements. Even her voice, as she addressed Francis, seemed altered.

"Sir Timothy has been showing me some of the wonders of his villa—do you call it a villa or a palace?" she asked.

"It is certainly not a palace," Sir Timothy protested, "and I fear that it has scarcely the atmosphere of a villa. It is an attempt to combine certain ideas of my own with the requirements of modern entertainment. Come and have a drink with us, Ledsam."

"I have just had one," Francis replied. "Mrs. Hilditch is in the rose garden and I am on my way to join her."

He passed on, and the two moved toward the open French windows. He crossed the rustic bridge that led into the flower garden, turned down the pergola and came to a sudden standstill before the seat which Margaret had indicated. It was empty, but in the corner lay the long-stalked lily which she had picked in the backwater. He stood there for a moment, transfixed. There were other seats and chairs in the garden, but he knew before he started that his search was in vain. She had gone. The flower, drooping a little now though the stalk was still wet with the moisture of the river, seemed to him like her farewell.

CHAPTER XIX

FRANCIS was surprised, when he descended for breakfast the next morning, to find the table laid for one only. The butler who was waiting, handed him the daily papers and wheeled the electric heater to his side.

"Is no one else breakfasting?" Francis asked.

"Sir Timothy and Mrs. Hilditch are always served in their rooms, sir. Her Ladyship is taking her coffee upstairs."

Francis ate his breakfast, glanced through the *Times*, lighted a cigarette and went round to the garage for his car. The butler met him as he drove up before the porch.

"Sir Timothy begs you to excuse him this morning, sir," he announced. "His secretary has arrived from town with a very large correspondence which they are now engaged upon."

"And Mrs. Hilditch?" Francis ventured.

"I have not seen her maid this morning, sir," the man replied, "but Mrs. Hilditch never rises before midday. Sir Timothy hopes that you slept well, sir, and would like you to sign the visitors' book."

Francis signed his name mechanically, and was turning away when Lady Cynthia called to him from the stairs. She was dressed for traveling and followed by a maid, carrying her dressing-case.

"Will you take me up to town, Mr. Ledsam?" she asked.

"Delighted," he answered.

THEIR dressing-cases were strapped together behind, and Lady Cynthia sank into the cushions by his side. They drove away from the house, Francis with a backward glance of regret. The striped sunblinds had been lowered over all the windows; thrushes and blackbirds were twittering on the lawn, the air was sweet with the perfume of flowers; a boatman was busy with the boats. Out beyond, through the trees, the river wound its placid way.

"Quite a little paradise!" Lady Cynthia murmured.

"Delightful," her companion assented. "I suppose great wealth has its obligations; but why any human being should rear such a structure as what he calls his Borghese villa, when he has a charming place like that to live in, I can't imagine."

Her silence was significant, almost purposeful. She unwound the veil from her motoring turban, took it off altogether and attached it to the cushions of the car with a hatpin.

"There," she said, leaning back, "you can now gaze upon a horrible example to the young women of today. You can see the ravages which late hours, innumerable cocktails, a thirst for excitement, a contempt of the simple pleasures of life, have worked upon my once comely features. I was quite good-looking, you know, in the days you first knew me."

"You were the most beautiful débutante of your season," he agreed.

"What do you think of me now?" she asked.

She met his gaze without flinching. Her face was unnaturally thin, with disfiguring hollows underneath her cheekbones; her lips lacked color; even her eyes were lusterless. Her hair seemed to lack brilliancy. Only her silken eyebrows remained unimpaired, and a certain charm of expression which nothing seemed able to destroy.

"You look tired," he said.

"Be honest, my dear man," she rejoined dryly. "I am a physical wreck, dependent upon cosmetics for the looks which I am still clever enough to palm off on the uninitiated."

"Why don't you lead a quieter life?" he asked. "A month or so in the country would put you all right."

She laughed a little hardly. Then for a moment she looked at him appraisingly.

"I was going to speak to you of nerves," she said, "but how would you ever understand? You look as though you hadn't a nerve in your body. I can't think how you manage it, living in London. I suppose you do exercises and take care of what you eat and drink."

"I do nothing of the sort," he assured her indignantly. "I eat and drink whatever I fancy. I have always had a direct object in life—my work; and I believe that has kept me fit and well. Nerve-troubles come as a rule, I think, from the under-used brain."

"I must have been born with a butterfly disposition," she said. "I am quite sure that mine come because I find it so hard to be amused. I am sure I am most enterprising. I try whatever comes along, but nothing satisfies me."

"Why not try being in love with one of these men who've been in love with you all their lives?"

She laughed bitterly.

"The men who have cared for me and have been worth caring about," she said, "gave me up years ago. I mocked at them when they were in earnest, scoffed at sentiment, and told them frankly that

when I married it would only be to find a refuge for a broader life. The right sort wouldn't have anything to say to me after that, and I do not blame them. And here is the torture of it. I can't stand the wrong sort near me—physically, I mean. Mind, I believe I'm attracted toward people with criminal tastes and propensities. I believe that is what first led me toward Sir Timothy. Every taste I ever had in life seems to have become besmirched. That's the torment of it. I wonder if you can understand?"

"I think I can," he answered. "Your trouble lies in having the wrong friends and in lack of self-discipline. If you were my sister, I'd take you away for a fortnight and put you on the road to being cured."

"Then I wish I were your sister," she sighed.

"Don't think I'm unsympathetic," he went on, "because I'm not. Wait till we've got into the main road here, and I'll try and explain."

THEY were passing along a country lane, so narrow that twigs from the hedges, wreathed here and there in wild roses, brushed almost against their cheeks. On their left was the sound of a reaping-machine and the perfume of new-mown hay. The sun was growing stronger at every moment. A transitory gleam of pleasure softened her face.

"It is ages since I smelt honeysuckle," she confessed, "except in a perfumer's shop. I was wondering what it reminded me of."

"That," he said, as they turned out into the broad main road, with its long vista of telegraph-poles, "is because you have been neglecting the real for the sham, flowers themselves for their artificially distilled perfume. What I was going to try and put into words without sounding too priggish, Lady Cynthia," he went on, "is this: It is just you people who are cursed with a restless brain who are in the most dangerous position, nowadays. The things which keep us healthy and normal physically—games, farces, dinner-parties of young people, fresh air and exercise—are the very things which after a time fail to satisfy the person with imagination. You want more out of life, always the something you don't understand, the something beyond. And so you keep on trying new things, and for every new thing you try, you drop an old one. Isn't it something like that?"

"I suppose it is," she admitted wearily.

"Drugs take the place of wholesome wine," he went on, warming to his subject. "The hideous fascination of flirting with the uncouth or the impossible some way or another, stimulates a passion which simple means have ceased to gratify. You seek for the unusual in every way—in food, in the substitution of absinthe for your harmless Martini, of cocaine for your stimulating champagne. There is a horrible wave of all this sort of thing going on today in many places, and I am afraid," he concluded, "that a great many of our very nicest young women are caught up in it."

"Guilty," she confessed. "Now cure me."

"I could point out the promised land, but how could I lead you to it?" he answered.

"You don't like me well enough," she sighed.

"I like you better than you believe," he assured her, slackening his speed a little. "We have met, I suppose, a dozen times in our lives. I have danced with you here and there, talked nonsense once, I remember, at a musical reception—"

"I tried to flirt with you then," she interrupted.

He nodded.

"I was in the midst of a great case," he said, "and everything that happened to me outside it was swept out of my mind day by day. What I was going to say is that I have always liked you, from the moment when your mother presented me to you at your first dance."

"I wish you'd told me so," she murmured.

"It wouldn't have made any difference," he declared. "I wasn't in a position to think of a duke's daughter, in those days. I don't suppose I am now."

"Try," she begged hopefully.

HE smiled back at her. The reawakening of her sense of humor was something.

"Too late," he regretted. "During the last month or so the thing has come to me which we all look forward to, only I don't think Fate has treated me kindly. I have always loved normal ways and normal people, and the woman I care for is different."

"Tell me about her?" she insisted.

"You will be very surprised when I tell you her name," he said. "It is Margaret Hilditch."

She looked at him for a moment in blank astonishment.

"Heavens!" she exclaimed. "Oliver Hilditch's wife!"

"I can't help that," he declared a little doggedly. "She's had a miserable time, I know. She was married to a scamp. I'm not quite sure that her father isn't as bad a one. Those things don't make any difference."

"They wouldn't with you," she said softly. "Tell me, did you say anything to her last night?"

"I did," he replied. "I began when we were out alone together. She gave me no encouragement to speak of, but at any rate she knows."

Lady Cynthia leaned a little forward in her place.

"Do you know where she is now?"

He was a little startled.

"Down at the cottage, I suppose. The butler told me that she never rose before midday."

"Then for once the butler was mistaken," his companion told him. "Margaret Hilditch left at six o'clock this morning. I saw her in traveling clothes get into the car and drive away."

"She left the cottage this morning before us?" Francis repeated, amazed.

"I can assure you that she did," Lady Cynthia insisted. "I never sleep, among my other peculiarities," she went on bitterly, "and I was lying on a couch by the side of the open window when the car came for her. She stopped it at the bend of the avenue—so that it shouldn't wake us up, I suppose. I saw her get in and drive away."

Francis was silent for several moments. Lady Cynthia watched him curiously.

"At any rate," she observed, "in whatever mood she went away this morning, you have evidently succeeded in doing what I have never seen anyone else do—break through her indifference. I shouldn't have thought that anything short of an earthquake would have stirred Magaret, these days."

"These days?" he repeated quickly. "How long have you known her?"

"We were at school together for a short time," she told him. "It was while her father was in South America. Margaret was a very different person in those days."

"However was she induced to marry a person like Oliver Hilditch?" Francis speculated.

His companion shrugged her shoulders.

"Who knows?" she answered indifferently. . . . . "Are you going to drop me?"

"Wherever you like."

"Take me on to Grosvenor Square, if you will, then," she begged, "and deposit me at the ancestral mansion. I am really rather annoyed about Margaret," she went on, rearranging her veil. "I had begun to have hopes that you might have revived my taste for normal things."

"If I had had the slightest intimation—" he murmured.

"It would have made no difference," she interrupted dolefully. "Now I come to think of it, the Margaret whom I used to know—and there must be plenty of her left yet—is just the right type of woman for you."

They drew up outside the house in Grosvenor Square. Lady Cynthia held out her hand.

"Come and see me one afternoon, will you?" she invited.

"I'd like to very much," he replied.

She lingered on the steps and waved her hand to him—a graceful, somewhat insolent gesture.

"All the same, I think I shall do my best to make you forget Margaret," she called out. "Thanks for the lift up. *A bientôt!*"

CHAPTER XX

FRANCIS drove direct from Grosvenor Square to his chambers in the Temple, and found Shopland, his friend from Scotland Yard, awaiting his arrival.

"Any news?" Francis asked.

"Nothing definite, I am sorry to say," was the other's reluctant admission.

Francis hung up his hat, threw himself into his easy-chair and lighted a cigarette.

"The lad's brother is one of my oldest friends, Shopland," he said. "He is naturally in a state of great distress."

The detective scratched his chin thoughtfully.

"I said 'nothing definite' just now, sir," he observed. "As a rule, I never mention suspicions, but with you it is a different matter. I haven't discovered the slightest trace of Mr. Reginald Wilmore, or the slightest reason for his disappearance. He seems to have been a well-conducted young gentleman, a little extravagant, perhaps, but able to pay his way and with nothing

whatever against him—nothing whatever, that is to say, except one almost insignificant thing."

"And that?"

"A slight tendency toward bad company, sir. I have heard of his being about with one or two whom we are keeping our eye upon."

"Bobby Fairfax's lot, by any chance?" Shopland nodded.

"He was with Jacks and Miss Daisy Hyslop, a night or two before he disappeared. I am not sure that a young man named Morse wasn't of the party, too."

"What do you make of that lot?" Francis asked curiously. "Are they gamesters, dope-fiends, or simply vicious?"

THE detective was silent. He was gazing intently at his rather square-toed shoes.

"There are rumors, sir," he said, presently, "of things going on in the West End which want looking into very badly—very badly indeed. You will remember speaking to me of Sir Timothy Brast?"

"I remember quite well," Francis acknowledged.

"I've nothing to go on," the other continued. "I am working almost on your own lines, Mr. Ledsam—groping in the dark to find a clue, as it were; but I'm beginning to have ideas about Sir Timothy Brast—just ideas."

"As, for instance?"

"Well, he stands on rather queer terms with some of his acquaintances, sir. Now you saw, down at Soto's bar, the night we arrested Mr. Fairfax, that not one of those young men there spoke to Sir Timothy as though they were acquainted, nor he to them. Yet I happened to find out that every one of them, including Mr. Fairfax himself, was present at a party Sir Timothy Brast gave at his house down the river a week or two before."

"I'm afraid there isn't much in that," Francis declared. "Sir Timothy has the name of being an eccentric person everywhere, especially in this respect—he never notices acquaintances. I heard, only the other day, that while he was wonderfully hospitable and charming to all his guests, he never remembered them outside his house."

Shopland nodded. "A convenient eccentricity," he remarked a little dryly. "I have heard the same thing myself. You spent the night at his country cottage, did you not, Mr. Ledsam? Did he offer to show you over the Walled House?"

"How the dickens did you know I was down there?" Francis demanded with some surprise. "I was just thinking as I drove up that I hadn't left my address either here or at Clarges Street."

"Next time you visit Sir Timothy," the detective observed, "I should advise you to do so. I knew you were there, Mr. Ledsam, because I was in the neighborhood myself. I have been doing a little fishing, and keeping my eye on that wonderful estate of Sir Timothy's."

Francis was interested.

"Shopland," he said, "I believe that our intelligences, such as they are, are akin."

"What do you suspect Sir Timothy of?" the detective asked bluntly.

"I suspect him of nothing," Francis replied. "He is simply, to my mind, an incomprehensible, somewhat sinister figure, who might be capable of anything. He may have very excellent qualities which he contrives to conceal, or he may be an arch-criminal. His personality absolutely puzzles me."

There was a knock at the door, and Angrave appeared. Apparently he had forgotten Shopland's presence, for he ushered in another visitor.

"Sir Timothy Brast to see you, sir," he announced.

THE moment was one of trial to everyone, admirably borne. Shopland remained in his chair, with only a casual glance at the newcomer. Francis rose to his feet with a half-stifled expression of anger at the clumsiness of his clerk. Sir Timothy, well-shaven and groomed, attired in a perfectly fitting suit of gray flannel, nodded to Francis in friendly fashion and laid his Homburg hat upon the table with the air of a familiar.

"My dear Ledsam," he said "I do hope that you will excuse this early call. I could only have been an hour behind you on the road. I dare say you can guess what I have come to see you about. Can we have a word together?"

"Certainly," was the ready reply. "You remember my friend Shopland, Sir Timothy? It was Mr. Shopland who arrested young Fairfax that night at Soto's."

"I remember him perfectly," Sir Timothy declared. "I fancied, directly I entered, that your face was familiar," he added, turning to Shopland. "I am rather

ashamed of myself about that night. My little outburst must have sounded almost ridiculous to you two. To tell you the truth, I quite failed at that time to give Mr. Ledsam credit for gifts which I have since discovered him to possess."

"Mr. Shopland and I are now discussing another matter," Francis went on, pushing a box of cigarettes toward Sir Timothy, who was leaning against the table in an easy attitude. —"Don't go, Shopland, for a minute.— We were consulting together about the disappearance of a young man Reggie Wilmore, the brother of a friend of mine—Andrew Wilmore the novelist."

"Disappearance?" Sir Timothy repeated as he lighted a cigarette. "That is rather a vague term."

"The young man has been missing from home for over a week," Francis said, "and left no trace whatever of his whereabouts. He was not in financial trouble; he does not seem to have been entangled with any young woman; he had not quarreled with his people; and he seems to have been on the best of terms with the principal at the house of business where he was employed. His disappearance, therefore, is, to say the least of it, mysterious."

Sir Timothy assented gravely.

"The lack of motive to which you allude," he pointed out, "makes the case interesting. Still, one must remember that London is certainly the city of modern mysteries. If a new 'Arabian Nights' were written, it might well be about London. I dare say Mr. Shopland will agree with me," he continued, turning courteously toward the detective, "that disappearances of this sort are not nearly so uncommon as the uninitiated would believe. For one that is reported in the papers, there are half a dozen which are not. Your late chief commissioner, by the by," he added meditatively, "once a very intimate friend of mine, was my informant."

"Where do you suppose they disappear to?" Francis inquired.

"WHO can tell?" was the speculative reply. "For an adventurous youth there are a thousand doors which lead to romance. Besides, the lives of none of us are quite so simple as they seem. Even youth has its secret chapters. This young man, for instance, might be on his way to Australia, happy in the knowledge that he has escaped from some murky chapter of life which will now never be known. He may write to his friends, giving them a hint. The whole thing will blow over."

"There may be cases such as you suggest, Sir Timothy," the detective said quietly. "Our investigations, so far as regards the young man in question, however, do not point that way."

Sir Timothy turned over his cigarette to look at the name of the maker.

"Excellent tobacco," he murmured. "By the way, what did you say the young man's name was?"

"Reginald Wilmore," Francis told him.

"A good name." Sir Timothy murmured. "I am sure I wish you both every good fortune in your quest. Would it be too much to ask you now, Mr. Ledsam, for that single minute?"

"By no means," Francis answered.

"I'll wait in the office, if I may," Shopland suggested, rising to his feet. "I want to have another word with you before I go."

"My business with Mr. Ledsam is of a family nature," Sir Timothy said apologetically as Shopland passed out. "I'll not keep him for more than a moment."

SHOPLAND closed the door behind him. Sir Timothy waited until he heard his departing footsteps. Then he turned back to Francis.

"Mr. Ledsam," he said, "I have come to ask you if you know anything of my daughter's whereabouts?"

"Nothing whatever," Francis replied. "I was on the point of ringing you up to ask you the same question."

"Did she tell you that she was leaving the Sanctuary?"

"She gave me not the slightest intimation of it," Francis assured his questioner, "in fact, she invited me to meet her in the rose-garden last night. When I arrived there, she was gone. I have heard nothing from her since."

"You spent the evening with her?"

"To my great content."

"What happened between you?"

"Nothing happened. I took the opportunity, however, of letting your daughter understand the nature of my feelings for her."

"Dear me! May I ask what they are?"

"I will translate them into facts," Francis replied. "I wish your daughter to become my wife."

"You amaze me!" Sir Timothy exclaimed, the old mocking smile at his lips.

"How can you possibly contemplate association with the daughter of a man whom you suspect and distrust as you do me?"

"If I suspect and distrust you, it is your own fault," Francis reminded him. "You have declared yourself to be a criminal and a friend of criminals. I am inclined to believe that you have spoken the truth. I care for that fact just as little as I care for the fact that you are a millionaire, or that Margaret has been married to a murderer. I intend her to become my wife."

"Did you encourage her to leave me?"

"I did not. I had not the slightest idea that she had left the Sanctuary until Lady Cynthia told me, halfway to London this morning."

Sir Timothy was silent for several moments.

"Have you any idea in your own mind," he persisted, "as to where she has gone and for what purpose?"

"Not the slightest in the world," Francis declared. "I am just as anxious to hear from her, and to know where she is, as you seem to be."

Sir Timothy sighed.

"I am disappointed," he admitted. "I hoped to obtain some information from you. I must try in another direction."

"Since you are here, Sir Timothy," Francis said, as his visitor prepared to depart, "may I ask whether you have any objection to my marrying your daughter?"

SIR Timothy frowned.

"The question places me in a somewhat difficult position," he replied coldly. "In a certain sense I have a liking for you. You are not quite the ingenuous nincompoop I took you for on the night of our first meeting. On the other hand, you have prejudices against me. My harmless confession of sympathy with criminals and their ways seems to have stirred up a cloud of suspicion in your mind. You even employ a detective to show the world what a fool he can look, sitting in a punt attempting to fish, with one eye on the supposed abode of crime."

"I have nothing whatever to do with the detail of Shopland's investigations," Francis protested. "He is in search of Reggie Wilmore."

"Does he think I have secret dungeons in my new abode," Sir Timothy demanded, "or *oubliettes* in which I keep and starve brainless youths for some nameless purpose? Be reasonable, Mr. Ledsam. What the devil benefit could accrue to me from abducting or imprisoning or in any way laying my criminal hand upon this young man?"

"None whatever that we have been able to discover as yet," Francis admitted.

"A leaning toward melodrama, admirable in its way, needs the leaven of a well-balanced discretion and a sense of humor," Sir Timothy observed. "The latter quality is as a rule singularly absent among the myrmidons of Scotland Yard. I do not think that Mr. Shopland will catch even fish in the neighborhood of the Walled House. . . . . As regards your matrimonial proposal, let us waive that until my daughter returns."

"As you will," Francis agreed. "I will be frank to this extent, at any rate. If I can persuade your daughter to marry me, your consent will not affect the matter."

"I can leave Margaret a matter of two million pounds," Sir Timothy said pensively.

"I have enough money to support my wife myself," Francis observed.

"Utopian but foolish," Sir Timothy declared. "All the same, Mr. Ledsam, let me tell you this: You have a curious attraction for me. When I was asked why I had invited you to the Sanctuary last night, I frankly could not answer the question. I didn't know. I don't know. Your dislike of me doesn't seem to affect the question. I was glad to have you there last night. It pleases me to hear you talk, to hear your views of things. I feel that I shall have to be very careful, Mr. Ledsam, or—"

"Or what?" Francis demanded.

"Or I shall even welcome the idea of having you for a son-in-law," Sir Timothy concluded reluctantly. "Make my excuses to Mr. Shopland. *Au revoir!*"

Shopland came in as the door closed behind the departing visitor. He listened to all that Francis had to say, without comment.

"If the Walled House," he said at last, "is so carefully guarded that Sir Timothy has been informed of my watching the place and has been made aware of my mild questionings, it must be because there is something to conceal. I may or may not be on the track of Mr. Reginald Wilmore; but," the detective concluded, "of one thing I am becoming convinced: the Walled House will pay for watching."

CHAPTER XXI

IT was a day when chance was kind to Francis. After leaving his rooms at the Temple, he made a call at one of the great clubs in Pall Mall, to inquire as to the whereabouts of a friend. On his way back toward the Sheridan, he came face to face with Margaret Hilditch, issuing from the doors of one of the great steamship companies. For a moment he almost failed to recognize her. She reminded him more of the woman of the tea-shop. Her costume, neat and correct though it was, was studiously unobtrusive. Her motoring veil, too, was obviously worn to assist her in escaping notice.

She too came to a standstill at seeing him. Her first ejaculations betrayed a surprise which bordered on consternation. Then Francis, with a sudden inspiration, pointed to the long envelope which she was carrying in her hand.

"You have been to book passage somewhere!" he exclaimed.

"Well?"

The monosyllable was in her usual level tone. Nevertheless he could see that she was shaken.

"You were going away without seeing me again?" he asked reproachfully.

"Yes!" she admitted.

"Why?"

She looked up and down a little helplessly.

"I owe you no explanation for my conduct," she said. "Please let me pass."

"Could we talk for a few minutes, please?" he begged. "Tell me where you were going?"

"Oh, back to lunch, I suppose," she answered.

"Your father has been up, looking for you," he told her.

"I telephoned to the Sanctuary," she replied. "He had just left."

"I am very anxious," he continued, "not to distress you, but I cannot let you go away like this. Will you come to my rooms and let us talk for a little time?"

She made no answer. Somehow, he realized that speech just then was difficult. He called a taxi and handed her in. They drove to Clarges Street in silence. He led the way up the stairs, gave some quick orders to his servant, whom he met coming down, ushered her into his sitting-room and saw her ensconced in an easy-chair.

"Please take off your veil," he begged.

"It is pinned on to my hat," she told him.

"Then off with both," he insisted. "You can't eat luncheon like that. I'm not going to try and bully you. If you've booked your passage to Timbuctoo and you really want to go—why, you must. I only want the chance of letting you know that I am coming after you."

SHE took off her hat and veil and threw them onto the sofa, glancing sideways at a mirror let into the door of a cabinet.

"My hair is awful," she declared.

He laughed gayly, and turned around from the sideboard, where he was busy mixing cocktails.

"Thank heaven for that touch of humanity!" he exclaimed. "A woman who can bother about her hair when she takes her hat off, is never past praying for. Please drink this."

She obeyed. He took the empty glass from her. Then he came over to the hearthrug by her side.

"Do you know that I kissed you last night?" he reminded her.

"I do," she answered. "That is why I have just paid eighty-four pounds for a passage to Buenos Aires."

"I should have enjoyed the trip," he said. "Still, I'm glad I haven't to go."

"Do you really mean that you would have come after me?" she asked curiously.

"Of course I would," he assured her. "Believe me, there isn't such an obstinate person in the world as the man of early middle-age who suddenly discovers the woman he means to marry."

"But you can't marry me," she protested.

"Why not?" he asked.

"Because I was Oliver Hilditch's wife, for one thing."

"Look here," he said, "if you had been Beelzebub's wife, it wouldn't make the least difference to me. You haven't given me much of a chance to tell you so yet, Margaret; but I love you."

She sat a little forward in her chair. Her eyes were fixed upon his wonderingly.

"But how can you?" she exclaimed. "You know nothing of me except my associations, and they have been horrible. What is there to love in me? I am a frozen-up woman. Everything is dead here," she went on, clasping her hand to her heart. "I have no sentiment, no passion, nothing but an animal desire to live my life luxuriously and quickly."

He smiled confidently. Then, with very little warning, he sank on one knee, drew her face to his, kissed her lips and then her eyes.

"Are you so sure of all these things, Margaret?" he whispered. "Don't you think it is, perhaps, because there has been no one to care for you as I do—as I shall —to the end of my days? The lily you left on your chair last night was like you —fair and stately and beautiful, but a little bruised. You will come back as it has done, come back to the world. My love will bring you—my care. Believe it, please!"

THEN he saw the first sign of change in her face. There was the faintest shade of almost shell-like pink underneath the creamy-white of her cheeks. Her lips were trembling a little; her eyes were misty. With a sudden passionate little impulse, her arms were around his neck, her lips sought his of their own accord.

"Let me forget," she sobbed. "Kiss me. . . . . Let me forget!"

Francis' servant was both heavy-footed and discreet. When he entered the room with a tray, his master was standing at the sideboard.

"I've done the best I could, sir," he announced a little apologetically. "Shall I lay the cloth?"

"Leave everything on the tray, Brooks," Francis directed. "We will help ourselves. In an hour's time bring coffee."

The man glanced around the room.

"There are glasses on the sideboard, sir, and the corkscrew is here. I think you will have everything you want."

He departed, closing the door behind him. Francis held out his hands to Margaret. She rose slowly to her feet, looked in the glass helplessly and then back at him. She was very beautiful but a little dazed.

"Are we going to have luncheon?" she asked.

"Of course," he answered. "Did you think I meant to starve you?"

He picked up the long envelope which she had dropped upon the carpet, and threw it onto the sofa. Then he drew up two chairs to the table, and opened a small bottle of champagne.

"I hope you wont mind a picnic," he said. "Really, Brooks hasn't done so badly—*pâté de foie gras*, hot toast and Devonshire butter. Let me spread some for you. A cold chicken afterward, and some strawberries. Please be hungry, Margaret."

She laughed at him. It occurred to him suddenly, with a little pang, that he had never heard her laugh before. It was like music.

"I'm too happy," she murmured.

"Believe me," he assured her, as he buttered a piece of toast, "happiness and hunger might well be twins. They go so well together. Misery can take away one's appetite. Happiness, when one gets over the gulpiness of it, is the best tonic in the world. And I never saw anyone, dear, with whom happiness agreed so well," he added, pausing in his task to bend over and kiss her. "Do you know you are the most beautiful thing on earth? It is a lucky thing we are going to live in England, and that these are sober, matter-of-fact days, or I should find myself committed to fighting duels all the time."

She had a momentary relapse. A look of terror suddenly altered her face. She caught at his wrist.

"Don't!" she cried. "Don't talk about such things!"

He was a little bewildered. The moment passed. She laughed almost apologetically.

"Forgive me," she begged, "but I hate the thought of fighting of any sort. Some day I'll explain."

"Clumsy idiot I was!" he declared, completing his task and setting the result before her. "Now, how's that for a first course? Drink a little of your wine."

He leaned his glass against hers.

"My love," he whispered, "my love now, dear, and always; and you'll find it quite strong enough," he went on, "to keep you from all the ugly things. . . . . I had a very excellent but solitary breakfast this morning, and it seems a long time ago."

"It seems amazing to think you spent last night at the Sanctuary," she reflected.

"And that you and I were in a punt," he reminded her, "in the pool of darkness where the trees met, and the lilies leaned over to us."

"And you nearly upset the punt."

"Nothing of the sort! As a matter of fact, I was very careful. But," he proceeded, with a sudden wave of memory, "I don't think my heart will ever beat normally again. It seemed as though it would tear its way out of my side when I leaned toward you, and you knew, and you lay still."

She laughed.

"You surely didn't expect I was going to get up? It was quite encouragement enough to remain passive. As a matter of fact," she went on, "I couldn't have moved. I couldn't have uttered a sound. I suppose I must have been like one of those poors birds you read about, when some devouring animal crouches for its last spring."

"Compliments already!" he remarked. "You wont forget that my name is Francis, will you? Try and practice it while I carve the chicken."

"You carve very badly, Francis," she told him demurely.

"My dear," he said, "thank heaven we shall be able to afford a butler! By the by, I told your father this morning that I was going to marry you, and he didn't seem to think it possible, because he had two million pounds."

"Braggart!" she murmured. "When did you see my father?"

"He came to my rooms in the Temple soon after I arrived this morning. He seemed to think I might know where you were. I dare say he wont like me for a son-in-law," Francis continued with a smile. "I can't help that. He shouldn't have let me go out with you in a punt."

There was a discreet knock at the door. Brooks made his apologetic and somewhat troubled entrance.

"Sir Timothy Brast is here to see you, sir," he announced. "I ventured to say that you were not at home—"

"But I happened to know otherwise," a voice remarked from outside. "May I come in, Mr. Ledsam?"

Sir Timothy stepped past the servant, who at a sign from Francis disappeared, closing the door behind him.

CHAPTER XXII

AFTER Francis' first glance at Sir Timothy, his only thought was for Margaret. To his intense relief, she showed no signs whatever of terror, or of any relapse to her former state. She was entirely mistress of herself and the occasion. Sir Timothy's face was cold and terrible.

"I must apologize for this second intrusion, Mr. Ledsam," he said cuttingly. "I think you will admit that the circumstances warrant it. Am I to understand that you lied to me this morning?"

"You are to understand nothing of the sort," Francis answered. "I told you everything I knew at that time, of your daughter's movements."

"Indeed!" Sir Timothy murmured. "This little banquet, then, was unpremeditated?"

"Entirely," Francis replied. "Here is the exact truth, so far as I am concerned. I met your daughter little more than an hour ago, coming out of a steamship office, where she had booked a passage to Buenos Aires to get away from me. I was fortunate enough to induce her to change her mind. She has consented instead to remain in England as my wife. We were, as you see, celebrating the occasion."

Sir Timothy laid his hat upon the sideboard and slowly removed his gloves.

"I trust," he said, "that this pint bottle does not represent your cellar. I will drink a glass of wine with you, and with your permission make myself a *pâté* sandwich. I was just sitting down to luncheon when I received the information which brought me here."

Francis produced another bottle of wine from the sideboard and filled his visitor's glass.

"You will drink, I hope, to our happiness," he said.

"I shall do nothing of the sort," Sir Timothy declared, helping himself with care to the *pâté*. "I have no superstitions about breaking bread with an enemy, or I should not have asked you to visit me at the Sanctuary, Mr. Ledsam. I object to your marriage with my daughter, and I shall take what steps I can to prevent it."

"Why?"

Sir Timothy did not at once reply. He seemed to be enjoying his sandwich; he also appreciated the flavor of his wine.

"Your question," he said, "strikes me as being a little ingenuous. You are at the present moment suspecting me of crimes beyond number. You encourage Scotland Yard detectives to make idiots of themselves in my stream. Your myrmidons scramble onto the top of my walls and try to bribe my servants to disclose the mysteries of my household. You have accepted to the fullest extent my volunteered statement that I am a patron of crime. You are, in short—forgive me if I help myself to a little more of this *pâté*—engaged in a strenuous attempt to bring me to justice."

"None of these things affects your daughter," Francis pointed out.

"Pardon me," Sir Timothy objected. "You are a great and shining light of the English law. People speak of you as a future Chancellor. How can you contemplate an alliance with the widow of one criminal and the daughter of another?"

"As to Margaret's being Oliver Hilditch's widow," Francis replied, "you were responsible for that, and no one else. He was your protégé; you gave your consent to the marriage. As to your being her father, that again is not Margaret's fault. I would marry her if Oliver Hilditch had been three times the villain he was, and if you were the devil himself."

"I am getting quite to like you, Mr. Ledsam," Sir Timothy declared, helping himself to another piece of toast and commencing to butter it. "Margaret, what have you to say about all this?"

"I have nothing to say," she answered. "Francis is speaking for me. I never dreamed that after what I have gone through, I should be able to care for anyone again in this world. I do care, and I am very happy about it. All last night I lay awake, making up my mind to run away, and this morning I actually booked my passage to Buenos Aires. Then we met, —just outside the steamship office,—and I knew at once that I was making a mistake. I shall marry Francis exactly when he wants me to."

Sir Timothy passed his glass toward his proposed son-in-law.

"Might one suggest—" he began. "Thank you very much. This is of course very upsetting to me. I seem to be set completely at defiance. . . . . It is a very excellent wine, this, and a wonderful vintage."

Francis bent over Margaret.

"Please finish your lunch, dear," he begged. "It is perhaps just as well that your father came. We shall know exactly where we are."

"Just so," Sir Timothy agreed.

THERE was a queer constrained silence for several moments. Then Sir Timothy leaned back in his chair and with a word of apology lighted a cigarette.

"Let us," he said, "consider the situation. Margaret is my daughter. You wish to marry her. Margaret is of age and has been married before. She is at liberty, therefore, to make her own choice. You agree with me so far?"

"Entirely," Francis assented.

"It happens," Sir Timothy went on, "that I disapprove of her choice. She desires to marry a young man who belongs to a profession which I detest, and whose efforts in life are directed toward the extermination of a class of people for whom I have every sympathy. To me he represents the smug as against the human, the artificially moral as against the free-thinker. He is also my personal enemy. I am therefore naturally desirous that my daughter should not marry this young man."

"We will let it go at that," Francis commented, "but I should like to point out to you that the antagonism between us is in no way personal. You have declared yourself for forces with which I am at enmity, like any other decent-living citizen. Your declaration might at any time be amended."

Sir Timothy bowed.

"The situation is stated," he said. "I will ask you this question as a matter of form. Do you recognize my right to forbid your marriage with my daughter, Mr. Ledsam?"

"I most certainly do not," was the forcible reply.

"Have I any rights at all?" Sir Timothy asked. "Margaret has lived under my roof whenever it has suited her to do so. Since she has taken up her residence at Curzon Street, she has been her own mistress, her banking account has known no limit whatsoever. I may be a person of evil disposition, but I have shown no unkindness to her."

"It is quite true," Margaret admitted, turning a little pale. "Since I have been alone, you have been kindness itself."

"Then let me repeat my question," Sir Timothy went on: "Have I the right to any consideration at all?"

"Yes," Francis replied. "Short of keeping us apart, you have the ordinary rights of a parent."

"Then I ask you to delay the announcement of your engagement, or taking any further steps concerning it, for fourteen days," Sir Timothy said. "I place no restrictions on your movements during that time. Such hospitality as you, Mr. Ledsam, care to accept at my hands, is at your disposal. I am Bohemian enough, indeed, to find nothing to complain of in such little celebrations as you are at present indulging in—most excellent *pâté*, that. But I request that no announcement of your engagement be made, or any further arrange-

ments made concerning it, for that fourteen days."

"I am quite willing, Father," Margaret acquiesced.

"And I, sir," Francis echoed.

"In which case," Sir Timothy concluded, rising to his feet, lighting a cigarette and taking up his hat and gloves, "I shall go peaceably away. You will admit, I trust," he added, with that peculiar smile at the corner of his lips, "that I have not in any way tried to come the heavy father? I can even command a certain amount of respect, Margaret, for a young man who is able to inaugurate his engagement by an impromptu meal of such perfection. I wish you both good morning. Any invitation which Margaret extends, Ledsam, please consider as confirmed by me."

He closed the door softly. They heard his footsteps descending the stairs. Francis leaned once more over Margaret. She seemed still dazed, confused with new thoughts. She responded, however, readily to his touch, yielded to his caress with an almost pathetic eagerness.

"Francis," she murmured, as his arms closed around her, "I want to forget."

CHAPTER XXIII

THERE followed a brief period of time, the most wonderful of Francis' life, the happiest of Margaret's. They took advantage of Sir Timothy's absolute license, and spent long days at the Sanctuary, ideal lovers' days, with their punt moored at night among the lilies, where her kisses seemed to come to him with an aroma and wonder born of the spot. Then there came a morning when he found a cloud on her face. She was looking at the great wall, and away at the minaret beyond. They had heard from the butler that Sir Timothy had spent the night at the villa, and that preparations were on hand for another of his wonderful parties. Francis, who was swift to read her thoughts, led her away into the rose-garden where once she had failed him.

"You have been looking over the wall, Margaret," he said reproachfully.

She looked at him with a little twitch at the corners of her lips.

"Francis, dear," she confessed, "I am afraid you are right. I cannot even look toward the Walled House without wondering why it was built—or catch a glimpse of that dome without stupid guesses as to what may go on underneath."

"I think very likely," he said soothingly, "we have both exaggerated the seriousness of your father's hobbies. We know that he has a wonderful gymnasium there, but the only definite rumor I have ever heard about the place is that men fight there who have a grudge against one another, and that they are not too particular about the weight of the gloves. That doesn't appeal to us, you know, Margaret; but it isn't criminal."

"If that were all!" she murmured.

"I dare say it is," he declared. "London, as you know, is a hotbed of gossip. Everything that goes on is ridiculously exaggerated, and I think that it rather appeals to your father's curious sense of humor to pose as the lawbreaker."

She pressed his arm a little. The day was overcast; a slight rain was beginning to fall.

"Francis," she whispered, "we had a perfect day here yesterday. Now the sun has gone, and I am shivery."

He understood in a moment.

"We'll lunch at Ranelagh," he suggested. "It is almost on the way up. Then we can see what the weather is like. If it is bad, we can dine in town tonight and do a theater."

"You are a dear," she told him fervently. "I am going in to get ready."

FRANCIS went round to the garage for his car, and brought it to the front. While he was sitting there, Sir Timothy came through the door in the wall. He was smoking a cigar and he was holding an umbrella to protect his white flannel suit. He was as usual wonderfully groomed and turned out, but he walked as though he were tired, and his smile, as he greeted Francis, lacked a little of its usual lighthearted mockery.

"Are you going up to town?" he asked.

Francis pointed to the gray skies.

"Just for the day," he answered. "Lady Cynthia went by the early train. We missed you last night."

"I came down late," Sir Timothy explained, "and I found it more convenient to stay at the Walled House. I hope you find that Grover looks after you while I am away? He has *carte blanche* so far as regards my cellar."

"We have been wonderfully served," Francis assured him.

In the distance they could hear the sound of hammering on the other side of the wall. Francis moved his head in that direction.

"I hear that they are preparing for another of your wonderful entertainments over there," he remarked.

"On Thursday," Sir Timothy assented. "I shall have something to say to you about it later on."

"Am I to take it that I am likely to receive an invitation?" Francis asked.

"I should think it possible," was the calm reply.

"What about Margaret?"

"My entertainment would not appeal to her," Sir Timothy declared. "The women whom I have been in the habit of asking, are not women of Margaret's type."

"And Lady Cynthia?"

Sir Timothy frowned slightly.

"I find myself in some difficulty as regards Lady Cynthia," he admitted. "I am the guardian of nobody's morals; nor am I the censor of their tastes; but my entertainments are for men. The women whom I have hitherto asked have been women in whom I have taken no personal interest. They are necessary to form a picturesque background for my rooms, in the same way that I look to the gardeners to supply the floral decorations. Lady Cynthia's instincts, however, are somewhat adventurous. She would scarcely be content to remain a decoration."

"The issuing of your invitations," Francis remarked, "is of course a matter which concerns nobody else except yourself. If you do decide to favor me with one, I shall be delighted to come, provided Margaret has no objection."

"Such a reservation promises well for the future," Sir Timothy observed with gentle sarcasm. . . . . "Here comes Margaret, looking very well, I am glad to see."

MARGARET came forward to greet her father before stepping into the car. They exchanged only a few sentences; but Francis, whose interest in their relations was almost abnormally keen, fancied that he could detect signs of some change in their demeanor toward one another. The cold propriety of deportment which had characterized her former attitude toward her father seemed to have given place to something more uncertain, to something less formal, something which left room even for a measure of cordiality. She looked at him differently. It was as though some evil thought which lived in her heart concerning him had perished.

"You are busy over there, Father?" she asked.

"In a way," he replied. "We are preparing for some festivities on Thursday."

Her face fell.

"Another party?"

"One more," he replied. Perhaps the last—for the present, at any rate."

She waited as though expecting him to explain. He changed the subject, however.

"I think you are wise to run up to town this morning," he said, glancing up at the gray skies. "By the way, if you dine at Curzon Street tonight, do ask Hedges to serve you some of the '99 Cliquot. A marvelous wine, as you doubtless know, Ledsam, but it should be drunk. . . . . *Au revoir!*"

FRANCIS, after a pleasant lunch at Ranelagh, and having arranged with Margaret to dine with her in Curzon Street, spent an hour or two that afternoon at his chambers. As he was leaving, just before five, he came face to face with Shopland descending from a taxi.

"Are you busy, Mr. Ledsam?" the latter inquired. "Can you spare me half an hour?"

"An hour, if you like," Francis assented.

Shopland gave the driver an address, and the two men seated themselves in the taxicab.

"Any news?" Francis asked curiously.

"Not yet," was the cautious reply. "It will not be long, however."

"Before you discover Reggie Wilmore?"

The detective smiled in a superior way.

"I am no longer particularly interested in Mr. Reginald Wilmore," he declared. "I have come to the conclusion that his disappearance is not a serious affair."

"It's serious enough for his relatives," Francis objected.

"Not if they understood the situation," the detective rejoined. "Assure them from me that nothing of consequence has happened to that young man. I have made inquiries at the gymnasium in Holborn, and in other directions. I am convinced that his absence from home is voluntary, and that there is no cause for alarm as to his welfare."

"Then the sooner you make your way

down to Kensington and tell his mother so, the better," Francis said a little severely. "Don't forget that I put you on to this."

"Quite right, sir," the detective acquiesced, "and I am grateful to you. The fact of it is that in making my preliminary investigations with regard to the disappearance of Mr. Wilmore, I have stumbled upon a bigger thing. Before many weeks are past, I hope to be able to unearth one of the greatest scandals of modern times."

"The devil!" Francis muttered.

He looked thoughtfully, almost anxiously at his companion. Shopland's face reflected to the full his usual confidence. He had the air of a man buoyant with hope and with stifled self-satisfaction.

"I am engaged," he continued, "upon a study of the methods and habits of one whom I believe to be a great criminal. I think that when I place my prisoner in the bar, Wainwright and these other great artists in crime, will fade from the memory."

"Is Sir Timothy Brast your man?" Francis asked quietly.

His companion frowned portentously.

"No names," he begged.

"Considering that it was I who first put you on to him," Francis expostulated, "I don't think you need be so sparing of your confidence."

"Mr. Ledsam," the detective assured him, "I shall tell you everything that is possible. At the same time, I will be frank with you. You are right when you say that it was you who first directed my attention toward Sir Timothy Brast. Since that time, however, your own relations with him, to an onlooker, have become a little puzzling."

"I see," Francis murmured. "You've been spying on me?"

SHOPLAND shook his head in deprecating fashion.

"A study of Sir Timothy during the last month," he said, "has brought you many a time into the focus."

"Where are we going to now?" Francis asked a little abruptly.

"Just a side show, sir. It's one of those outside things I have come across which give light and shade to the whole affair. . . . . We get out here, if you please."

The two men stepped onto the pavement. They were in a street a little north of Wardour Street, where the shops for the most part were of a miscellaneous variety. Exactly in front of them, the space behind a large plate-glass window had been transformed into a sort of show-place for dogs. There were twenty or thirty of them there, of all breeds and varieties.

"What the mischief is this?" Francis demanded.

"Come in and make inquiries," Shopland replied. "I can promise that you will find it interesting. It's a sort of dogs' home."

Francis followed his companion into the place. A pleasant-looking, middle-aged woman came forward and greeted the latter.

"Do you mind telling my friend what you told me the other day?" he asked.

"Certainly, sir," she replied. "We collect stray animals here, sir," she continued, turning to Francis. "Everyone who has a dog or a cat he can't afford to keep, or which he wants to get rid of, may bring it to us. We have agents all the time in the streets, and if any official of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals brings us news of a dog or a cat being ill-treated, we either purchase it or acquire it in some way or other and keep it here."

"But your dogs in the window," Francis observed, "all seem to be in wonderful condition."

The woman smiled.

"We have a large dog-and-cat hospital behind," she explained, "and a veterinary surgeon who is always in attendance. The animals are treated there as they are brought in, and fed up if they are out of condition. When they are ready to sell, we show them."

"But is this a commercial undertaking," Francis asked, "or it is a branch of the S. P. C. A?"

"It's quite a private affair, sir," the woman told him. "We charge only five shillings for the dogs and half a crown for the cats, but everyone who has one must sign our book, promising to give it a good home, and has to be either known to us or to produce references. We do not attempt, of course, to make a profit."

"Who on earth is responsible for the upkeep?"

"We are not allowed to mention any names here, sir, but as a matter of fact, I think that your friend knows. He met the gentleman in here one day. Would you care to have a look at the hospital, sir?"

Francis spent a quarter of an hour wandering around. When they left the place, Shopland turned to him with a smile.

"Now, sir," he said, "shall I tell you at whose expense that place is run?"

"I think I can guess," Francis replied. "I should say that Sir Timothy Brast was responsible for it."

The detective nodded. He was a little disappointed.

"You know about his collection of broken-down horses in the park at the Walled House, too, then, I suppose? They come whinnying after him like a flock of sheep whenever he shows himself."

"I know about them, too," Francis admitted. "I was present once when he got out of his car, knocked a carter down who was ill-treating a horse, bought it on the spot and sent it home."

Shopland smiled, inscrutably yet with the air of one vastly pleased.

"These little side-shows," he said, "are what help to make this, which I believe will be the greatest case of my life, so supremely interesting. Anyone of my fraternity," he continued, with an air of satisfaction, "can take hold of a thread and follow it step by step, and wind up with the handcuffs, as I did myself with the young man Fairfax. But a case like this, which includes a study of temperament, requires something more."

THEY were seated once more in the taxicab, on their way westward. Francis for the first time was conscious of an utterly new sensation with regard to his companion. He watched him through half-closed eyes—an insignificant-looking little man whose clothes, though neat, were ill-chosen, and whose tie was an offense. There was nothing in the face to denote unusual intelligence, but the eyes were small and cunning and the mouth dogged. Francis looked away out of the window. A sudden flash of realization had come to him, a wave of unreasoning but positive dislike.

"When do you hope to bring your case to an end?" he asked.

The man smiled once more, and the very smile irritated his companion.

"Within the course of the next few days, sir," he replied.

"And the charge?"

The detective turned around.

"Mr. Ledsam," he said, "we have been old friends, if you will allow me to use the word, ever since I was promoted to my present position in the Force. You have trusted me with a good many cases, and I acknowledge myself your debtor; but in the matter of Sir Timothy Brast, you will forgive my saying with all respect, sir, that our ways seem to lie a little apart."

"Will you tell me why you have arrived at that conclusion?" Francis asked. "It was I who first incited you to set a watch upon Sir Timothy. It was to you I first mentioned certain suspicions I myself had with regard to him. I treated you with every confidence. Why do you now withhold yours from me?"

"It is quite true, Mr. Ledsam," Shopland admitted, "that it was you who first pointed out Sir Timothy as an interesting study for my profession, but that was a matter of months ago. If you will forgive my saying so, your relations with Sir Timothy have altered since then. You have been his guest at the Sanctuary; and there is a rumor, sir,—you will pardon me if I seem to be taking a liberty,—that you are engaged to be married to his daughter, Oliver Hilditch's widow."

"You seem to be tolerably well informed as to my affairs, Shopland," Francis remarked.

"Only so far as regards your associations with Sir Timothy," was the deprecating reply. "If you will excuse me, sir, this is where I should like to descend."

"You have no message for Mr. Wilmore, then?" Francis asked.

"Nothing definite, sir, but you can assure him of this: His brother is not likely to come to any particular harm. I have no absolute information to offer, but it is my impression that Mr. Reginald Wilmore will be home before a week is past. . . . . Good afternoon, sir."

Shopland stepped out of the taxicab, and raising his hat, walked quickly away. Francis directed the man to drive to Clarges Street. As they drove off, he was conscious of a folded piece of paper in the corner where his late companion had been seated. He picked it up, opened it, realized that it was a letter from a firm of lawyers, addressed to Shopland, and deliberately read it through. It was dated from a small town near Hatch End:

Dear Sir:

Mr. John Phillips of this firm, who is coroner for the district, has desired me to answer the inquiry contained in your official letter of the 13th. The number of inquests held upon bodies recovered from the Thames in the neighborhood to which you allude, during the present year has been seven. Four of these have been identified.

Concerning the remaining three nothing has ever been heard. Such particulars as are on our file, will be available to any accredited representative of the police at any time.

Faithfully yours,
PHILLIPS AND SON.

The taxicab came to a sudden stop. Francis glanced up. Very breathless, Shopland put his head in at the window.

"I dropped a letter," he gasped.

Francis folded it up and handed it to him.

"What about these three unidentified people, Shopland?" he asked, looking at him intently.

The man frowned angrily. There was a note of defiance in his tone as he stowed the letter away in his pocketbook.

"There were two men and one woman," he replied, "all three of the upper classes. The bodies were recovered from Wilson's lock, some three hundred yards from the Walled House."

"Do they form part of your case?" Francis persisted.

Shopland stepped back.

"Mr. Ledsam," he said, "I told you, some little time ago, that so far as this particular case was concerned I had no confidences to share with you. I am sorry that you saw that letter. Since you did, however, I hope you will not take it as a liberty from one in my position if I advise you most strenuously to do nothing which might impede the course of the law. Good day, sir!"

CHAPTER XXIV

FRANCIS, in that pleasant half-hour before dinner which he spent in Margaret's sitting-room, told her of the dogs' home near Wardour Street. She listened sympathetically to his description of the place.

"I had never heard of it," she acknowledged, "but I am not in any way surprised. My father spends at least an hour of every day, when he is down at Hatch End, among the horses, and every time a fresh crock is brought down, he is as interested as though it were a new toy."

"It is a remarkable trait in a very remarkable character," Francis commented.

"I could tell you many things that would surprise you," Margaret continued. "One night, for instance, when we were staying at the Sanctuary, he and I were going out to dine with some neighbors and he heard a cat mewing in the hedge somewhere. He stopped the car, got out himself, found that the cat had been caught in a trap, released it, and sent me on to the dinner alone while he took the animal back to the veterinary surgeon at the Walled House. He was simply white with fury while he was tying up the poor thing's leg. I couldn't help asking him what he would have done if he could have found the farmer who set the trap. He looked up at me and I was almost frightened. 'I should have killed him,' he said; and I believe he meant it. . . . . And Francis, the very next day we were motoring to London and saw a terrible accident. A motorcyclist came down a side road at full speed and ran into a motor-lorry. My father got out of the car, helped them lift the body from under the wheels of the lorry, and came back absolutely unmoved. 'Served the silly young fool right!' was his only remark. He was so horribly callous that I could scarcely bear to sit by his side. Do you understand that?"

"It isn't easy," he admitted.

There was a knock at the door. Margaret glanced at the clock.

"Surely dinner can't be served already!" she exclaimed. "Come in."

Very much to their surprise, it was Sir Timothy himself who entered. He was in evening dress and wearing several orders, one of which Francis noted with surprise.

"My apologies," he said. "Hedges told me that there were cocktails here, and as I am on my way to a rather weary dinner, I thought I might inflict myself upon you for a moment."

Margaret rose at once to her feet.

"I am a shocking hostess," she declared. "Hedges brought the things in twenty minutes ago."

She took up the silver receptacle, shook it vigorously and filled three glasses. Sir Timothy accepted his and bowed to them both.

"My best wishes," he said. "Really, when one comes to think of it, however much it may be against my inclinations, I scarcely see how I shall be able to withhold my consent. I believe that you both have at heart the flair for domesticity. This little picture, and the thought of your tête-à-tête dinner, almost touches me."

"Don't make fun of us, Father," Margaret begged. "Tell us where you are going in all that splendor?"

Sir Timothy shrugged his shoulders.

"A month or so ago," he explained, "I was chosen to induct a scion of royalty into the understanding of fighting as it is indulged in at the National Sporting Club. This, I suppose, is my reward—an invitation to something in the nature of a state dinner, which, to tell you the truth, I had forgotten until my secretary pointed it out to me this afternoon. I have grave fears of being bored or of misbehaving myself. I have, as Ledsam here knows, a distressing habit of truthfulness, especially to new acquaintances. However, we must hope for the best. By the by, Ledsam, in case you should have forgotten, I have spoken to Hedges about the '99 Cliquot."

"Shall we see you here later?" Margaret asked after Francis had murmured his thanks.

"I shall probably return direct to Hatch End," Sir Timothy replied. "There are various little matters down there which are interesting me just now—preparations for my party. *Au revoir!* A delicious cocktail, but I am inclined to resent the orange bitters."

HE sauntered out, after a glance at the clock. They heard his footsteps as he descended the stairs.

"Tell me, what manner of a man is your father?" Francis asked impulsively.

"I am his daughter, and I do not know," Margaret answered. "Before he came, I was going to speak to you of a strange misunderstanding which has existed between us and which has just been removed. Now I have a fancy to leave it until later. You will not mind?"

"When you choose," Francis assented. "Nothing will make any difference. We are past the days when fathers or even mothers count seriously in the things that exist between two people like you and me, who have felt life. Whatever your father may be, whatever he may turn out to be, you are the woman I love—you are the woman who is going to be my wife."

She leaned toward him for a moment.

"You have an amazing gift," she whispered, "of saying just the thing one loves to hear in the way that convinces."

Dinner was served to them in the smaller of the two dining-rooms, an exquisite meal, made more wonderful still by the wine, which Hedges himself dispensed with jealous care. The presence of servants, with its restraining influence upon conversation, was not altogether unwelcome to Francis. He and Margaret had had so little opportunity for general conversation that to discuss other than personal subjects in this pleasant, leisurely way had its charm. They spoke of music, of which she knew far more than he; of foreign travel, where they met on common ground, for each had only the tourist's knowledge of Europe, and each was anxious for a more individual acquaintance with it. She had tastes in books which delighted him, a knowledge of games which promised a common resource. It was only while they were talking that he realized with a shock how young she was, how few the years that lay between her serene schooldays and the tempestuous years of her married life. Her schooldays in Naples were most redolent of delightful memories. She broke off once or twice into the language, and he listened with delight to her soft accent. Finally the time came when dessert was set upon the table.

"I have ordered coffee up in the little sitting-room again," she said, a little shyly. "Do you mind, or would you rather have it here?"

"I much prefer it there," he assured her.

They sat before an open window, looking out upon some elm trees in the boughs of which town sparrows twittered, and with a background of roofs and chimneys. Margaret's coffee was untasted; even her cigarette lay unlighted by her side. There was a touch of the old horror upon her face. The fingers which he drew into his were as cold as ice.

YOU must have wondered sometimes," she began, "why I ever married Oliver Hilditch."

"You were very young," he reminded her, with a little shiver, "and very inexperienced. I suppose he appealed to you in some way or another."

"It wasn't that," she replied. "He came to visit me at Eastbourne, and he certainly knew all the tricks of making himself attractive and agreeable. But he never won my heart—he never even seriously took my fancy. I married him because I believed that by doing so I was obeying my father's wishes."

"Where was your father at the time, then?" Francis asked.

"In South America. Oliver Hilditch was nothing more than a discharged employee of his, discharged for dishonesty. He had

to leave South America within a week to escape prosecution, and on the way to Europe he concocted the plot which very nearly ruined my life. He forged a letter from my father, begging me, if I found it in any way possible, to listen to Oliver Hilditch's proposals, and hinting guardedly at a very serious financial crisis which it was in his power to avert. It never occurred to me or to my chaperon to question his *bona fides*. He had lived under the same roof as my father, and knew all the intimate details of his life. He was very clever, and I suppose I was a fool. I remember thinking I was doing quite a heroic action when I went to the registrar with him. What it led to, you know."

There was a moment's throbbing silence. Francis, notwithstanding his deep pity, was conscious of an overwhelming sensation of relief. She had never cared for Oliver Hilditch! She had never pretended to! He put the thought into words.

"You never cared for him, then?"

"I tried to," she replied simply, "but I found it impossible. Within a week of our marriage I hated him."

Francis leaned back, his eyes half closed. In his ears was the sonorous roar of Piccadilly, the hooting of motorcars, close at hand the rustling of a faint wind in the elm trees. It was a wonderful moment. The nightmare with which he had grappled so fiercely, which he had overthrown, but whose ghost still sometimes walked by his side, had lost its chief and most poignant terror. She had been tricked into the marriage! She had never cared or pretended to care. The primal horror of that tragedy which he had figured so often to himself seemed to have departed with the thought. Its shadow must always remain, but in time his conscience would acquiesce in the pronouncement of his reason. It was the hand of justice, not any human hand, which had slain Oliver Hilditch.

"What did your father say when he discovered the truth?" he asked.

"He did not know it until he came to England on the day that Oliver Hilditch was acquitted. My husband always pretended that he had a special mail-bag going out to South America; so he took away all the letters I wrote to my father, and he took care that I received none except one or two which I know now were forgeries. He had friends in South America himself who helped him—one a typist in my father's office, of whom I learned afterward. But that really doesn't matter. He was a wonderful master of deceit."

Francis suddenly took her hands. He had an overwhelming desire to escape from the miasma of those ugly days, with their train of attendant thoughts and speculations.

"Let us talk about ourselves," he whispered.

After that, the evening glided away incoherently, with no sustained conversation, but with an increasing sense of well-being, of soothed nerves and happiness, flaming seconds of passion, sign-posts of the wonderful world which lay before them. They sat in the cool silence until the lights of the returning taxicabs and motorcars became more frequent, until the stars crept into the sky and the yellow arc of the moon stole up over the tops of the houses. Presently they saw Sir Timothy's Rolls-Royce glide up to the front door below and Sir Timothy himself enter the house, followed by another man whose appearance was somehow familiar.

"Your father has changed his mind," Francis observed.

"Perhaps he has called for something," she suggested, "or he may want to change his clothes before he goes down to the country."

Presently, however, there was a knock at the door. Hedges made his diffident appearance.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he began, addressing Francis. "Sir Timothy has been asking if you are still here. He would be very glad if you could spare him a moment in the library."

Francis rose at once to his feet.

"I was just leaving," he said. "I will look in at the library and see Sir Timothy on my way out."

CHAPTER XXV

SIR TIMOTHY was standing upon the hearthrug of the very wonderful apartment which he called his library.

"You asked for me, Sir Timothy," Francis said as he entered.

Sir Timothy smiled.

"I was fortunate to find that you had not left," he answered. "I want you to be present at this forthcoming interview. You are to a certain extent in the game. I thought it might amuse you."

Francis for the first time was aware

that his host was not alone. The room, with its odd splashes of light, was full of shadows, and he saw now that in an easy-chair a little distance away from Sir Timothy, a girl was seated. Behind her, still standing, with his hat in his hand, was a man. Francis recognized them both with surprise.

"Miss Hyslop!" he exclaimed.

She nodded a little defiantly. Sir Timothy smiled.

"Ah!" he said. "You know the young lady, without a doubt. Mr. Shopland, your coadjutor in various works of philanthropy, you recognize, of course? I do not mind confessing to you, Ledsam, that I am very much afraid of Mr. Shopland. I am not at all sure that he has not a warrant for my arrest in his pocket."

The detective came a little farther into the light. He was attired in an ill-fitting dinner suit, a soft-fronted shirt of unpleasing design, a collar of the wrong shape and a badly arranged tie. He seemed, nevertheless, very pleased with himself.

"I came on here, Mr. Ledsam, at Sir Timothy's desire," he said. "I should like you to understand," he added with a covert glance of warning, "that I have been devoting every effort, during the last few days, to the discovery of your friend's brother, Mr. Reginald Wilmore."

"I am very glad to hear it," Francis replied shortly. "The boy's brother is one of my greatest friends."

"I have come to the conclusion," the detective pronounced, "that the young man has been abducted, and is being detained at the Walled House against his will for some illegal purpose."

"In other respects," Sir Timothy said, stretching out his hand toward a cedarwood box of cigarettes and selecting one, "this man seems quite sane. I have watched him very closely on the way here, but I could see no signs of mental aberration. I do not think, at any rate, that he is dangerous."

"Sir Timothy," Shopland explained, with some anger in his tone, "declines to take me seriously. I can of course apply for a search-warrant, as I shall do, but it occurred to me to be one of those cases which could be better dealt with, up to a certain point, without recourse to the extremities of the law."

Sir Timothy, who had lighted his cigarette, presented a wholly undisturbed front.

"What I cannot quite understand," he said, "is the exact meaning of that word 'abduction.' Why should I be suspected of forcibly removing a harmless and worthy young man from his regular avocation, and, as you term it, abducting him, which I presume means keeping him bound and gagged and imprisoned? I do not eat young men. I do not even care for the society of young men. I am not naturally a gregarious person, but I think I would go so far," he added, with a bow toward Miss Hyslop, "as to say that I prefer the society of young women. Satisfy my curiosity, therefore, I beg of you. For what reason do you suppose that I have been concerned in the disappearance of this Mr. Reginald Wilmore?"

FRANCIS opened his lips, but Shopland, with a warning glance, intervened.

"I work sometimes as a private person, sir," he said, "but it is not to be forgotten that I am an officer of the law. It is not for us to state motives or even to afford explanations for our behavior. I have watched your house at Hatch End, Sir Timothy, and I have come to the conclusion that unless you are willing to discuss this matter with me in a different spirit, I am justified in asking the magistrates for a search-warrant."

Sir Timothy sighed.

"Mr. Ledsam," he said, "I think, after all, that yours is the most interesting end of this espionage business. It is you who search for motives, is it not, and pass them on to our more automatic friend, who does the rest? May I ask, have you supplied the motive in the present case?"

"I have failed to discover any motive at all for Reginald Wilmore's disappearance," Francis admitted, "nor have I at any time been able to connect you with it. Mr. Shopland's efforts, however, although he has not seen well to take me into his entire confidence, have my warmest approval and sympathy. Although I have accepted your very generous hospitality, Sir Timothy, I think there has been no misunderstanding between us on this matter."

"Most correct," Sir Timothy murmured. "The trouble seems to be, so far as I am concerned, that no one will tell me exactly of what I am suspected? I am to give Mr. Shopland the run of my house, or he will make his appearance in the magistrates' court and the evening papers will have placards with marvelous headlines at

my expense. How will it run, Mr. Shopland—'MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE OF A YOUNG GENTLEMAN. MILLIONAIRE'S HOUSE TO BE SEARCHED.'"

"We do not necessarily acquaint the press with our procedure," Shopland rejoined.

"Nevertheless," Sir Timothy continued, "I have known awkward consequences to arise from a search-warrant too rashly applied for or granted. However, we are scarcely being polite. So far, Miss Hyslop has had very little to say."

The young lady was not altogether at her ease.

"I have had very little to say," she repeated, "because I did not expect an audience."

Sir Timothy drew a letter from his pocket, opened it and adjusted his eyeglass.

"Here we are," he said. "After leaving my dinner-party tonight, I called at the club and found this note. Quite an inviting little affair, you see—young lady's writing, faint but very delicate perfume, excellent stationery, Milan Court—the home of adventures!

"'Dear Sir Timothy Brast: Although I am not known to you personally, there is a certain matter concerning which information has come into my possession, which I should like to discuss with you. Will you call and see me as soon as possible?

"'Sincerely yours, DAISY HYSLOP.'

"On receipt of this note," Sir Timothy continued, folding it up, "I telephoned to the young lady and as I was fortunate enough to find her at home, I asked her to come here. I then took the liberty of introducing myself to Mr. Shopland, whose interest in my evening has been unvarying, and whose uninvited company I have been compelled to bear with, and suggested that, as I was on my way back to Curzon Street, he had better come in and have a drink and tell me what it was all about. I arranged that he should find Miss Hyslop here, and for a person of observation, which I flatter myself to be, it was easy to discover the interesting fact that Mr. Shopland and Miss Daisy Hyslop were not strangers. —Now tell me, young lady," Sir Timothy went on. "You see, I have placed myself entirely in your hands. Never mind the presence of these two gentlemen. Tell me exactly what you wanted to say to me?"

"The matter is of no great importance," Miss Hyslop declared. "In any case I should not discuss it before these two gentlemen."

"Don't go for a moment, please," Sir Timothy begged, as she showed signs of departure. "Listen: I want to make a suggestion to you. There is an impression abroad that I was interested in the two young men, Victor Bidlake and Fairfax, and that I knew something of their quarrel. You were an intimate friend of young Bidlake's and presumably in his confidence. It occurs to me, therefore, that Mr. Shopland might very well have visited you in search of information, linking me up with that unfortunate affair. Hence your little note to me."

MISS HYSLOP rose to her feet. She had the appearance of being very angry indeed.

"Do you mean to insinuate—" she began.

"Madam, I insinuate nothing," Sir Timothy interrupted sternly. "I only desire to suggest this: you are a young lady whose manner of living, I gather, is to a certain extent precarious. It must have seemed to you a likelier source of profit to withhold any information you might have to give at the solicitation of a rich man, than to give it free gratis and for nothing to a detective. Now am I right?"

Miss Hyslop turned toward the door. She had the air of a person who had been entirely misunderstood.

"I wrote you out of kindness, Sir Timothy," she said in an aggrieved manner. "I shall have nothing more to say on the matter—to you, at any rate."

Sir Timothy sighed.

"You see," he said, turning to the others, "I have lost my chance of conciliating a witness. My check-book remains locked up, and she has gone over to your side."

She turned around suddenly.

"You know that you made Bobby Fairfax kill Victor!" she almost shouted.

Sir Timothy smiled in triumph.

"My dear young lady," he begged, "let us now be friends again. I desired to know your trump card. For that reason I fear that I have been a little brutal. Now please don't hurry away. You have shot your bolt. Already Mr. Shopland is turning the thing over in his mind. Was I lurking outside that night, Mr. Shopland, to guide that young man's flabby arm? He scarcely seemed man enough for a mur-

derer, did he, when he sat quaking on that stool in Soto's bar while Mr. Ledsam tortured him? —I beg you again not to hurry, Miss Hyslop. At any rate wait while my servants fetch you a taxi. It was clouding over when I came in. We may even have a thunderstorm."

"I want to get out of this house," Daisy Hyslop declared. "I think you are all horrible. Mr. Ledsam did behave like a gentleman when he came to see me, and Mr. Shopland asked questions civilly. But you—" she added, turning round to Sir Timothy.

"Hush, my dear," he interrupted, holding out his hand. "Don't abuse me. I am not angry with you—not in the least; and I am going to prove it. I shall oppose any search-warrant which you might apply for, Mr. Shopland, and I think I can oppose it with success. But I invite you two, Miss Hyslop and Mr. Ledsam, to my party on Thursday night. Once under my roof, you shall have *carte blanche*. You can wander where you please, knock the walls for secret hiding-places, stamp upon the floor for *oubliettes*. Upstairs or down, the cellars and the lofts, the grounds and the park, the whole of my domain is for you from midnight on Thursday until four o'clock. What do you say, Mr. Shopland? Does my offer satisfy you?"

The detective hesitated.

"I should prefer an invitation for myself," he declared bluntly.

Sir Timothy shook his head.

"Alas, my dear Mr. Shopland," he regretted, "that is impossible! If I had only myself to consider, I would not hesitate. Personally I like you. You amuse me more than anyone I have met for a long time. But unfortunately I have my guests to consider! You must be satisfied with Mr. Ledsam's report."

Shopland was not at all disconcerted.

"There are three days between now and then," he observed.

"During those three days, of course," Sir Timothy said dryly, "I shall do my best to obliterate all traces of my various crimes. Still, you are a clever detective, and you can give Mr. Ledsam a few hints. Take my advice. You wont get that search-warrant, and if you apply for it, none of you will be at my party."

"I accept," Shopland decided.

Thereupon Sir Timothy crossed the room, unlocked the drawer of a magnificent writing-table, and from a little packet drew out two cards of invitation. They were of small size but thick, and the color was a brilliant scarlet. On one he wrote the name of Francis, the other he filled in for Miss Hyslop.

"Miss Daisy Hyslop," he said, "shall we drink a glass of wine together on Thursday evening, and will you decide that although, perhaps, I am not a very satisfactory correspondent, I can at least be an amiable host?"

The girl's eyes glistened. She knew very well that the possession of that card meant that for the next few days she would be the envy of every one of her acquaintances.

"Thank you, Sir Timothy," she replied eagerly. "You have quite misunderstood me; but I should like to come to your party."

Sir Timothy handed over the cards. He rang for a servant and bowed the others out. Francis he detained for a moment.

"Our little duel, my friend, marches," he said. "After Thursday night we will speak again of this matter concerning Margaret. You will know then what you have to face."

MARGARET herself opened the door and looked in.

"What have those people been doing here?" she asked. "What is happening?"

Her father unlocked his drawer once more and drew out another of the red cards.

"Margaret," he said, "Ledsam here has accepted my invitation for Thursday night. You have never, up till now, honored me; nor have I ever asked you. I suggest that for the first part of the entertainment you give me the pleasure of your company."

"For the first part?"

"For the first part only," he repeated, as he wrote her name upon the card.

"What about Francis?" she asked. "Is he to stay all the time?"

Sir Timothy smiled. He locked up his drawer and slipped the key into his pocket.

"Ledsam and I," he said, "have promised one another a more complete mutual understanding on Thursday night. I may not be able to part with him quite so soon."

The dramatic conclusion of this captivating novel by the author of "The Great Prince Shan" and many other famous stories, will appear in the forthcoming September issue.

Thinner Than Water

A deeply interesting story of very real people, by the talented author of "The Prodigal," "The Strange Case of Alan Corwin" and many other notable Blue Book stories.

By George L. Knapp

SAM MILLER paused in the alley, and through a knothole in the fence regarded the upper flat with a suspicious look in his greenish-gray eyes. Nothing alarming was in sight. He came inside the yard, closing the gate noiselessly,—a sharp contrast to his usual methods of approach,—and stopped behind a bush to repeat his scrutiny. Sam had been in a fight; and his antagonist, though smaller and younger than himself, had shown a feline fury that had come near to winning victory. Sam's waist was ripped from neck to waistband. One knee of his breeches was worn through by abrasions quite unconnected with prayer. Both legs showed irregular patterns of white skin and black yarn that may have been highly decorative, but did not argue a long career of usefulness for his stockings. Spots of blood, which seemed to trace their origin to a slightly enlarged nose, dotted his forward aspect, and it was plain that he had passed through a barrage of mud. Any mother would have been moved to language at sight of her offspring in such a mess, and Sam's female parent was not famed for reticence. Wherefore, Sam desired greatly to get to his room before she saw him, change his clothes, and leaving only the knickerbockers for inspection, hide his waist and stockings. They would be found sometime, of course, but Sam preferred to take his troubles on the installment plan.

Partly reassured at last, though with an uneasy feeling at the back of his brain, Sam tugged off his shoes and mounted the back stairs as silently as a cat. The window from his room to the upper rear porch was open, and he stepped through. He was straddling the sill when a male voice said:

"I don't care who hears!"

IN spite of the blustering words, the tone should have told any grown person that the speaker lied, and that he did care, a great deal. Evidently some one else cared more, however, for Sam heard his mother exclaim in a panic half-whisper:

"Oh, don't! Don't yell so! The neighbors'll all hear you, an' we'll be ruined!" There was a sound of weeping.

The next words, in the man's voice, were no more than a rumble. Sam decided that the conversation was being held in the dining-room. He opened the door to the hall, cautiously, and was rewarded:

"Divorce, nothin'! You'd oughta be ashamed to talk about divorce, a woman raised like you was, an' a school-teacher! Besides, 'taint legal. I wa'n't served with no papers. I can bust that divorce wide open!"

"But you were—in—the pen—"

"That's right, throw it up to me! That's the thanks a man gets for tryin' to take care of his fambly! How'd I come to get cinched? Tryin' to make a livin' for you an' Sam after I lost my job. An' you throw it up to me!"

Sam's mother was not too refined to retort that her ex-husband lost his job for stealing, but she was too perturbed to think quickly, and another interruption came to add to her troubles. "Hush, you'll wake the baby!" she exclaimed, but a wail showed that the damage was done.

"He'll have somethin' to howl about if I tell what I know, an' bust that divorce," returned the man. "He's nothin' but—" He stopped with the projected remark about the infant's social status unuttered, which again argued a prudence belying his bold words. Women do pick the queerest things to fight about, and when they start on the warpath—

THE first word that reached Sam's ears had told him the state of affairs. His real father, not the good-natured step-parent who now answered to the title of "dad," was out of the pen, and pestering his former wife. Of course he wanted money. He usually did—Sam had vivid memories of his progenitor's hunger for coin. It was too bad, but there was no loss without some gain. If his mother had this to worry about, she wouldn't be so particular about a few holes in some old stockings. Sam began changing his clothes. Absorbed in the task of patching a broken elastic with a safety-pin, he missed some words when the conversation recommenced. The next he heard was his mother's protest:

"But I haven't got any money here, except a little—"

"Gimme that, then!" said the man roughly. In a moment he added, in the same tone:

"You better have more'n that around, next time."

THERE was no reply. Steps came down the passage. Sam peeped out cautiously. Five years had made inroads on the coarse good looks which once were the fellow's chief asset. He was forty, and looked older; his hair was gray; and a cringe lay so close beneath his bluster that the boy sensed it, though his mother did not. But the impudent eye—singularly like Sam's own—had not changed, nor the shifty mouth which the lad had escaped at the cost of taking a primly self-centered one from the distaff side. Miller went away by the alley route. For a moment Sam listened uncomfortably to his mother's weeping, and then the door of his room was pushed wide, and she stood before him.

"Oh, heavens!" she exclaimed. "You heard."

It was a statement of fact which Sam had not the hardihood to deny. He nodded.

"If you tell, I'll skin you alive!" exclaimed the woman, her eyes blazing. Sam knew enough of her temper to realize that the threat was not wholly idle.

"I aint a tattletale," he returned virtuously. His mother gave a skeptical sniff, and asked how much he had heard. Informed on this point, she wept quietly for a few moments, then began to bemoan her fate in more articulate fashion.

"He'll ruin us!" she exclaimed. "He's a terrible man! He stops at nothing! Harry" (her present husband) "can't match him at all. Oh, what will I do?"

"Have him arrested," suggested her practical offspring.

"And have Harry quit me, cold? Where'd we be then, I'd like to know?"

"He wouldn't quit," said Sam reassuringly.

"Much you know about it!" returned his mother. "Of course he'd quit. Any man would. They're all alike when it comes to a woman, and Jim'll tell, if I don't get him more money. He's a terrible man."

"He aint made much at it, if he has to come round here an' bone you for money," said Sam, who was inclined to judge things by the profit they paid.

"He can ruin us, though," answered his mother. "Don't you dare say a word to Harry. If this ever comes out, we're gone—and oh, I just know it will come out!" She departed at a call from the baby, and though Sam was very sorry for her, he breathed a sigh of relief. She had not noticed his clothes.

Small wonder that her observation was faulty. Her plight was serious, and she believed it ruinous. Thirteen years before, an orphan and a country school-teacher, she spent the summer vacation with an aunt who lived in a county-seat town. There she met Jim Miller, who called himself a traveling salesman, and married him after a brief courtship that was shortened as much by her relative's shrill opposition as by Jim's bold importunity. Before Sam was born a year later, she learned that her husband was a professional crook; and being a woman of narrow but genuine honesty, her life for years thereafter was an inferno. She worked, she starved; she endured blows and curses from her husband and contempt from his criminal companions. When Sam was seven, Miller was caught in a bungling robbery, and his wife got a divorce while he was in prison. After three years of comparative peace in spite of privation, she met and married Harry Prentiss, a bachelor printer of forty-five. She did not actually lie about matters, but he thought her first husband dead, while she lived in fear that the scoundrel would return and wreak vengeance on her for leaving him. And now—he had come.

WHEN Prentiss got home that evening, his only cheerful welcome was from the baby. Sam, alarmed and curious, was reserved to the verge of sullenness. His mother, red-eyed and trembling, told her poor makeshift of a lie, that she had lost the money on a trip to the grocery. Prentiss made light of the event.

"How much was it, Millie?" he asked.

"Five or six dollars," she answered.

"Well, 'twont put us in the poorhouse," he said genially. "Don't cry about it. —Hey, Billy! We wont cry over a little old money, will we? Not much!"

I think Millie would have worried less if he had stormed awhile. For one thing, she would have taken it as a sign of strength; and just now she craved strong support, even if it bruised her. For another, the man's gentleness added to her grief at deceiving him, even as it confirmed her belief that deceit was necessary. If cases had been reversed, Miller would have blacked her eye and raised the roof. Even supposing that anyone would forgive her, which was absurd in itself, how could this mild, kindly, rather fat man, with eyes already weakened from his work, stand up against the "terrible" Jim Miller.

SHE overrated both Miller's wickedness and his powers. Even as a crook, he was a good deal of a failure. Such equivocal success as is possible in the world of crime requires nerve and specialization. Under all his bluster, Miller was a coward, and too lazy to specialize. He was jack of a dozen dirty trades and master of none. At the time of his marriage he was one of a gang of sure-thing gamblers that followed races, questionable circuses and county fairs. That was his favorite "lay" still, though the increasing strictness of the authorities constantly narrowed his field. He was a passable card-sharp, but without the "front" to get into the circles where big money could be had; and at one time he made some headway selling swindling stocks. He had done a good bit of burglary and a little safe-blowing, always in minor fields, under the lead of a stronger man, and never in a first-class "job." Now, with his character beginning to tell tales in his face, he had less chance than ever in the semirespectable walks of crookdom, and was turning more and more to crude robbery. A little later, failing nerve would drive him out of this, and he would become a "moocher," with petty graft for a sideline. But he could still run a good bluff on those weaker than himself.

He came to the flat a few days later, for Sam's mother told him so when he found her in tears. That afternoon she left him in charge of the baby and went downtown, hurrying back before her husband reached home. He noticed her excitement, though far from guessing the cause of it. Next morning, when the flat was cleared and the baby asleep in his buggy on the porch, she called Sam to her room and gave him an envelope.

"You've got to take this to Jim," she said. "I don't dare let him come here any more. He said if I didn't send him some money today, he'd come tonight, when Harry's home, and give away everything. He'd do it, too; he's a terrible man. I sold some things and got this Liberty bond, so he'd think it came out of our deposit-box, and that I really didn't have money. You've got to take it to him at that poolroom on Blake Street. Don't stay there, Sam, please."

She did not often use that last word, but Sam avoided committing himself. He went down to the poolroom. It was virtually empty at this hour, but his father was waiting.

"So this is Sam," he said advancing with a cordial air. "Remember me, Sammy?"

Sam did. Young as he was when this crook last played a part in his life, Sam remembered him well. He recalled stealthy returns after mysterious absences, times of jovial play and reckless prodigality, other times of furious temper and demands on his wife for money. Sam had admired and feared his father; and though time had weakened both feelings, they were reinforced by curiosity. He first stated his errand.

"I was to give you this," he said, handing over the envelope. Miller took it with a show of indifference, but opened it at once, and gave an impatient curse when he saw the contents.

"Why didn't she send real money?" he demanded.

"She didn't have it," answered Sam.

"Well, they're easy to sell," said the man. "Now, how's Sammy?"

"All right," said Sam.

"How long you been livin' where you are now?"

The boy told, and then asked the question that was consuming him:

"Where have you been since—since—you got out?"

"Better ask where I aint been," was the boasting answer. "I been out two years. Last winter I worked the races, down South. That's a good graft; the bulls bleed you dry, though. This spring I went out to the coast. We done some business there, but my partner crabbed me. Just now I'm down on my luck a little, but it wont be long. Your stepdad take you travelin' any?"

"No," said Sam. "He's going to get a Ford this summer, though."

"What kind of a guy is he, anyhow?"

"Oh, he's all right."

"Does he wallop you?"

"No—only a little, once."

"He better not let me catch him at it!" Miller swelled out his chest and walked a few strides with the man-for-breakfast air of the old-time heavy villain. "Does he ever beat Millie up?"

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Sam. His viewpoint had changed enough in the last few years that the question startled him a little. "He's awful good to her."

"He's a damn fool for that," was the unexpected reply. "I bet she'd do more for me than for him, right now! I know her. I know all the janes. The way to handle 'em is get 'em scairt an' keep 'em scairt."

A little frightened by this outburst, Sam left, first promising to return two days later for a visit.

THAT evening Prentiss got his stepson alone, and asked him questions.

"I don't want you telling tales out of school, Sam," said Prentiss while the boy held his breath in sudden fear, "but there's something troubling your mother. Do you know what it is?"

"No sir," said Sam huskily.

"Well, if you can find out, I wish you would. She's afraid to tell me. Course that's foolish, but I don't blame her. She's a mighty good woman, Sam, but she's had an awful hard time. I don't want to say anything against your father, but he didn't treat her right; he didn't, really; and that makes her scary about men-folks in general. If you happen on to what's worrying her, you'll tell me, wont you? I want to help her."

"Yes sir," said Sam, without the slightest intention of keeping his word. Fresh from contact with his predatory real parent, the boy wondered if his stepfather's kindness were not weakness, after all.

Truth to tell, Sam was torn by the love of adventure and the longing to explore strange coasts—and he knew only one person who had made such voyages.

He went to see his father at the promised time, and found him spruced up and wearing a watch-chain across his flashy vest. A born merchant, Sam made a swift guess at the cost of this transformation, and decided that not much of the Liberty bond was left. Miller greeted his son with effusive swagger, and began to talk of himself and his exploits. He told tales of card-sharping, of confidence games, of unmannerly hicks who raised a row when robbed of their money by sure-thing gambling devices; but he did not mention the arrests, fines, jail-sentences and orders to leave town which took up so much space in his real history. When Sam was leaving, Miller slapped him on the back, and said:

"I bet you're a good one when you grow up! You wont let nobody put it over on you! Not much! You're too much like your own dad. Blood's thicker'n water!"

Whereat Sam felt vastly flattered.

Sam went for another pool-room visit the next day, and the next; but did not

find his parent. Two days later his mother sent him. This time Miller was on hand, and surly.

"Well," he demanded, "got the kale?"

"No," said Sam, "Mother—"

"Why aint you got it?"

"Mother says she aint got it," persisted Sam. "She says you got to give her a little time, 'cause she can't pick money off trees. She says—"

"Aw, damn what she says!" exclaimed Miller. "You tell her to dig up fifty bones, at least, p. d. q., or I'll call on that guy that thinks he's a married man, an' tell him where the whole bunch of 'em get off. Get me? She'll dig up, or I'll come visitin'; an' if I do, I'll wreck that pretty little flat!"

"But then you wouldn't get anything," returned the practical Sam. "An' you might be arrested, or—or something." He dared not suggest that Prentiss might oppose this terrible rover; Sam had accepted his mother's verdict on that, but there were moments when he had doubts. Miller cut across the uncertain argument:

"Don't you worry none about me, Sam, an' don't spill that gab to Millie, 'nless you want to get her in trouble. I know how to deal with janes. You tell her what I said."

SAM told, and Millie mourned aloud. Sam ventured to hint doubts that his father would proceed to extremities; but this only evoked terrified pleas and hysterical orders to hold his peace. Firmly convinced that men never forgive blunders or deceits in a woman, poor Millie thought of nothing but to hold her trenches as long as possible under the bombardment, and never dreamed that a counter-attack would start the enemy toward the dim horizon at the fastest pace he could muster. She could not raise fifty dollars legitimately without her husband's knowledge; so she went to their deposit-box, her excuse being to put away a ring that was too small for her, and stole a fifty-dollar Liberty bond from their little store. She put this in an envelope, gave it to Sam to deliver to his father, waited till the boy had gone; and then, being an honest woman in more senses than one, flung herself on her bed in a storm of weeping that left her sick and faint.

It would have been wiser had she given way to her grief while Sam was present. The boy really loved his mother, albeit in a somewhat selfish way; and his thieves' blood gave him an instinctive hunch as to the way to meet this particular thief. If he had seen her outburst, I suspect Sam would have carried the bond to his stepfather, or at least have hidden it and waited developments. As matters stood, he only saw his mother cringing at a threat and stealing from her husband—which of course, in boy eyes as well as in criminal ones, vindicated the man who made the threat. Miller did not allow the lesson to fail for want of comment.

"See?" he said. "That's the way to handle 'em. Get 'em scairt an' keep 'em scairt. If they don't knuckle to what you say, wallop 'em on the jaw. I know how to handle any jane. You just remember this when you get to runnin' with 'em yourself. Now wait, an' we'll have a feed."

Sam waited, and was rewarded with three dishes of ice cream, five bottles of soda pop, and a four-bladed knife with a genuine imitation ivory handle. For Miller, like some more famous philanthropists, loved to be generous with other people's money.

IF events had taken their usual course, the theft of the Liberty bond would not have been discovered for weeks; but events seldom are ordinary when you want them that way. A few days later Prentiss had to go to his deposit-box for some papers. That evening he asked:

"Millie, did you take out a bond when you were at the box the other day?"

Sam had just picked up the telephone to call a boy friend, and when he heard this question, the instrument slipped from his hands. The resulting crash covered Millie's start. She answered in a fairly natural voice:

"Why, what in the world makes you ask that? I told you I went to put in my ring, not to take things out."

"You could take it if you wanted to," said Prentiss. "It's yours as much as mine; only I think you ought to tell me about it. Are you sure you didn't drop a bond?"

"Of course I didn't!" She could meet this question squarely without the direct lie which some women dread worse than ten times as much indirect deceit. "What makes you ask?"

"Well, there's a bond gone," said Prentiss. Like many mild, plodding men who stay single till late in life, Prentiss was careful of his money and a consistent

saver. "Of course, I may have lost it myself when I got the last coupons," he added, generously, "but I don't think so."

Sam's action in dropping the telephone that evening was prophetic of his rôle in the days that followed. Without intending to do so, he became his mother's best means of concealment. Her authority over him was weakened to the vanishing-point, and his father was encouraging him to defy all authority. Sam would have been less than human if he had not run a little wild, and his unruliness worried his stepfather and furnished an excuse for the worries of his mother. Bit by bit, he edged over the boundaries which had held him, and one morning he went too far. His mother started to scold him for the theft of lump sugar, and Sam interrupted:

"Well, what if I did? You aint got any right to talk!"

A hand closed firmly on his collar, and swung him around till his head hit the wall with a resounding crack; two stern blue eyes looked down into his own, and in a voice which had not a trace of softness left in it, his stepfather said:

"That'll be all of that, Sam. You've been getting out of hand, lately, and here's where it stops. Apologize to your mother, this minute!"

"I— I'm s-sorry!" said Sam in awed tones. His stepfather went on speaking:

"Don't ever let me hear anything of this again. You'll be respectful to your mother, or you'll settle with me. —Why, Millie, what's the matter?" For she had started weeping as if her heart would break.

WHEN Prentiss had gone to work, still wondering at the outburst, Sam attended to his few household chores, and departed for the pool-room with a grouch against home and everyone in it. They were all picking on him, and he wouldn't stand it; he wasn't going to let anybody put things over on him. He was one of the wise guys, and he couldn't be treated that way. His stepfather was just a fat old bluff—in his heart Sam knew better, but the reflection consoled him. His mother swiped Liberty bonds, and then scolded him for swiping sugar. He'd show 'em! He'd—

"What's the matter?"

Sam jumped at the challenge and looked up into his father's face. Absorbed with his grievance, he had reached the rendezvous without knowing it. He explained. Miller swore, threw a chest, blustered about what he had a mind to do, and then, suddenly crafty, asked:

"How'd you like to come with me for a trip?"

Sam thought he would like it very well.

"All right; we'll meet a fellow an' go with him for an auto-ride. I was just startin' to see him when you come."

They took a street-car, transferred to another line, and rode till they reached the end of the rails on the gently rolling prairie, with only a few scattered houses near. They walked three hundred yards or so northwest, and there, on a low knoll, was a flivver of the touring model, with a rough-looking man at the wheel. Miller left Sam behind and advanced alone, but the rough man's first question was plainly audible.

"Who the hell's that kid?"

Sam could not hear the answer, except that for some reason they could not get some one. He judged he was to take that some one's place. A few more words passed, and then Sam was beckoned near. The rough man gave him a long stare, but spoke only to Miller:

"Does he know?"

"He don't need to. He'll do what I tell him."

"Hell!" said the man.

"It's this or give up the job," said Miller. "They've got the jockey, an' there's nobody else."

"We could do it in daylight, without nobody else, if you had any guts," returned the rough man. "All right, pile in. 'Taint my kid. If he was—"

The unfinished sentence troubled Sam more than a little.

SEVERAL miles beyond the city limits they turned out to the side of the road and climbed through the fence into a grove. Miller announced that they would have a picnic. The men spread out sandwiches and a pie, and primed their appetites by a drink from a flask which Miller produced from his hip pocket. There was no ice-cream, and Sam thought it rather a failure as a picnic lunch. Besides, he was beginning to get homesick. Funny the way his mother cried that morning.

Lunch over, the men lay down and slept. At four o'clock they roused, but instead of making preparations to go back to the city, they drew apart and talked together in low, moody tones. Two hours later they

brought out more sandwiches, but this time there was no pie.

"Is this all we got to eat?" asked Sam.

"You're damn lucky to get that, young feller," returned the rough man. Sam subsided, and Miller began to speak nervously of something else.

At dusk they climbed into the car again and drove on at a moderate pace, still keeping to the road which led a little north of west. They crossed a river and passed through a good-sized town without stopping. Six or seven miles beyond this town, and a mile past a small village, they hid the car in a field; then the men stowed their burglars' tools in various pockets, and all three took the back-trail to the village. The depot was on the very edge of town. They stopped a little way outside, in the shelter of some tall weeds.

"Why don't we go to the depot?" queried Sam. His father swore at him in an undertone, but the rough man chuckled.

"Because we're layin' low, young feller," he answered. "We're out to crack a hick bank, an' we don't want no witnesses. Your lovin' dad brung you along to let us in, an' then keep watch outside, and let us know if trouble's comin'."

IN a vague way the boy had sensed the nature of the expedition from the first, but to hear it stated thus boldly terrified him. The adventuring part of his nature was growing smaller and now he would have really preferred to get his excitement secondhand, without risking his precious skin. His father's meek submission to the rough man's mastery roused Sam's anger as well as his fear. He thought of *Oliver Twist*, known from the evening readings of his stepfather. *Oliver* broke away from the thieves and gave the alarm—but he got shot by a butler. Sam didn't know what a butler was, but a bank would be sure to have one. He might make his break now—there were people on the village street. No, the rough man had a gun; and besides, Sam did not want to get his father arrested. That much regard remained for the man who had given him life, and labored ever since to make the gift valueless.

The figures on the village street disappeared. A passenger train stormed through without stopping. Another stopped, but its lights forbade approach. A freight same in on the other track, headed toward the city. Tired, frightened and half asleep, Sam was still pondering his problem when his father caught his arm. A long train was coming from the direction of the city; it stopped with the unfastened door of a box car almost opposite their retreat. A whisper, a jump, a heave, a scramble; and the three were in the friendly darkness of the interior. When the train started, the rough man lighted a match and looked around. Save for themselves, the car was empty. He held the match close to Sam's face, and the boy, who was crying softly, turned away.

"Well," repeated the man as darkness closed in again, "'taint my kid."

The train jolted onward through the night while Sam's mind passed to another part of the history of *Oliver Twist*. *Oliver* recovered from his wound, and lived happy ever after, while that smart guy with the funny name got pinched and sent to prison. Maybe it would be safer to break away than to go through, after all. His mother would be crying about him by this time, and his stepfather would sit at the telephone all night, calling up folks. If there was a chance—

"Comin' to it," said the rough man. "Get ready."

The train slowed down as if for their special convenience, and they tumbled out and sought shelter in some bushes before it stopped. After some minutes it went on again, and the station agent—the only villager up to meet it—stumbled sleepily homeward. The three raiders stepped out into the light of a belated and shrunken moon, and the rough man took Sam by the shoulder.

"Do you know what this is?" he demanded, holding up his automatic.

"It's—a gun, sir," said Sam.

"It's the gun I kill folks with when they play tricks on me," said the man. "Your dad an' me, we're goin' to crack this crib, an' you're goin' to help. If you try to get away, you get this, see?"

He poked the gun into Sam's stomach, and the boy saw. His father stirred and mumbled uneasily, but did not speak.

THE crib to be cracked was not a bank but a store, one of the few country stores that maintain their trade in spite of good roads and mail-order catalogues; and it was reputed to have a goodly supply of cash always on hand. It was on a corner, streets on two sides, a vacant lot on the third. Behind was the alley, and be-

yond that two more vacant lots, dotted with trees. The trio approached from the rear. The windows were protected by iron bars, but there was no watchman and no electric alarm. A narrow window was out of sight of either street and of most of the alley. The rough man jimmied the bars from this with trifling noise, sprung the catch, raised the sash, then picked up Sam, set him on the sill and ordered him to go through and unlock the back door.

The boy obeyed, torn between fear of the gun behind and the imaginary butler before. The rough man nodded approval.

"All right. Now you're in it as deep as we are. Take him to the lookout place —and mind, no tricks." He showed his pistol again as he spoke.

LEFT alone under the tree whose deep shadow screened him while its position enabled him to see sections of both streets and the full length of the alley, Sam fairly shook with terror. Nothing happened, however, and his fear lessened. The men inside were busy with the safe. After some minutes a regular *clop-clop* attracted his attention. He stole across the alley, according to orders, and tossed some light gravel against the back windows of the store. Operations inside ceased at the signal until the horse and buggy passed down the side-street. Miller came to the door.

"That's right," he commended in a whisper. "That's the way to do it. 'Twont be long, now."

He went back inside, and Sam returned to his post with fresh courage and a new idea. If he could warn the burglars, why couldn't he warn the police? But then his father would be caught. Was there any way of warning both—without getting shot?

He looked about him. Most of the hamlet lay north of the store, but the tracks were on the south, and from the direction of the city came a whistle and a labored puffing which meant an approaching freight-train. The night, too, was growing cloudy, and the moonlight was very dim. Sam stole softly through the vacant lot behind him, found that he could reach the next street without leaving the shadow of the trees, came back to his post, listened; then stooped and picked up a couple of stones. The freight-train was coming close.

Even the inexpert cracksmen were making good progress on the old-fashioned safe when again came the light rattle of gravel against the windows. They snapped out the torch and sat still. The rattle was repeated. They stole softly to the door. Sam was not visible, and wondering much, they stepped out, the rough man with his hand on his automatic. They stood a moment, peering into the shadows and listening to the train now almost abreast of them. Then the window at their side crashed as a stone drove through it, there was a swish of small breeches legs under the trees, and in a moment came a wild shriek from the next street:

"Robbers! Murder! Thieves! Help! Police!"

A million dogs, it seemed to Sam, woke to yelping life at his cry, and above their clamor came the crack of a heavy pistol. The rough man had fired wild, partly in sheer temper, partly because experience had taught him that a shot makes the public rather slow to close in. This done, he and Miller darted toward the railroad, swung aboard an empty coal-car as the freight went through without stopping, and were safe, at least for the moment, even as Sam tumbled into the arms of a stout man who ran out on the street in his night-shirt.

TWENTY-FOUR hours later the boy was back home, kissed and cried over and something of a hero. His tale of a lone runaway and a chance discovery of the robbers had gone with the people of the village, but was shredded at once by domestic cross-examination. No one seemed to blame him, however. His stepfather, who plainly knew the whole story of Millie's troubles, commended Sam for letting his real parent get away; but that parent did not join in the thanksgiving. Over the bottle with which the two sought to console themselves for their failure, Miller read out the story as it appeared in the city papers, and bemoaned his sad fate.

"I'd like to know who the guy was that said blood's thicker'n water! He was some boob! I'll tell the world he was. My boy, my own darlin' boy, throwin' down his own lawful father, callin' the bulls, an' then goin' back to that mutt that aint got nerve enough to be stall for a moll buzzer! Can you beat it? I say blood's thinner'n water, tha's what it is!"

"Aw, can it!" said the rough man. "Gimme that hooch!"

Lightnin' and the Law

"Gawd shore is on the side of the law," commented one mountaineer in the course of this vivid drama by a man who writes with conviction.

By Meredith Davis

"BLUE grass ag'in!"

The words, from the mouth of the young mountaineer hunched in the day-coach of the accommodation train from Richmond, were more of a benediction than a statement of fact. His lack-luster eyes had been gazing morosely out of the window ever since the train had crossed the James River and started on its southwesterly trip. The level, sparsely settled lands from Petersburg on to Roanoke had failed to arouse him; now, with Pulaski the next stop, he had caught sight of rolling hills that looked blue-green in the distance.

"Blue grass! D'ye see it yonder?" The mountaineer nudged his companion beside him, another youth of the hills about his own age.

The second nodded understandingly. It hadn't been more than two days since he had seen these hills, on his trip to Richmond; but the boy at the window—well, it had been nearer to two years since he had looked upon the mountains that marked the boundaries of that corner of Virginia wherein both youths had been born and reared.

The one at the window turned to face his companion.

"Sid, has they anything happened to change Lonesome Notch much? Air the hills jest as full o' partridge and rabbit as they was afore I—I went up to Richmond?"

The other nodded once more. "Jest the same, Friel. Ye'll be havin' a good huntin' spell, I reckon, if ye aint fergot how to shoot."

"Shoot?" Friel, youngest of the clan of Edwards, spoke bitterly now, the light of anticipation at his home-coming dying suddenly in his eyes. "Shoot? Ye can bet I aint fergot how to shoot, Sid Hatton. Jest let ary one o' yer—"

Sidna Hatton lifted a warning hand.

"Ye aint a-breakin' yer promise already, air ye, Friel?" Sidna's glance leveled itself to Friel's eyes, and they lowered, then shifted uneasily until they focused once

again on the blue-green slopes in the distance.

FOR a time the mountain youths sat silent, each with thoughts crowding in upon his mind—thoughts that centered always on the old feud between the clan of Hatton and the clan of Edwards. Strange indeed that these sturdy sons of ancient enemies should be traveling side by side! But stranger by far was the errand from which they were returning.

Strictly, it was only Sidna that was returning from an errand; Friel simply was coming home again after two years' exile. Yet he had had a part in the errand that had taken Sidna to the State capital; he had been an unwitting participant in it, while Sidna had gone of his own volition.

The errand? Well, it had to do with the great white penitentiary that sits on the lower slopes of Richmond not far from the brown waters of the James. It had to do, more particularly, with the death-house in the smooth-walled prison. The death-house—the single glaring light in the ceiling, the gaunt chair with its grisly trappings, the sputtering of electricity, the whole sorry business of murder expiated.

There were little incidents that these two youths had seen, the day before in that basement room in Richmond, that they never would forget, quite, though they should live out a century of life.

There was the look of old Caspar Edwards when he heard his son Friel cry out in recognition from the seats in the back of the death-house. There was the echo of Friel's blasphemy, hushed brusquely by a prison guard, when the youth saw his father, limp, sodden, carried away after the chair had played its part.

There was the gasp of pain, too, when Sidna Hatton saw his father seated in the place where the other clansman had just been. There was the trickle of blood that had come from Sidna's under-lip as he watched, fascinated by horror, the coldly precise manner in which the law takes its toll. There was the memory of Sidna's tears, later—tears of anger, of resentment, tears that weren't in the least cowardly, coming from a mountain stalwart that never had known sorrow or fear in all his life in the hills.

Now the sons were journeying back to their people: Sidna Hatton, a deputy sheriff; Friel Edwards, his hereditary foeman, an ex-convict sent home on parole in his custody. And before they had walked through the portals of the prison, the warden had exacted a pledge from each that they would abide in peace one toward the other until they had returned to their own Carroll County. After that—it was none of the warden's business, exactly, except that he took it upon himself to remind Friel that the State had given him parole from the remainder of his eight-year sentence only on condition of his continuing good behavior.

Presently the conductor's call aroused the mountaineers.

"Come on, Friel," said Sidna. "I reckon we'll be a-changin' trains yere at Pulaski." He touched his companion on the arm.

Friel stirred sullenly; the memories of the death-house were hard to shake off in an instant.

"Why can't we stay on this-un till it gits to Galax?" he asked petulantly.

" 'Cause it don't go to Galax. Ye ought to know that," said Sidna. "We have to take this-yere other railroad and get off at Galax, then foot it over to the Notch."

Friel arose slowly and followed the other out of the car. "I clean fergot about trains and things," he half apologized. "Ye can fergit a heap when ye're shet up fer two years." A pause. "All except—some things—like how to shoot," he finished malevolently.

Sidna ignored the muttered remark. He was not to be tricked into a quarrel with his charge. After they got back to the Notch, he might not let Friel say such things; and then he remembered he was an officer of the law and must put away feudism from his mind. But then he had been a deputy only a month, and he had been a clansman all his life!

JIM CANTWELL, the Sheriff, met the returning youths at the station at Galax that night and drove them over the ridge and into the Notch. It was raining in fits and spells, and occasional flashes of lightning lent a lurid glare to the thick woods on each side of the road.

Cantwell, wise in his kind, asked no questions of the youths; instead he chatted casually of the prospects for the coming fall wheat-crop and corn-shucking. It was not until he halted his rickety buggy at the cabin of Friel's brother Lute, well down the slope into Lonesome Notch, that he adverted to anything of a personal nature.

"Friel," he said, his tone now incisive

and hard as he leaned toward the Edwards youth just alighted from the buggy, "I want ye to know it was Sid Hatton, yere, that got ye out o' prison ahead o' yer time. Sid likely wouldn't of told ye. And it was my doin's that let ye see that electrocution up in Richmond yest'day, so's ye could tell yer folks back yere jest what happens when a man commits murder. Me and Jedge Pegram, we arranged it with the governor to have the warden take ye in to see it; maybe it was hard on ye, but so it ought of been. Sid stood it, and I reckon ye can. Sid didn't know he was a-goin' to see it, either. All he went fer was to fetch ye back, he thought."

The Sheriff gathered up his reins to resume the journey. "Now look yere, Friel: if this object lesson aint cured ye Edwardses—and ye Hattons, too, fer that matter—of gun-totin' and shootin' reckless-like, there's another way that's dead shore to cure ye all. And that's the way ye jest seen up yonder in the prison. Maybe Sid didn't need no lesson, seein' he warn't in the fight at the courthouse; but we had him go along with ye, so's it'd be even all around."

Then Friel spoke for the first time to anyone regarding the things he had seen in the death-house.

"Sheriff," he asked, standing dimly visible in the drizzling rain near his brother's door, "how come they can put my—can put a man in that-air chair alive and—everything—and right away they take him out dead? They's something—something infarnal, I tell ye! They don't give a man a chancet to die with his boots on!"

"They aint nothin' infarnal about it, Friel," the Sheriff said. "It's jest the law a-showin' its power—a-showin' ye how helpless ye air when ye get caught by the law. That's why—"

"But *whut* is it killed my pop? That's what I'm askin' ye!" Friel interrupted, all the pent-up bitterness and resentment from his experience of the day before bursting into protest at this thing that he couldn't understand. "Whut killed him, I say?"

The Sheriff paused a moment. He didn't know exactly, himself, how to describe it; there was something mysterious about it in his own mind. While he hesitated, a flash of lightning zigzagged across the sky above the ridge.

"Friel," said Sheriff Cantwell, "ye see that-air lightnin' yonder? Well, it's the same kind of electricity in lightnin' that they use in that chair up in Richmond. Yes, that's how they do it. Electric'ty lightnin'." The Sheriff was pleased with the inspiration that had come with the flash in the sky.

Friel turned to enter the door of the cabin. His head shook in puzzled manner, and the Sheriff and Sidna, from the buggy, barely heard his rejoinder:

"Lightnin' and the law—and Gawd sends the lightnin'. Gawd—Gawd must be—on the side o' the law!"

LONESOME NOTCH was alive with speculation when it found the clansmen returned. Was the old feud to break out again? Why had Friel Edwards come back before his time was up? And why had Sheriff Cantwell sent Sidna Hatton, of his five or six deputies, to bring him home?

Lonesome Notch's curiosity continued unsatisfied. Neither Sidna nor Friel chose to take the folk of the hills into his confidence; nor did Sheriff Jim Cantwell think it anybody's business why he had done as he had. And so far as the clan feud was concerned, a tacit truce seemed to be in effect.

Indeed, it should have been, for the leaders of the clans had been removed for all time by the fulfillment of the court's sentence that morning in the death-house. Caspar Edwards and Garry Hatton had been convicted of murder in the first degree a little more than two years ago for their parts in inciting an outbreak at the courthouse square in Hillsville, county seat of Carroll County, in which one Edwards and two Hatton men had been killed, and several on each side wounded.

Judge Hugh Pegram of Roanoke had come down and summoned a special grand jury to indict the leaders, then had ordered an immediate trial of both Edwards and Hatton men. District Attorney Clyne had prosecuted the cases vigorously, and in two months after the shooting, the elder Edwards and Hatton were on their way to the death-house. Friel Edwards and a cousin also had been convicted of second degree murder; Friel, because of his eighteen years at the time of the shooting, was given this parole on recommendation of Judge Pegram after Sidna Hatton had gained the ear of the court and, later, the ear of the governor of the State.

What Sidna's motives were in befriending Friel in this manner would have been hard

for him to explain. Perhaps there was an ulterior purpose, to get at an exact analysis of it, for Sidna had found that Friel was in a fair way to become a martyr in the eyes of a certain mountain miss of Lonesome Notch so long as he was kept in prison suffering for the principal sins of his father. And when the word reached the Notch that the last appeal to the supreme court and to the governor had failed and the two-year fight for clemency for Caspar Edwards had been for naught, this girl seemed to enshrine Friel the more in her memory because of the fate that was to be his father's.

Carol Edwards, though of the clan in blood, did not hold altogether with her kinsmen in their outlawry. Before the fanning of the embers of hatred between the men of the Edwards and the Hatton legions into open blaze and final explosion two years ago, Carol had looked with not a little favor upon Sidna Hatton—the one youth of her ancestral foemen that seemed to stand aloof from the passion and bloodlust that animated the others of both clans.

But when the cases had come up for trial before Judge Pegram, and Sidna, for some reason not plain to Carol, had not been prosecuted, it seemed rank injustice to the girl unversed in law and the ways of courts. The chieftains of both clans had been doomed to death; several of the lesser figures had been sent to serve terms in far-away Richmond, among them Friel, her own cousin; why had not Sidna even been arrested? It did no good in these two years that had passed that Sidna endeavored time and again to explain that he had not been concerned in the actual shooting, that he never had fired a shot in anger in his life, and that Friel—but Sidna always stopped short of saying anything to involve Friel's good name. He wouldn't hit behind a man's back, in love or in war.

A FEW days after Sidna's return from Richmond he started down the road from the Notch on his daily trip into Hillsville. The modest home where he and his mother lived and ran their little farm was on the eastern side of the Notch, with Hatton kinfolk scattered throughout the vicinity. The Edwards clan lived, for the most part, on the western side of the Notch, the dip in Sunset Mountain separating them from the Hattons by a span of two to three miles. Just over the ridge from the Edwards side of the Notch was the station at Galax. Hillsville lay down the valley east of the Notch, several miles from the foot of Sunset Mountain.

Almost the first person Sidna met this day as he strode down the Hillsville road entering the town was Carol Edwards. She stopped when she saw him approaching. A market-basket filled with store goods swung from one arm.

Sidna touched his hat-brim in an embarrassed manner. He wasn't sure of his reception at her hands, for it was the first time he had seen her since his trip to the capital.

The girl was the first to speak.

"'Lo, Sid! Whar ye been so long?" Then, before he could answer, she flung another question at him: "Sid, have ye seen Friel sence—sence ye come back?"

Sidna shook his head. "Why?" he asked. "Aint ye seen him?"

"Ye-es, once or twice," she said slowly, as if her mind was not precisely on the words she was uttering. "On'y I was a-wonderin' if maybe ye oughtn't to be a-keepin' a lookout fer him, Sid. He might git into trouble—somehow—and bein' ye brought him down from Richmond, ye sort o' owe it to him to keep him from a-goin' back."

She paused. Sidna began to absorb some of the girl's anxiety, though unconsciously.

"Whut d'ye mean, Carol?" he questioned sharply. "Friel aint a-breakin' his parole, is he?"

"I don't know whut his parole 'lows, but—" Again she hesitated; then, impulsively: "Oh, Sid, I don't want him to go to jail ag'in! He aint a-goin', neither! I wont let him! It'd kill him!"

Sidna interrupted the girl's growing tirade.

"Hold on yere, Carol; ye aint told me whut Friel's up to, anyway," he insisted. "S'posin' ye tell me whut ye're a-fearin' of."

Carol plucked Sidna by the arm and bade him walk with her while she continued on her journey up the Lonesome Notch road. A hundred yards or more they plodded before she uttered a word; but Sidna knew his Carol better than to disturb her with needless questioning.

"Sid," she said, suddenly grasping his arm in a firm hold, "ye got to help keep Friel from a-goin' back to jail. Sheriff Jim told me ye helped git him out, so I reckon ye can keep him out. Sid, Friel's a-figgerin' on some deviltry—he's a-drinkin'

and hangin' around with Uncle Bart too much fer his own good."

"Bart Edwards?" repeated Sidna. The injection of the name into the discussion created instant uneasiness in Sidna's mind. Bart, brother of Caspar, now was recognized head of the Edwards clan since his return from serving a year's sentence for manslaughter in connection with the courthouse shooting. "Bart Edwards back yere?" he repeated. "I thought he was a-goin' to move down to Mount Airy."

"So he was—and he says he's still intendin' to go, on'y I think there's some kind o' warrant out fer him acrost in Carolina. He's been a-hangin' around our house too much fer my peace o' mind, Sid. He aint a-plannin' nothin' fer nobody's good, and Friel's followin' him wharever he goes."

SIDNA was perplexed. All the rest of the way up the road, until they reached the fringe of the wooden slopes near the Notch separating her clan's domain from his, he discussed with her in disjointed sentences what he could do to help Friel. And always the girl insisted that Friel must not go back to prison, even if he were caught breaking the law.

As Sidna halted to bid Carol good-by, he made bold to ask her a question that had been in his mind ever since he had come back from Richmond. Now the girl's hand lay in his firm grasp, her frank, level eyes of blue-gray looking up at him from beneath a well-modeled forehead and regular brows.

"Afore ye go, Carol," he began fumblingly, "there's somethin' I—I'd sort o' like to know. I'm a-wonderin' jest how things air a-standin' atween ye and—and Friel or—or atween maybe ye and myself, that is."

The girl searched Sidna's face closely before she replied, and when she did so, she looked shyly down at the powerful hand that held her own.

"Sid," she said, all the fire of a few minutes before replaced in her voice now by a note of sympathetic understanding, "ye aint ever said nothin' to me partic'lar-like, and Friel—well, he 'lowed when he went to Richmond that he was a-comin' back to marry up with me if I'd wait fer him. He—" She stopped.

"He whut?" insisted Sidna.

"Why, maybe he's fergot whut he said two years afore," she went on, " 'cause he aint said nothin' like that sence he come back." Sidna winced at the sight of her moistening eyes.

"But ye're—ye're not beholden to him, air ye?" he asked at length. His hand still held hers, but now she gently withdrew it; he watched her expression keenly, saw the struggle she was having with her lips to keep them steady.

"No, I don't reckon I'm beholden to him, Sid," she said, "if that's whut ye're aimin' to l'arn." Her tone was low and regular by this time, as if the hurt in her heart were but a passing wound to her pride: at least, Sidna hoped it was only that. The girl went on: "But that don't matter now, if he's in trouble. After all, he's still my cousin, if he aint—my man."

"I'll shore do whut I can to help him," Sidna promised. "I'll be seein' him right soon, I reckon."

"But ye're a Hatton," Carol said with sudden misgivings.

"And I'm an officer of the law, jest the same's I'm a Hatton."

"Law!" cried the girl. "Law! That's whut took Friel's pop, and yores too! And ye're a-standin' up for—" The fire of feudal blood died down as quickly as it had burst into flame. "No, Sid, I didn't mean jest that," she broke off impetuously. "It was on'y 'cause ye air an officer of the law that ye can help Friel now. He'd listen to ye fer that reason, anyways."

So, in the end, Sidna reiterated his promise to intervene with Friel before it became too late. But after he had gone back toward Hillsville, he knew that he had fallen down miserably in another and greater errand that had to do with his heart and Carol's.

LESS than a week after the conversation with Carol, Sidna Hatton was riding along his side of the winding creek that flowed down the Notch into New River, that strange stream that seemed to run uphill until it emptied, far up in West Virginia, into the Kanawha, tributary of the Ohio. The creek had been the boundary line for generations between the domains of the Hattons and the Edwardses.

Today Sidna was riding Larry, his chestnut horse, upstream to serve some jury summonses at the upper end of the Notch. He had been too busy for the last several days with the affairs of the coming term of district court to give attention to Friel Edwards, but he meant to see the paroled

youth just so soon as his serving of jury papers was completed.

Disturbing reports had reached Sidna from other persons regarding Friel's conduct since he had talked with Carol. The young clansman was managing, chiefly through accident, it seemed to Sidna, to be keeping just within the pale of the law; his misbehavior had been more pranks than misdemeanors. But in it all Sidna could see the evil influence of Bart Edwards at work—Bart, who always had flaunted the law, yet only once had known the sting of the law's lash.

Sid stopped Larry a moment to let him slake his thirst in the crystal-clear water. Scarcely had the horse dropped his mouth to the stream when a shot rang out from up the slope on the Edwards side. An instant later a bullet clipped through the crown of Sidna's felt hat, tilting it off and into the water.

The young deputy sheriff sprang from Larry's back before the echoes of the shot had ceased reverberating across the Notch. He picked up his hat and regarded it thoughtfully; the danger of a second shot following the first apparently did not occur to him or, if it did, he scorned it. Instead he soliloquized:

"That'll be Bart Edwards hisself, I reckon," he said. "He allus did shoot tolerable high, pop used to say. Now, if that had of been old Caspar—Larry, ye'd a-been totin' some other pair o' legs 'stead o' mine the rest o' yer days." Then he bestirred himself.

"Wonder how fur Bart is from yere by now," he mused as he leaped astride Larry once more and urged the steed on up the stream. Presently he broke into a chuckle. "He never had the narve old Caspar had—he never come out in the open. Reckon maybe he's headin' fer North Car'liny agin'!"

A hundred yards farther upstream he headed his horse into a narrow path that ran alongside the creek on the Hatton side. He had heard approaching horse's hoofs coming down the opposite slope, and he preferred to take no chances of presenting an open target this time. Presently, as Sidna stood beside Larry behind a clump of laurel bushes, his eyes detected a moving object pressing through the underbrush on the other slope. A minute later, and it emerged into full view: It was Friel, seated bareback on a horse, and prodding his steed desperately.

"Friel!" Sidna called to the rider.

Sidna's voice reached the scurrying youth's ears above the splash of his horse's hoofs in the creek. The rider drew rein hastily, looking around to discover who had hailed him.

"Friel, whar ye goin'?" called Sidna. "Come over yere!"

Sidna stepped out and revealed himself, waving a hand toward the other. The Edwards youth dug his heels into his horse, wheeled him around almost on his haunches and dashed for the shore where Sidna stood.

"Thank Gawd ye're not dead, Sid!" he panted as he came up. "I thought ye was hit, when I seen ye drop off yer hawse."

Sidna surveyed the flushed face of Friel with uneasiness. The boy had been drinking.

"How'd ye know I was shot at?" asked Sid in casual manner.

" 'Cause I was with—why, I seen yer hat flop off when I heerd the shot, and ye—ye must of lept off yer hawse powerful quick, 'cause it looked like ye was shot," the Edwards boy explained.

"How fur was ye from yer Uncle Bart when he shot?" Sid demanded suddenly.

"Right clost to—I didn't say it was Uncle Bart!" he broke off, angry at the trap into which he had fallen so easily. "Ye can't prove it was him!"

Sidna smiled. "I don't have to prove it, Friel. Ye jest as much as admitted it. 'Sides, I know he allus shoots high. See?" He pointed to the hole in his hat.

Friel dismounted and approached Sid shamefacedly. "I tried to stop him, Sid, honest to Gawd! I tried to tell him ye wasn't in the shootin' down at the courthouse, and I told him he wouldn't dast shoot if he'd-a seen whut I did in the prison up yonder!"

FRIEL grew more loquacious now, the liquor loosening his tongue. "And I told him about the lightnin' that they put in that-air chair to kill folks that does murder. He laughed and said lightnin' couldn't hurt nobody while they was inside a house. Then I told him it was another kind o' lightnin'—electric'ty lightnin', Sheriff Cantwell said, and he laughed ag'in, and then ye come into sight whar he'd been a-layin' fer ye ever sence he heerd ye was a-goin' up the Notch to sarve papers."

Sidna interrupted. "Whut did he do after he shot?" he asked.

"Him and me squandered, him up the hill, and me, I hopped on my hawse and started to git away afore somebody found yer body and blamed it on me." Friel looked around and up the slope, fearfully, as if expecting to see Bart Edwards returning to finish his uncompleted errand of murder.

Sidna placed a friendly hand on Friel's shoulder. "Listen yere, Friel: I aint a-goin' to say nothin' about this down to Hillsville, and I don't want ye to, neither. On'y—on'y somethin's got to be done about yer Uncle Bart; he can't go on shootin' at folkses' hats and things. Next time he mightn't aim so high."

Friel and Sidna mounted their horses in silence, Friel turning toward the other side of the Notch while Sidna prepared to resume his trip up the valley. Friel waved his hand as they started.

"I'll shore not say nothin' about it, Sid," he said. "And I'm a-goin' to tell Uncle Bart some more about that-air electric'ty lightnin' up yonder!"

NOTWITHSTANDING his narrow brush with death, Sidna was relieved at heart at the revelation of Friel's apparent rebellion against the ways of his Uncle Bart. He had feared, from Carol's warnings, that Friel had begun to slip into lawless habits. Now—

"Ye see, Carol," he was telling her the next day after his experience at the creek, "I don't reckon Friel's a-gittin' out o' hand yit. I seen him yest'day and—well, he 'peared like he was aimin' to keep his parole, all right." But never a word to the girl of the shooting itself!

Carol was manifestly satisfied with Sid's assurances. Her only trouble left, she told him, was the continuing presence of Bart Edwards, for he had returned late the night of the shooting, and learned from Friel that his bullet had missed.

Sidna and Carol were walking up the same road they had traveled that other time, but this day they continued on into the Notch, strolling along the creek and tossing stones now and again at rabbits or squirrels that were startled from their woodland retreats. A passing fear came over Sid that perhaps Bart Edwards might try another shot at him; immediately he put it aside, for he knew the clansman would not risk hitting one of his own blood walking beside his enemy.

"Sid," said Carol, becoming serious after a romp in the wake of a rabbit, "couldn't ye maybe arrest Uncle Bart and send him down to Car'lina whar he's wanted? It'd keep Friel from mischief until he gits stiddied down to somethin'."

Sidna shook his head. "Not unless the sheriff at Mount Airy gits out the right kind o' papers fer him, I can't. This-yere law is a funny thing. A man can be arrested and locked up right aways, if he's caught in the State he done the crime in, but if he gits acrost into another State, they got to do a heap o' lawin' afore they can git him back home fer trial. It's jest a line ye can't see that makes all the diff'erence."

Carol nodded. "Law shore is easy on some folks and hard on others," she said. Sidna winced; for the life of him, he wasn't sure whether the girl was making another veiled allusion to the case of Friel and himself after the courthouse affair. He decided, on the whole, to ignore it.

"Yes, law is funny, but it—well, I reckon we-all can live safer if we got the law on our side," was his drawling comment.

Before Carol could reply, two shots sounded far up the Hatton side of the Notch—shots separated by an interval of barely three seconds. They seemed about three-quarters of a mile away, and near the summit of the Notch.

"Whut's that mean?" exclaimed Carol. Sid raised a quieting hand. He led the girl into the thickest part of the woods and underbrush and bade her stay there until he could investigate.

"I'll come back yere as soon's I find out whut's up," he promised. "I can remember this place by that-air blasted tree the lightnin' hit last month. And don't ye show yer face out, Carol, if anybody comes along but me!"

It was only a matter of a few minutes for Sidna, trained in woodcraft from the cradle, to slink through the woods up the slope toward the place where the shots had seemed to come from. His sense of direction proved almost uncanny, for presently he halted abruptly at the edge of a little clearing on the very top of Sunset Mountain and the Notch. Before his gaze lay a man, sprawled face down; beside the body knelt Friel Edwards, a revolver in his hand.

"Friel, I reckon I'll have to arrest ye," said Sidna. The lad turned instantly as the hand of the deputy sheriff clamped down on his shoulder. He made a nervous gesture with the revolver.

"Gi' me yer gun afore ye do any more mischief," said Sidna as quietly as before. And he reached down and took the weapon from the unresisting grasp of the youth, still kneeling.

"How did ye come to shoot this man?" continued Sidna. "Git up and talk to me, Friel." He gave a powerful tug at the youth's arm, almost raising him to his feet by the movement. Friel began to mutter incoherently; his shoulders shook as if with an ague, but he did not sob.

"Come on yere, Friel, and talk to me," insisted Sid. "I'm shore sorry ye done this —but maybe they's a way out of it—somehow."

The accused mountaineer swung around, vicious now in the sudden realization of his plight.

"I didn't do it, I tell ye!" he shouted. "I didn't kill no man! I jest found him a-lyin' yere afore ye come along!"

"How come ye had yer gun out?" asked Sid, examining the weapon for the first time. It was a thirty-eight-caliber five-shot revolver—a somewhat smaller gun than most of the mountain men carried usually. One cartridge was empty, the other four loaded.

"I didn't shoot him, I'm a-tellin' ye, Sid!" Friel cried again and again. "I shot oncet at—at the man that killed him, that's why I had my gun out."

Sidna studied the youth closely. "That's a mighty thin excuse, Friel. I reckon, after all, I'll have to arrest ye."

"I didn't do it, Sid! Ye aint a-goin' to send me up to that lightnin' chair in Richmond! Ye aint—" Suddenly he stopped, staring over Sidna's shoulder. Then—

"Carol! He aint a-goin' to arrest me fer somethin' I didn't do!" he shouted as the girl came forward into the clearing. Sidna whirled around and reproved her for following.

"I jest had to come, Sid," she said. "I didn't hear no more shots, so I knowed there warn't no danger. Whut—whut air ye a-doin' to Friel?" She glanced first at that youth, then at the inert body on the ground. A quick tremor of horror passed over her; then she turned again to Sid.

"How—who done it?" she asked. "And who is this-air man?"

Sidna answered the latter question first: "He's a man named Witcomb from over Betty Baker way. I seen him every month or so travelin' into Hillsville. Used to be a blockader, they say." Then his duties recalled him: "But I reckon I got to arrest Friel. . . . . I found him—"

"Friel!" The girl exclaimed angrily before he could frame his explanation. "Friel aint no murderer!" She ran to Friel's side and thrust one arm through his, looking at him searchingly, hoping for his denial and looking triumphant at Sidna when it was forthcoming.

"Why, Sid Hatton, Friel'd no more kill a man than ye would, and ye know it!" she declared. "Now, who done it, Friel, if ye know? Tell Sid afore Gawd as yer witness!"

The youth hung his head. "I don't know who done it," was all he would say.

Something about Friel's helplessness sent a wave of sympathy over Sidna: A momentary vision of the electric chair flashed before him—Friel sitting in it, Carol, broken-hearted, blaming him for letting Friel die in shame! No, there must be some mistake! Friel wouldn't commit murder after what he had seen in Richmond.

The girl's voice aroused him.

"Come on yere, Sidna; it's a-thunderin' up the valley. We got to do somethin' about this body. But ye aint a-goin' to arrest Friel, air ye, Sid?" This last almost pleadingly.

AN inspiration came to Sidna. Looking straight at Carol, and speaking evenly, he announced his decision:

"No, I'm not a-goin' to arrest Friel. I'm a-goin' down to Hillsville and tell Coroner Lawton that I shot this-air man fer resistin' an officer o' the law in the performin' of his duties. Come on, Carol—and ye, too, Friel—afore it starts a-rainin' too hard."

His two companions stood speechless with astonishment at the dénouement. Carol stepped forward a pace, her hand feeling at her breast as if to still her heart from overtumultuous beating. Before Sidna had gone a half dozen steps, she darted after him crying: "Sid! Sid! Ye can't give yerself up!"

Sid halted, turned to reach out and steady the impetuous girl who flung herself almost into his arms. One hand stroked her hair as she clung to his arm; Sid breathed hard, deep, with the intoxication of emotion. Carol clung tighter.

"Ye didn't do it, Sid! I was with ye when we heerd the shots!" she protested. Again and again she pleaded with him. But in the end Sidna stuck to his deci-

sion—told the girl the law did not punish its officers for killing men "if they has to," told Friel to go to his home and say nothing and to go to North Carolina the next day to work.

And so he walked on down into Hillsville, scornful of the lightning that broke and flashed across the Notch, heedless of the increasing torrent that had drenched him to the skin before he had come in sight of the county seat. A great satisfaction filled his heart: He would save Friel and, saving him, fend off a fate almost worse than death for Carol.

THE district attorney did not spare Sidna the next day because he was a deputy sheriff, and put some pointed questions at Sidna. Coroner Lawton and Sheriff Cantwell were the other occupants of the room.

"Sid, ye say ye shot this man Witcomb because he resisted ye?" repeated Cantwell. "Whut was he a-doin'? Ye might as well tell Mister Clyne all about it and save a passel o' trouble."

"Well," said Sid, "Witcomb used to be—they arrested him fer blockadin' several times, Mister Clyne. I seen him walkin' along suspicious sort o', and I—well, I wanted to search him, and he made like to draw a gun—and—that's all, I reckon."

The commonwealth's attorney waited a moment for dramatic effect, then:

"How does it happen that Witcomb was killed by a rifle-bullet and you had only your automatic when you surrendered yesterday?"

Sidna was silent. It was a detail he had overlooked in the sudden decision at the scene of the crime the day before. A rifle-bullet—then it hadn't been Friel, after all!

Clyne went on mercilessly: "And why, if he was trying to draw a gun on you, did he turn his back toward you? Just to let you shoot him through the back?"

Sidna looked appealingly at Cantwell. Why hadn't he prepared his case before he had come into Hillsville? Why—

"Sid Hatton, there's something you're hiding!" exclaimed the prosecuting attorney. "It's pretty clear that you didn't kill Witcomb, but if you're shielding the guilty man, you can be sent up for being accessory after the fact. You know that, don't you?"

Sid nodded. But all the storming and all the cajolery of Clyne and of Cantwell availed naught to persuade Sid into telling anything more. He saw it was useless to stand by his fiction of having slain Witcomb, but he was equally firm in his determination not to let Friel's name or Carol's enter the discussion.

An hour later Commonwealth's Attorney Clyne arose impatiently. He paced up and down the dingy little room, then turned to Sheriff Cantwell:

"Cantwell, arrest Sid Hatton as accessory after the fact. I'll draw up a warrant myself. Take him to jail!"

Late that afternoon Carol Edwards heard that Sid was in jail. It wasn't exactly as Sid had told her it would be; she didn't understand. And so she went over to see Friel—if he hadn't gone away—and get him to do something. Just what Friel could do she didn't stop to consider.

And on the way to Friel's cabin she met Lute Edwards, his brother. Lute was in a hurry, but he told her, in passing, that his Uncle Bart was lying in the cabin with a broken shoulder, "right tolerable smashed to bits." Lute asked her to attend him while he went into Hillsville to get a doctor. Friel, too, was gone, he said; he didn't know where—hadn't seen him since the day before. . . . .

It was just as dawn was breaking over the eastern ridge of Sunset Mountain next day that Bart Edwards opened his eyes for the first time since Carol had begun her vigil, reinforced by Lute at intervals after his return with the doctor. Bart stared blankly at the ceiling of the rude cabin for a long time before he shifted his gaze to the side. Carol was the first within his range of vision.

"Whar am I, gal?" he mumbled. A groan almost drowned out Carol's reply. The man was in torture.

"I—reckon I'm done fer," he whispered a little later. "Whar's Friel?"

Neither Carol nor Lute could tell him.

"Why air ye askin' for Friel?" asked Carol. "We can 'tend ye all right."

The man frowned. "Did he—git away?" Carol understood now. Here was the solution of the whole sorry business: If only Bart would talk! Hurriedly she explained to Lute her suspicions, and the latter, with a sagacity born of long dealing with the law, at length advised her to hasten to Hillsville and summon the district attorney or Sheriff Cantwell.

Two hours later Carol returned. With Clyne and Cantwell came also Sidna Hat-

ton, still handcuffed from his entry into jail. The commonwealth's attorney looked questioningly at the injured man on the forlorn bed beneath the only window in the room.

"Now, girl, be quick! Just on Sheriff Cantwell's hunch we all came up here to see what your story is. Now let's have it!"

Carol pointed to the prostrate man. "Bart Edwards can tell ye—whut happened to Witcomb yest'day on the other side o' the Notch. Now tell 'em, Uncle Bart!" And the girl leaned fiercely over her kinsman, fixing him with a gaze that seemed to hypnotize him, fairly, into doing her bidding.

"I—didn't know it was Witcomb I shot," he whispered, a hoarseness in his throat making the words almost unintelligible. "I was aimin' fer to kill a Hatton. Thought it was Sid—or his cousin Newt. . . . . Friel—tried to stop me when he seen me aimin'—fired his pistol in the air to scare off—Witcomb. I got riled—shot right aways 'thout thinkin'."

CAROL looked triumphantly at Clyne, then at Sidna. The latter shifted uneasily from one foot to the other. Clyne turned to him now.

"Why were you shielding this man?" he demanded. Sid was silent.

"He warn't a-shieldin' Uncle Bart," broke in Carol. "It was Friel."

Clyne's mystification grew. "A Hatton shielding an Edwards! What's—"

A cough from the bed interrupted. Bart Edwards was struggling to speak again.

"If Friel was yere," he whispered at length, in gasps of two and three words, "he'd tell ye how—he and Sid—promised they wouldn't—fight no more. He tried—tried to git me to promise—but I said—" Another fit of coughing, of racking groans. "I said no—no law officer is a-goin' to belong to—the Hatton gang. They aint a-goin' to have the law on their side if—"

A figure darted into the cabin and burst into the circle around the bed. Friel Edwards, clothes torn and muddy, confronted them all.

"I been a-listenin' outside the window," he blurted out, "and afore my Uncle Bart dies, I want to ask him if he—if he believes me now whut I told him about Gawd—Gawd and the law!"

A tense silence held the group. Friel went on, calmer now:

"D'ye believe whut I told ye—that Gawd sent the lightnin' that killed my pop fer shootin'—and that Gawd sends the lightnin' to punish—"

"What's all this talk about lightning?" broke in Clyne. "This isn't getting anywhere."

"Yes it is, too!" insisted Friel. A strange look was in his eyes as he faced Sidna. "Didn't Sheriff Cantwell tell ye and me it was lightnin' that killed men whut did murder?" Sidna nodded solemnly, conscious of Carol's trembling hand on his arm more than of the heated question from Friel.

"D'ye believe it, Uncle Bart?" the lad demanded again. A mighty effort from the injured man—the sigh of passing life—and the lips of the dying man framed the words: "Yes, I—believe—"

The long silence after Sheriff Cantwell pronounced Bart dead was broken, finally, by Friel. He was facing Carol and Sidna.

"I found Uncle Bart pinned down under a tree after I left ye, Carol, when Sid went down to Hillsville. He was a-tryin' to git away, I reckon. I drug him yere to Lute's cabin and—and then I hid in the woods fer fear somebody'd catch me."

Carol frowned on her kinsman.

"And ye let Sid go to jail fer whut Uncle Bart did! I'm not a-goin' to have no more truck with ye, Friel Edwards!"

But Friel seemed not at all disturbed by her ultimatum, for he reached out a hand to Sid and made an acknowledgment before them all.

"Sid, this yere ought to wind up the trouble atween our gangs," he said. "It's been a-goin' on a right smart while, and I reckon if—well, if ye and Carol—whut I'm aimin' to say, Sid, is I'm powerful glad Carol has took ye fer her man. I don't blame her. I'm dead fond o' ye myself, Sid, fer what ye done fer me."

The youth finished in a flush of embarrassment: It comes hard for the mountain man to reveal his feelings in public. Sid gave the outstretched hand a grip that told Friel more than anything he might have said.

And now, for the last time, the commonwealth's attorney asked a question of Friel:

"How did you say you found Bart?"

"Why, he was caught under a tree," Friel explained. "I seen the bolt o' lightnin' that blasted it jest ahead o' me in the woods." A pause. "Gawd—shore is on the side o' the law. Aint he, Sid?"

An engrossing little adventure in rascality, narrated by the talented author of "Winsome Winnie" and many other deservedly popular stories.

The Beautiful Ostrich

By Bertram Atkey

THE Honorable John Brass put down the letter from the income-tax expert whom the sharp-set attentions of the revenue representatives had driven him and his partner Colonel Clumber to employ, and gloomily poured himself another glass of liqueur brandy.

"This country is going to the garbage-hounds—if it hasn't already gone," he said. "This income-tax sharp says we can't get out of it with less, and hints that if it hadn't have been for him, it would have been a whole lot more. In fact, things have got into such a state in this country under this Government that even an expert can't get you out of having to pay your income tax. That's it, squire—we've got to pay up and look pleasant."

The Colonel hunched his shoulders, like a walrus imitating a Frenchman.

"I'll do my half of the paying—because I've got to," he growled. "But I'm damned if I try to look pleasant!"

"That's all right. I'll look pleasant for both of us," said John with a blood-freezing glance at the letter.

The Colonel eyed his partner with a species of morose interest.

"Well, all I can say is that if that's what you call looking pleasant, you are no Apollinaris—no Greek god, no, by Gad!" he stated with a rather surly chuckle. "You look about as pleasant as a pawnbroker at a bazaar, ha-ha!"

But the Honorable John had no intention of allowing his partner to work off his grouch upon him.

"That's all right, squire," he said. "It's what I expected. No man who takes a hand in this income-tax game can bank on drawing anything better than a busted flush—if that. Better men than us have had the hides scraped off 'em by these revenue operators once they got their skinning-knives geared up for business!"

He stared dourly at the fatal letter.

"I'm thinking whether we can't get this good money back some way or other."

HE strolled across to the window, staring out at the drizzle-veiled park in which the mansion was set. Viewed in sunlight the place would have been charming, but studied from a comfortable room, after lunch, it was not very inviting.

"The owner of this shooting was no bad judge when he drew down our good money and beat it to winter in California," grumbled the Honorable John. "We've been here two days, and it's rained all the time. A man wants to be some kind of frog or water-lizard to enjoy shooting in this climate. And—who might this be!"

"Hey?"

"Somebody coming up the drive. Good-ish car. Visitors. Looks like a lady inside. Better see her, I suppose. Can't very well turn down a dame making a neighborly call, hey? On the young side, too—if my eyes don't tell me a lie."

"Hey, what's that? Young lady calling! Let *me* have a look. May be some friend of mine." The Colonel came to the window, as a very good-looking car ran to a standstill before the doorway.

"Good car—late model, six-cylinder Slyder four-seater," murmured John.

The eyes of the partners were on the door of the car. A dainty foot incased in patent-leather shoes, followed by an even daintier ankle, made itself apparent. The partners nodded approval.

"Very neat—very pretty," said John absently. "Now, that's my idea of an afternoon caller."

"Some queen, certainly," admitted the Colonel, smoothing his hand over his harsh, wiry and perfectly unsmoothable hair.

Duly announced by Parcher, the crimson-visaged butler rented with the establishment, she proved to be a very tall, shapely brunette, extremely well got up, still young (though much too old for boarding-school), very self-possessed, slightly worldly. Upon her card were engraved the words *"Madame Undine de Nil"*—her name, evidently, though the Honorable John blinked slightly at it.

"French name—meaning literally 'Undone by nothing'—whatever that means, if anything. Confident sort of name—'Defeated by nobody,' in English, eh? Well, who wants to defeat her. This is an afternoon call, not a war."

Certainly Madame de Nil did not belie John's extraordinarily free rendering of her name. She was confident—and charming, also English, in spite of her name.

"Oh no, this is not a neighborly afternoon call," she exclaimed smilingly, after the two old rascals had made her comfortable. "It would be so nice to be neighbors—but I have come all the way from Southampton to see you."

She caused her wonderful eyes to shine upon them, threw back her furs and favored them with a glimpse of a beautifully molded neck and throat. "It is a business call—though it seems almost wrong to introduce business after so charming a reception as you have given me." (Parcher was even then placing wine, fruit, sweets, liqueurs, cakes, everything that the Honorable John's far-flung experience and the resources of the establishment could produce to please and fortify a beautiful lady after a long motor run on a wet day.)

"Well, why bother to introduce it, Madame Undine?" said the Colonel, smiling like an old bear who had just found a nest of wild honey.

"Alas, I must," declared Madame anxiously, as she accepted a glass of green Chartreuse from John—to sustain her, he advised, until tea was ready. "For, you see, I have come to ask a very great favor."

The partners smiled noncommittally.

"Well, then, suppose we get the business part over," suggested the Honorable John in fatherly fashion. "It oughtn't to take us very long to make up our minds to do *you* a favor, my dear child."

The dear child's eyes danced.

"I hoped you would talk like that," she said. "I will explain."

The Honorable John stayed her just long enough to give butler Parcher instructions to Sing that Madame's chauffeur was to be given tea, and treated thoroughly well—even as though he were Sing's own favorite son. Then they settled down to listen to the striking Undine's tale.

IT was quite short, and the request she had come to make was extremely simple. Her husband desired to sublease Harrowall House and the shooting from the partners. Indeed, it was only because of a mistake in the addressing of an envelope that Monsieur de Nil had not taken the shooting before the partners had decided upon it and booked it. She explained that both she and her husband loved that part of the country and had looked forward all the year to coming there. It was not entirely for the shooting that they wished

to come. As proof of that, Madame offered to exchange the shooting they had actually taken—a much better one than the Harrowall shooting—and pay a fair sum in addition for the exchange.

The lady explained all this at some length and with considerable eloquence, even fervor. She excused the fervor by stating that her husband was ill, and being a highly strung man, would fret himself worse if he were disappointed.

"It is, I know, very much—too much—to ask," she declared, permitting a slight tremor to afflict her voice. "And I should not dream of asking you to give up your shooting if I were not able to offer you the Highdown—a very much better shooting—in exchange. You agree that the Highdown shoot is better than this, don't you? And the district is not so remote and lonely as this!"

The partners—who knew the Highdown shoot—agreed readily that it was like exchanging a bushel of decomposed Russian rubles for one good United States dollar or thereabouts, and this fact, coupled with the beautiful Undine's undeniable charm, seemed to settle the matter as far as the gallant Colonel was concerned—or so his expression seemed to say.

But oddly enough, there was apparent upon the Honorable John's good-humored visage no indication of any frantic haste to comply with the lovely lady's request. He was, like his partner, a very susceptible man where fair ladies were concerned—but he was also prone to blink at any offer of something for nothing. The lady was offering a very fine, even famous, shoot in exchange for a moderately good one. Why?

In his very varied experience few strangers had ever traveled a considerable distance on a wet day to offer him a handsome present. It was not a habit of strangers—or of friends. He didn't do that sort of thing himself—and he didn't expect other people to do it for him. No, pretty, worldly women like Undine de Nil did not need to give something for nothing—they were more accustomed to giving nothing for something, and John was well aware of the fact. He was not comfortable in his mind about this offer—he smelled (as he expressed himself later to his partner) a large and odoriferous rodent lurking somewhere; he felt that there was a string tied to this generous offer of the lovely Undine, that an Ethiopian was carefully concealing within the wood-pile.

So he broke it to her gently—taking a half-hour at least to do so—that he and his partner would think the matter over and write to her within the course of the next two days.

He did it so kindly that the gracious Undine apparently took it for granted that, when they had inspected the Highdown shooting, for which purpose she presumed they stipulated the two days' grace, her point was practically gained. So, diffusing much sweetness and speeding up her output of charm to really remarkable proportions, she thanked them, and leaving her address, departed.

"WELL, you didn't exactly hurl yourself at her with an acceptance, did you? We deserve to lose the Highdown shoot," grumbled the Colonel.

"We shall never have it, squire," said John.

"What d'you mean? D'you mean you're going to refuse the offer?"

"Unless I can find out within a couple of days why they want to live here for the next month or so, I do."

"Why, she told you, didn't she? Her husband's got a fancy for this place—and he aint well and he's worrying. That's plain enough, isn't it?" growled the Colonel.

But the Honorable John smiled dreamily.

"Did you ever know a pretty, dashing young lady like Undine have a husband who didn't worry—and mostly felt not quite well? I guess I'd worry if she was my wife, yes sir. . . . . Besides, I've got a hunch that there's something smooth in this business. I'm going to worry it, like the dog did the cat in the house that little Jack Horner built."

"Oh, as you wish—as long as you don't worry me with it," said the Colonel who had learned to respect those queer sudden inspirations which his partner commonly referred to as hunches.

"Meantime," he continued, pressing the bell, "Parcher can clear all this ladies' stuff away—fancy eating sugar cakes at this hour of the day! Beautiful ostriches; that's what women are—beautiful ostriches. We'll have a couple to clear our heads. I've got some pretty solid thinking before me, thanks to that—beautiful ostrich. Besides, we haven't discussed dinner with Sing yet. . . . . Parcher, send Sing up, and we'll have an understanding about the

partridges *à la Pompadour* for dinner tonight. I can see this is going to be a busy afternoon for me, squire," he concluded; and taking a cigar, he poured himself a brimmer, and settled back in his armchair to work.

THE movements and methods of the Honorable John Brass, when under the influence of a hunch, were usually mysterious, apparently meaningless and extremely hard to follow. Indeed, during the rainy week which succeeded the visit of Madame de Nil, his partner the Colonel made no effort at all to follow the devious workings of the good-humored pirate's mind. They inspected the Highdown shoot, near Winchester, and saw that it was good, but there Colonel Clumber's interest ceased, and it was entirely without curiosity that he saw John send Sing the Chink, mounted upon a big motorcycle, to Southampton, and other places, and it was with no emotion except deep sullenness that he acquiesced in the sending of a letter to the fair Undine containing a polite but unmistakable refusal to sublet Harrowall House and its shooting.

Rather to the Colonel's surprise, the De Nils made no further attempt to persuade them to agree to the exchange. Neither the "beautiful ostrich" nor her husband answered the Honorable John's letter.

"Huh, they soon gave up," he said, over the breakfast-table a few days later.

Before replying, the Honorable John, his eyes solemnly fixed on his partner, carefully concluded the mastication of a generous mouthful of sole *à la Salisbury*—a fascinating compound involving the use of lobster-shells, which same are filled with lobster and sole forcemeat and a rich *velouté* sauce, with a folded fillet of sole on each, the whole dressed on a border of rice and generously garnished with little mushrooms.

"That's all right, squire," he said. "They've given up nothing, believe me."

"No—it's us that have given up something—one of the best mixed shoots in the south," agreed the Colonel sardonically.

"Well, well, maybe we have. Maybe the old man has made a mistake this time," said John with an insincere humility, "—and maybe he hasn't."

The Colonel missed the insincerity, and placated a little by the humility, let his partner down lightly—for him.

"Oh, well—every man has got a right to make a damn fool of himself occasionally," he conceded. "I've come near doing it myself in my time—many years ago."

John chuckled, ignoring all the obvious repartees.

"You seem very well satisfied about it!" observed his partner rather stiffly.

"Squire," returned the Honorable John, "I am. . . . . Fill me that cup, Sing, my lad. Your sole *Salisbury* was fair to middling. Just let me have a look—only a glance, son—at that game-pie, will you?"

IT was not till some hours later when the partners were returning from a casual stroll with their guns, that the Honorable John asked his partner if he had heard the airplane buzzing about in the night.

"Airplane?" snorted the Colonel. "I heard no airplane—and I'm a light sleeper, too."

"There was one," said John.

The Colonel laughed.

"If there was, I should have heard it," he said. "What does it matter? What's an airplane, anyway?"

John beckoned a farmhand who, probably having been awakened by the sound of their voices, appeared to be doing something to a gate close by.

"Did *you* hear an airplane in the night, old man?" he asked.

The rustic had—and said so.

"Sounded to me as how he pitched somewhere handy. My missus heard um too, and tould me to get up and go and see if I could see um. But, 'No fear,' I says to her, 'I got summat better to do than to go sloppin' and dodgerin' about the fields huntin' for flyin' machines this time o' night,' I says. But there sartainly was one of um flyin' about—pitched on the ground somewhere nigh-abouts, seemingly."

The man was right.

A little farther on they met another laborer, actively employed in looking at a rabbit-hole, who informed them that an airplane had "pitched" in the long meadow down by the railway arch.

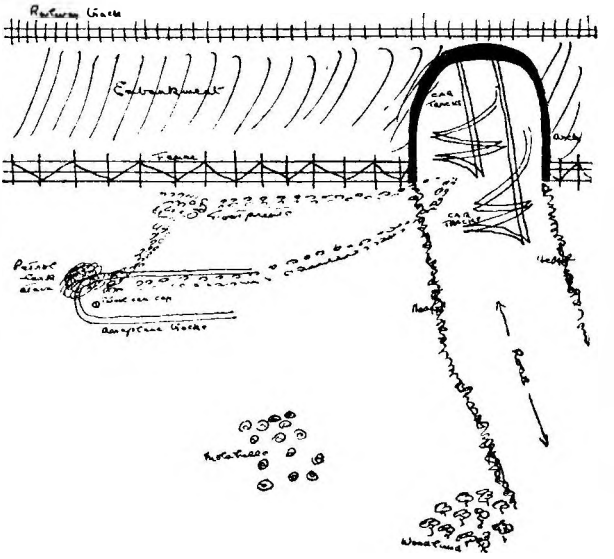
"We've got to pass the arch on our way back," said John. "We'll have a look at his tracks."

THIS they did. They found the tracks easily enough in the softish surface of a long, flat pasture bounded by the railway which cut through the estate.

"Hum! He chose the best landing-place on the estate," said John. "Had no trouble at all."

The Honorable John was studying the track of the wheels—a long track where the airman had landed, a short bend, and the track where he had taken off again—like a narrow staple or *U*.

Close by was the railway arch where the line crossed a farm road. John moved about studying the tracks of the airplane, certain footprints, and a petrol-soaked patch of turf. Following his studies, he moved farther and farther away from the impatient Colonel until he came to a stop under the arch, where he paused, staring at the ground thoughtfully.



"Yes, it's an ordinary every-day farm road—covered with ordinary every-day mud," said the Colonel. "Come on along to lunch."

"Certainly—certainly," agreed the Honorable John, but made no move.

"What are you staring at? It's only mud—ordinary mud."

John looked at his partner, his greenish-gray eyes blank with thought.

"What d'you make of those tracks—and footprints, squire?" he asked, pointing to certain motor-tire tracks under the arch.

"Nothing," said the Colonel promptly. "Nothing—before lunch. After lunch I could write you a novel about 'em—perhaps," he added jocularly. "For the Lord's sake, man, cut out this *Sherlock* stuff on an empty stomach and come to your victuals."

"All right—you go on. I'll catch you up."

HE kept his word. The Colonel only beat him to the lunch-table by a second—for the Honorable John Brass was a man to whom greyhounds could give nothing away in a straight sprint to lunch. He put up a thoroughly good battle with what Sing had devised for the midday repast, but he was absent-minded throughout, and disappeared shortly afterward.

He turned up an hour later, with the greenish glint in his eyes rather intensified, and while the Colonel dozed, he spent the rest of the afternoon in drawing and studying the following rough map—together with the brass cap of a petrol can.

Next John conned a railway map, nodded with an increasing satisfaction on his face, studied the mail-boat announcements in that day's *Times*, chuckled, rose and put everything away, except the petrol-can cap.

He commanded refreshment to be set before him—old liqueur variety—and woke his partner.

"Rested after your lunch, squire?" he asked with gentle irony. "I mean, are you rested enough to give your brains a little exercise?"

The Colonel stared.

"I guess my brains can grapple with any problem you can set 'em, old man," he avowed. "What is it?"

John passed him the petrol-can cap.

"Well, what d'you make of that?" he inquired.

The Colonel glanced at him suspiciously.

"Where did you get it?"

"Picked it up in the meadow by the railway arch," said the Honorable John airily. "Does it convey anything to you?"

The Colonel pondered.

"Well, it's been dropped by somebody; that's clear," he said slowly, "—probably by that airman who landed last night. That's it. The chap ran short of petrol and landed to put in a can or two. In the bad light he dropped this. That's it."

"That all?" asked John blandly. "Putting two and two together and taking one thing with another is that all it tells you?"

"What the devil else is there for it to tell me?" snapped the Colonel with a certain irritation. "It's just an ordinary brass cap, isn't it—like forty-five hundred million more. It isn't a gramaphone. It can't tell you or anybody more than one thing, can it? You picked it up, didn't you? Well, the only real information anybody can get out of that is that somebody dropped it. What does it tell *you?*"

The Honorable John smiled.

"Nothing much, true," he replied dryly. "All it tells me is that tomorrow night at about one o'clock certain folk at Southampton are going to find themselves badly short in their accounts—thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, of pounds short."

He stared at the dirty brass cap as though it were a crystal ball and he a crystal-sharp.

"It doesn't tell me much," he continued ironically. "But what it does tell me is that I'm going to do as I said about that income tax. I'm going to get it back from the Government, squire—and a double handful for luck."

THE Colonel gazed at his partner with a reluctant admiration in his eyes.

"Yes, you can admire me," said the Honorable John equably. "I've earned it—at least, my natural genius has. I'll admit freely that I've got a wonderful talent for building up on trifles and noticing things. As I've told you before! It's where I'm different from the ordinary damfool, squire. Take you, for instance: you saw everything that I saw down by the railway arch yesterday—but it told you nothing. You stared at it, and your mind didn't move half an inch—your brains were kind of sluggish—heavy, like cold rice pudding. But *mine—my* brains were boiling up like—like—"

"Hot glue," suggested the Colonel.

"Well, it's a poor way of putting it," said the Honorable John, "a very poor way; but it'll do. I saw so much down there, owing to this great gift of mine for noticing details that don't draw a single spark out of any average brains, that I had to jot it down on paper to remember it."

He produced his rough plan. "Take a look at that," he said.

The Colonel did so—stared at it for a moment, turning it about. Then he returned it.

"Looks like a picture of the Crystal Palace going to be struck by lightning," he commented. "Does it mean anything?"

John settled down in his chair.

"It gives among a lot of other things the reason why Undine wanted to exchange shootings," he said. "Now, listen to me and I'll explain: There's a bit of guesswork about it—but it's a good idea to guess while the guessing's good. Pass the brandy; get your brains revolving; and listen to the old man!"

ANY person sufficiently foolish to leave a comfortable bed at about eleven o'clock of the following evening and take a little prowl through the misty, dimly moonlit night to the meadow and railway arch on the Harrowall estate might very possibly have observed that he was not the only prowler in that remote neighborhood.

As the Honorable John had very truly remarked, there had been quite a lot of guessing in the fabric which he had built up on the details he had observed on the previous day, but—the guessing had been good. . . . .

At eleven o'clock the spot was apparently as deserted as any one of many similar spots in the countryside. Save for a barn-owl fanning himself about on silent wings, a few rabbits feeding, and a fox watching the rabbits from a clump of bushes, the place was deserted.

But at five minutes past eleven a little group of shadows made its appearance at the edge of the woodland on the side of the meadow farthest from the railway line. The four figures comprising this group moved very silently, and in the curious shifting light might have been no more than dense wisps of mist. But the fox watching the rabbits knew better. One swift glance over his shoulder as he left, assured him that the newcomers were one burly man of yellowish complexion (Sing the Chink), one burlier man (this was Bloom, the Colonel's valet) and two burliest men, namely the Honorable John and his partner.

They halted in the right angle formed where the woodland joined the hedge of the farm road, and John took a long and careful scrutiny of the meadow. It lay still and empty under the mist.

"Nobody here yet," said he, glancing at the illuminated dial of his wrist-watch. "But we'd better get busy."

He turned to his partner.

"You and Bloom get down to the railway arch, old man. Keep well in the shadows. I expect a motor to come up there before long. You know what to do. Disable it temporarily—to take out the distributor-brush will do—then creep back up to us under the hedge. All clear? Good."

Two of the shadows moved swiftly down the farm road in the direction of the arch. They were lost to sight in the mist almost immediately.

The Honorable John scanned the meadow again.

"I think that patch of molehills out there will make good enough cover for us in this mist and this light, Sing. Come on. Curl up small—compress yourself a bit, in fact—when you get there, and then just lie quiet, wait for orders, and pray to Confuschia that an airplane doesn't land on you. Got your wire-cutters and things? Come on, then. And don't forget that one or two of these folk have got to be caught at all costs! And two or more must escape!"

They moved out to the meadow silently, toward a spot where a number of big molehills showed dimly. Here, among these, they curled up.

Silence settled down again. Five—ten—fifteen minutes passed. Then suddenly John, hunched up among the molehills, stirred slightly.

"Listen, Sing! Hear anything, hey?"

A very faint, low, remote humming had made itself apparent.

"Here he comes, Sing—quiet now. Don't crane up like that—you can't see him. Lie still and double up. . . . . Ha! Here are his pals!"

Sliding very silently, with its electric lamps dimmed, a motorcar came stealing along the lonely farm road. It stopped under the arch, and its lights went out.

The Honorable John, straining his eyes, fancied he saw two figures enter the meadow by the arch and go gliding soundlessly along by the fence at the foot of the embankment.

The deep hum of the invisible airplane was very plain now. It seemed to be heading upon a course which would take it straight overhead.

The watchers waited silently.

Two ghostly rays appeared in the meadow somewhere near the old tracks of the airplane—a green and a red. These came from two powerful masked electric torches and were pointed straight up to the sky by the people who had come in the car.

Then abruptly the engine note of the machine overhead died out, yielding to the dry whistle of the air through the wires—and the Honorable John stiffened as a huge shape, like some monstrous and formidable flying-beast of the night, loomed into view gliding down to the meadow. Beautifully driven, it took the ground almost without a jar, taxied along a little and came to rest some distance from the watchers. It looked huge in the curious shifting light.

LOW voices sounded for an instant through the mist, then died out toward the embankment. The Chinaman, crouching low, and his owner, crouching as low as his figure permitted him, crept forward toward the machine, peering through the mist, listening tensely at every step.

"All right—they're all at the embankment—get busy—quick, quick, you heathen!" whispered John as they stole under the wide wings of the machine.

Followed a series of very soft sounds—as it might be the noise of one who slowly, with infinite caution, cuts copper petrol-pipes and high-tension cables with a pair of wire-cutters.

Presently, within a space of minutes, the two figures stole back to the mole-heaps, and from thence to the angle of the hedge and the woodland.

The Colonel and Bloom were already there.

"All right," murmured the ex-peer.

"Good, good! Now wait."

The Honorable John peered at his watch.

"The mail is due through at eleven-fifty-two," he said. "She probably slows here for the section that's being repaired a quarter-mile on round the bend. She's due in a minute—and she's on time, too! Hark!"

The distant roar of an express came to them through the night as they listened, increasing swiftly. A dull glare swung into view, sweeping along the track—the mist-dimmed light of the many windows.

Even as the Honorable John had prophesied, the express slowed as she ran parallel with the meadow. But in less than two minutes she was past, and the noise of her was dying out southward.

The watchers craned forward like bloodhounds, but the Honorable John restrained them—mainly with whispered insults.

"Give 'em time—time!" was the burden of his low-voiced exhortations.

The minutes stole past—five—ten, then a little thud sounded from the direction of the arch—a soft padding of running footsteps—more thuds from the airplane—and a muttering of voices.

"Wait—I say—wait," hissed John.

Then, quite suddenly, a bitter imprecation shot through the mist.

"She'll never start—something's wrong—leaking badly—put the stuff all in the car—quick!" came a voice with a French accent.

More footsteps thudded softly, dying out toward the car under the arch. Almost immediately the rushing sound of a self-starter surged through the mist. But it was not followed by any engine sound.

"Now, my sons," said the Honorable John, and galloped furiously down toward the arch, followed by his band. "Mind, we must get one of 'em, more if we can."

They came upon four startled people by the motor like a quartet of thunderbolts.

"Here they are, my lads," shouted John, and hurled himself at the nearest. It proved to be none other than the fair Undine, dressed in breeches and riding-coat. Without an instant's hesitation she clawed the Honorable John down the plump cheeks like a wildcat. Startled, John loosened his grip for a second—and Undine squirmed eelishly away from him and vanished in the mist.

"The—long-clawed ostrich!" he ejaculated, turning to the others.

They had had better luck.

Bloom had lost his man, and had narrowly escaped a dislocated Adam's apple; but Sing and the Colonel had rushed their prisoners well away and out of sight of the car and were sitting comfortably astride of them.

"Got 'em? Good work! Tie their wrists and run 'em up to the house," commanded the Honorable John. "You and Bloom, Sing."

And this they did.

Even as the prisoners disappeared with their escort, the Honorable John was peering into the back of the car, what time the Colonel replaced the distributor brush, by the removal of which he had temporarily crippled the engine.

"Well, here they are, old man," he said softly. "It was a good big grab. . . . . Six boxes. Gold—their confederate in that train must have been as strong as a horse and as quick as a cat to have shot those boxes out in the time the train took to run past the meadow. Nip in! Good!"

The Honorable John started the engine and slung the car round with a jerk. He switched on his lamps, and they started—in the alleged pursuit of the two missing people.

But they did not find them.

IT was considerably more than an hour later when the partners returned to Harrowall House. And oddly enough, they came not in the Slyder car which they had captured, but in their own touring-car, with Sing at the wheel.

Even as nobody had seen or heard Sing go out to meet them, so nobody saw or heard them return, for with the exception of butler Parcher (very sleepy) and Mr. Bloom, guarding the prisoners, the rest of the servants were deeply asleep (thanks, no doubt, to the effects of what Sing, who had attended to that matter on the previous evening, naïvely called "dopee—make sleepee").

Nor did any save the partners and Sing ever know that with the trio there came into the house four heavy boxes of bullion—good gold, which was safely bestowed away before they had been in the house ten minutes.

Then, and not till then, did the Honorable John (being, he claimed, a law-abiding man) send for the police—who came from the nearest town, with great speed, for already the telephone had been busy.

A mail-train, carrying a very large consignment of gold for America, for shipping aboard the *Adriania*, had arrived at Southampton precisely six boxes of bullion short. These boxes, together with one of its guardians, had mysteriously disappeared en route from London.

He was a very quick, very shrewd and experienced man, the Inspector in charge of the bevy of police, and he complimented the Honorable John three times on his smartness in working out the planned robbery from such slender clues. He might have complimented him some more, but time was limited. He interviewed the prisoners, two capable-looking but hard-faced

gentlemen of middle age who stated they could not speak a word of any language but French, and who, in that tongue, volubly swore that they knew nothing of any planned robbery, but were simply employed as chauffeur and mechanic by M. de Nil—an enthusiastic amateur aviator—and his wife, a keen motorist.

The Inspector forwarded them to Salisbury for safe custody while he set off to trail the De Nils.

He did not find them. But he found their car, half in, half out of the river, a mile or so from Harrowall House, and from its position he easily and fluently reconstructed what had happened.

"See?" he said to the Honorable John and Colonel Clumber. "The two De Nils made off from under the railway arch in their car, while you were tackling the other two—"

"Yes, that's right," nodded John.

"With the boxes of gold behind. They probably traveled very fast, overran the road at this bend and skidded into the river. They grabbed all the gold they could carry—or perhaps buried all they had time to—and disappeared, leaving what they couldn't take."

He was rummaging in the tilted back of the car.

"Yes," he said, "I'm right. There are two boxes here left in the car. . . . . That's what happened."

"You make it as plain as print, Inspector," said the Honorable John.

"Well, that's my job," explained the Inspector. "Now we've got to catch these De Nils. When we get them, we get the rest of the gold."

"Yes, yes," said John, wagging his head, "surely so—surely so."

BUT neither the Inspector nor anyone else ever got the beautiful ostrich or her husband. And it follows that the gold was never discovered—at least not until some time later, when the shooting tenancy expired and the Brass-Clumber combine discovered it where they had hidden it, and carted it back to London, there to be judiciously disposed of.

But it was only with great difficulty that the Colonel could bring himself to believe that it was by anything but sheer luck that his partner had got wise to the De Nils' intended exploit.

And it was wholly in vain that the Honorable John, adopting the methods of *Sherlock Holmes* (of whom he was a great admirer) explained in detail how he had wormed it out—thus:

"The airplane tracks, the petrol stain, the petrol cap and the double track and double marks where the car had reversed twice told me that the car and airplane had been there at the same time and that the car had fetched petrol for the 'plane. I found out that De Nil had knocked 'em up at Smith's garage in the village at midnight and bought twenty gallons. Smith described them as a good-looking woman and a man with a pointed red beard. Sing had seen De Nils at Southampton when I sent him there for that purpose, and recognized the description—and I recognized her. The footprints along the embankment fence told me that they were interested in some way in the railway line. I knew already they wanted the run of the place and were willing to give Highdown for it. I inspected Highdown and found it was bounded by the same line—but was not so lonely as this place. Also, the train does not slow down past Highdown. It was while I was wondering what they were driving at that I saw a paragraph in the paper saying that a big installment of gold off the American debt was being shipped by the *Adriania*—and *that* did the trick. I looked up a few timetables and things, and I wormed it out that their idea was to get the loot well away by airplane, probably across the Channel, by dawn, having the car in support—you may say, in case of accident. The visit to the meadow the first night was a sort of rehearsal—to see if the airplane could maneuver well enough in the meadow. That," concluded the Honorable John impressively, "was where they made their little error. They thought that the tracks would not be noticed—or if they were, that they would tell nothing. They weren't far wrong, either—if they had had to deal with ordinary people. But they had to deal with a man with a gift—me, in fact. Why, squire, I don't mind saying that I read those tracks like an open book of poetry. The De Nils reckoned the tracks were details—but they didn't know that I eat details alive. No, squire—you can take it from me that it was a bit of good work—by me, the old man. And don't forget that whenever you come across a detail, be sure to draw my attention to it—in case it's valuable. Pass the brandy."

Boss Pro Tem

Mr. Addison has a special knack of seizing upon the dramatic episodes of business life and making thrilling stories of them. As a result, this, like his "I. S. O. W." in our May issue, is of unusual interest.

By Thomas Addison

MATTERS were in something of a mess at the Richardson Shirt Factory in the town of Cranston along in December of 1921. Possibly the briefest way to picture this mess is to quote a letter old Abel Richardson, in a moment of supreme disgust and despair, wrote to the editor of a big city paper. The editor printed it as typical of prevailing conditions in industrial circles. Said Abel Richardson:

> I have seventy thousand dollars invested in my factory. Theoretically I am the "Backbone of the Nation," that essential, respectable, middle-class person about whom you have heard many pleasant speeches during the late political campaign. In theory I am all right. Actually, I am the football of the politician, the capitalist, the labor union. I do not fit in anywhere. There is a lot of me, but I am not organized. The capitalist calls me small fry. The laborer looks upon me as a capitalist. The politician doesn't consider me at all; I am not big enough to bother about. Yet if things do not change soon, I shall be stone broke. I cannot sell my product, but that cuts no figure with my help; they wont listen to a reduction in the payroll.
>
> To cap all, I am up against a "buyers' strike." I don't mean the public, though it started there. I mean the retailers and the middlemen. One cancels orders to the other, and the other to me. I am the ultimate goat, fed full to bursting with cancellations.
>
> So here I am, that "Backbone of the Nation," that middle-class man upon whom the "future of the nation depends." But if matters don't mend with me, I shall be wiped out. What, then, will this great and glorious nation do? Can you say? I can't.

HAVING got this load off his chest on a Saturday, old Abel Richardson proceeded, the following Monday, to take on another; it was influenza, and he was ordered to keep his bed for a week. This reduced the executive staff at the factory to Hiram Pratt, bookkeeper, and Nora Regan, stenographer. To be sure, there was young Perry Richardson, Abel's nephew recently released from college, but he was "out on the road" and, for all anyone could see, kicking up mighty little dust

in the way of getting orders. Abel had no son of his own, and it was his hope that Perry would take the place of one.

The factory's general office was a large room with ample window-light at the east end of a long one-story brick building. Hiram's high desk and stool, Nora's typewriter desk, a letter press and a sample table comprised the furniture. An uncompromising photographic view of the factory, a gaudy lithographed map of the United States of America, and the flaming mammoth calendar of a fire-insurance company were the wall adornments — the unbeauteous telephone apparatus affixed to the wall near Nora's desk being, of course, excluded from any mention with works of art.

THREE doors opened out of this room: to the street, to the shop and to Abel Richardson's private office, with its battered flat desk and extension telephone, and a rickety stand piled with trade-journals methodically arranged in the order of issue.

"Hadn't we better wire Perry to come in?" suggested Nora to Hiram on the morning the news was telephoned to them of the boss' illness. She was a black-haired, gray-eyed young person who could look in anybody's mirror without cracking it.

Hiram, a spectacled, bony little man of fifty, pulled at his nether lip. It hung down in a kind of flap from years of recourse to it in moments of mental hesitancies.

"Perhaps—yet I don't know," he said. "Perry'll be in anyway in a few days; and we need orders."

"Yes? And you cherish fond hopes in that direction?" Miss Regan's tone was facetiously ironic.

"Maybe, if we let him alone, at the very last he will book some."

"While the lamp holds out to burn, with orders Perry may return," paraphrased the stenographer wickedly. "A beautiful dream!" Her voice changed the least bit. "Well, Mr. Hiram, are we going to wire him?"

It should be explained here that though Hiram had been with the factory twenty years, and Nora little more than two, he had made himself no other than a keeper of the books, while the girl by sheer force of native ability had made herself as the right hand of Abel Richardson, even though titularly Perry was that important member. So, while Nora was considerately careful to accord surface deference to Hiram's seniority of service, she knew how to impose her will on him when the occasion arose, and leave him innocently unconscious of it. The present was an example in kind,

"I can't see the necessity," Hiram made reply to her query. "There's nothing he can do here that we can't do, and—heh, heh—a little better."

"Oh, it's not that," said Nora unsmilingly. "If it were a question of brains, why—I'd say nothing. But it isn't."

"What is it, then? I don't quite perceive your objective." Hiram plucked at his lips perplexedly.

"It is that O'Brien we discharged last month. He was here Friday haranguing the men. He may be back today, tomorrow, any time. And I *want*"—Nora spoke in italics here—"I *want* to see that man thrown out of this plant body and boots. Mr. Richardson was not equal to it. Are you, Mr. Hiram Pratt?"

"Me? Good gracious, no!" he squeaked in alarm.

"Well, Perry is. He was right tackle on his team. I guess he could show O'Brien the door prettily. It is one thing I am delighted to admit he can do."

"Oh-ah-hum! Perhaps we'd best wire him," conceded Hiram, in a small tumult of hurry. "I'll mark it '*Rush.*' Or—why, yes—possibly I can catch him by phone. He's in Baltimore today, at the Langham. Maybe he hasn't started out on his calls yet."

"Or is at his breakfast. It's only a little after nine," observed Nora sweetly. "You might try it. I'm sure Mr. Richardson would approve."

AS it chanced, Nora guessed aright. Hiram did catch Perry at breakfast, and on the following day, in the early forenoon, while Nora was alone in the office,—Hiram being out in the factory consulting with the foreman,—he strolled in, serene and suave as a summer morn. Nora was at her desk, her back to the door. She knew perfectly well who it was, but she did not turn.

"Good morning, Mistress Nora. How does your garden grow?" he greeted blithely as he advanced.

She swung around then, her brows arching to express surprise.

"Oh, it's you! Good morning," she responded.

"Yes, it's little me, straight in from riding the rattlin's." He grinned engagingly. "But I don't see the High Panjandrum about."

"Hiram? He's in the shop, talking with Jenks. He will be in presently."

"He said," explained Perry, "that it was nothing really serious with Uncle Abel, so I thought that before going on to him, I'd look in here first." He sat down, and regarded her expectantly. He was rewarded with a rush of warm interest.

"It was too bad we had to disturb you at your breakfast yesterday. And only ten minutes past nine o'clock!"

"Oh, not at all. In fact, I hadn't begun—had just given the order."

"Ah!" She exhaled audibly. "We worried about it some."

Perry allowed his eyes to fall. There was a little dancing spark in the brown depths of them he would not let her see.

"I was afraid you'd do it," he drawled, "and I took pains to impress on Hiram that it was of no consequence. He assured you of that, didn't he?"

"Yes," she fibbed as composedly as himself.

"The old boy—I'm referring to Hiram," he went on, "did not dot me up on the phone—had a lamp on the long distance tariff, I imagine. He simply intimated that I was needed here and I'd better take the first train. I tried to argue the matter—you see, I'm making some friends in the trade—"

"Your expense-account indicates it," interjected Nora, beaming on him.

"And," he continued evenly, "I rather expected to land a buster in Baltimore. However—"

"Oh, how unfortunate!" interposed Nora again. "It might have offset the bad news in this morning's mail."

She clasped her hands on her breast in mock despair. As quickly her mood changed. Her eyes darkened like stormy seas as they swept the sturdy frame of the young man indolently seated before her. She cried out vehemently:

"I must speak. I've got to! If I didn't care, if I were only looking to my pay-envelope, it would be different. But I've worked here side by side with Mr. Richardson, and I know the load he has to carry, the fight he has to make. All the Irish in me—and I've some—calls to me to fight with him, and win."

"Go on, please," said the young fellow as she stopped. "You've more to say to me. I can feel it."

He was not smiling now, though his tone was light. And this last it was that kindled her to a volley of plain words she would have modified, doubtless, if that same "Irish" in her had not egged her on.

"I will do it, even if I have to go afterwards!" she exclaimed. "What we need in this shop are orders. *Orders!* It's worry over that, as much as anything, your uncle is sick with—and you idling over a late breakfast when you ought to have been out hot-foot after them! He let a real salesman go—Elliott—in the fall and put you on because he thought you had it in you, and it was a good time to break you to the work. You didn't have to drum up orders then—they were fired at you. But your uncle thought that at least you were learning the ropes, that you'd get the selling fever in your blood, feel the urge of the game, make good when the bubble burst, and it came to *getting* orders, not just *taking* them. He banked on you. I—we all did. But now—when there are no more orders to *take*—you make a tourist tour of a sales-route, and send the bills into the office. I could cry in shame for you—and for Mr. Richardson's shattered hopes."

A QUICK and shocked hush followed through which the pain and scorn of Nora's words seemed yet to vibrate. Young Richardson sat quite still, and a little pale. His eyes were fixed on the girl. There was no anger in them; rather there was an intent, exploring look under which her face, to her helpless self-resentment, began to color and then flame. He spoke at last.

"I know I haven't made any showing—yet. But there are a lot of kinks in this game, and I haven't been so awfully long at it. Still, I'm learning."

Nora shrugged and rose from her chair.

"I will go now," she said. "After this, of course—" But he stayed her with a motion of his hand.

"I thought that we were friends, and friends are privileged to speak their minds. Besides, I'm not empowered to accept your resignation. Only my uncle can do that."

"You are acting in his place."

"Oh, then, I decline to accept it." He tried hard for perfect gravity. "That being settled, suppose we get down to business. I will endeavor earnestly to bring such intelligence as I have to bear on it."

She resumed her chair, feeling suddenly foolish and abashed. He nodded pleased approval and said:

"It was conveyed to me—a little vaguely, perhaps, but urgently—that there was need of me here. It is incredible, but I'll play come-on. What's up?"

Nora bit her lip. Then, briefly, she recounted the situation. O'Brien was a natural-born agitator, and with a smooth tongue. Now, out of revenge, he was fomenting trouble with the hands, trying to get them to strike for an increase of pay. Mr. Richardson had told them that if anything it was a decrease they should get, else he might be compelled to shut down. But O'Brien—slipping in at noon hours when the men were resting—had kept on with his agitation until a strike, in fact, was imminent.

"And if he comes back today?" queried Perry quietly.

She gave him a glance of indignant surprise.

"He is a large man, but the door is wide."

"Ah, I see. You require a bouncer. Very good, ma'am. How does Foreman Jenks stand in this?"

"He is with us. He has been here a long time. He knows Mr. Richardson is a just man."

"Yes, a pretty good old sport," he agreed. She frowned, but he went on smoothly: "In the feast of reason and flow of soul that at first engaged us, I seem to recall mention of bad news in the mail today. Are details admissible?"

"Drake & Brown have canceled their spring order," Nora told him. "It is what Mr. Hiram is seeing Jenks about."

"H-m-m! A bother, that," observed Perry. To Nora he did not seem as moved as he should be at the intelligence. She fired up again.

"It's the fourth cancelation we've had in thirty days. But this is serious. Possibly you are not aware that D. & B.'s account is the biggest on our books."

"Oh, yes. That I do know," he assented pridefully.

"The goods are made up and ready to ship. It is outrageous."

"It is. By the way, here's a little something I saw on the train. Rather decently done, I think you'll say."

He proffered a newspaper folded conveniently to a certain place. She accepted it with a baffled look. Was he entirely callous to the fortunes of the factory? Then her glance fell upon Abel Richardson's letter, and at once she was buried in it.

PERRY lighted a cigarette and sauntered into his uncle's private office. On the desk was a little pile of opened letters awaiting the day when the boss should be able to give them attention. On top of the heap, the latest accession to it, lay Drake & Brown's cancellation. Perry sat down and reached for it. The few curt lines brought a curious expression to his face. He stared meditatively at the wall a few seconds, after which he laid the letter to one side and began on the rest of the mail. But he discontinued. Hiram had come in from the shop. Nora was speaking to him.

"I want you to read this. Perry says it's rather 'decently' done. Oh!"

She had taken no pains to lower her voice. Perry grinned as it came to him. Then he heard Hiram's whisper:

"So he's here!" Before she could answer, he sang out:

"In the captain's office, Hiram. Come in, both of you, please."

"Oh—ah—to be sure," cackled the bookkeeper, immediately on his way. And as he entered and shook hands: "Um—ah—I refrained from telling you on the phone—"

"You did. But Nora has dotted me up. I'm crammed full. Nora, I neglected to ask you to bring your notebook. We are going to write to somebody. And—oh! Reverting for a moment to uncle's letter, I repeat that it *is* rather decently done. Defines his status without hysterics. That never gets you anywhere when you're in bad. You can read it later, Hiram. I wish to talk with you regarding this Drake & Brown matter. I understand the goods are made up."

"And boxed, ready to ship."

"Who took the order?"

"Elliott. Just before he left us."

"Were there any strings to it? But suppose you get it."

"Certainly. Of course. Yes sir." Hiram tugged at his lip as he started off. He was confounded by the strange metamorphosis in the hitherto insouciant young man.

"One moment," put in Perry. "Does my uncle know that you sent for me?"

"Why—er—no. I thought—"

"Perfectly correct." He was waved out of the room. Then Perry addressed himself to Nora: "Before we begin, I'd like to ask about those other cancellations you mentioned. Whose were they?"

She named the houses, giving the cash amounts involved.

"And what was done about them?" Perry desired to know. "They tot up quite a little sum."

"What was there to be done?" she argued. "Everybody is getting cancellations these days."

"We just accepted them, then, and said nothing. In other words, our silence gave consent."

She nodded, her brows drawn in puzzlement over his drift, when Hiram returned with the order. Perry scanned it and looked at the two.

"I can't spot a joker in it anywhere," he pronounced. "But I'm green, as you know. Is it regular? I say, though! That's a fool question; my uncle passed on it. Take a letter, Nora, to Drake & Brown.

" 'Gentlemen: We refuse to accept cancellation of your order No. 1823, date of September 17th last. The goods are made up, boxed and marked, and are going forward to you today. Find B/L inclosed. Yours truly, Richardson Shirt Factory. By P. Richardson.' "

"Good Lord!" gasped the bookkeeper. "My dear boy, that wont do. Why—"

Perry cut in on him.

"Don't worry, Hiram. D. & B. may think again when they get this. Go see that these goods are got out of here at once."

"But—"

"You will kindly do as I say, Hiram. I am boss here *pro tem*." A faint, cold smile accompanied the words.

The old man, his head wagging dolefully, went on his errand. Nora waited, her eyes studiedly fixed on her book. A spot of vivid color had leaped into her cheek. Perry addressed her.

"I think that is all. These other letters go into technicalities too deep for me. I'm taking them to Uncle Abel.

"I wouldn't," she dissented, as she rose with him. "There is no hurry, and he oughtn't to be bothered just now. And may I—suggest—that you do not tell him of this letter to D. & B.?"

"You think it would upset him?"

"At least it would worry him. You must know that it will lose us their future business."

He laughed a little. It puzzled Nora still more, for there seemed to be a secret relish in it strangely at odds with the occasion.

"Nora," he said abruptly, "I suppose you think I'm frightfully fresh in this, that I'm starting something I can't finish."

They had moved into the outer room by now.

"I can't say about the finish, but for the rest, if you wish to know, I think it's just fine!" she told him.

"Really?"

"Yes. I've longed to have Mr. Richardson do it—a dozen times. These cancellations are like slaps in the face. I want to slap back. But then, there's always that future business."

His eyes shifted, for once more those little dancing sparks were in them.

"Future business doesn't help pay present bills," he said; "but here's something that may."

The words tumbled forth over one another in awkward haste, and he was out of the door with the last of them, leaving in her hand a Hotel Langham envelope. Before she could recover from her astonishment, the door opened again, and Perry's head was poked in.

"I forgot to say," he pattered, "that there's an item in that newspaper I'd be glad to have you clip for me to send D. & B. Page Seven—I marked it. And oh, just ease that O'Brien person along if he shows up while I'm gone, will you? I'll be back soon."

HE was off this time definitely. Standing where she was, Nora lifted the flap of the unsealed envelope and drew out a folded paper. She opened it. One swiftly comprehensive glance, and her hands fell laxly at her sides. Her mind was in curious disarray. She felt small and humbled, yet withal voicefully jubilant.

"It is perfectly grand!" she cried aloud. "And all the time he had it in his pocket. Oh, I could crawl into a mousehole and be lost in it!"

"What's the occasion?" It was Hiram. He had entered unperceived. Nora flashed around to him, her face all alight.

"Perry! He has landed the Hollomon Company. And Elliott never could. Look! D. & B.'s order isn't in it with this. It—it's a peach!"

Hiram pored over the order. A series of little approving grunts issued from him. Presently he peered over his spectacles at the girl.

"'Immediate shipment.' That reads well. Bars cancellation. Hah-hum! Nora, how in the world do you suppose he did it?"

She threw him a haughty look.

"Salesmanship. How else, if you please?" Suddenly she spied the newspaper in his coat, and without ado pounced on it.

"Here," piped Hiram. "I haven't read Mr. Richardson's letter yet. I haven't been given a chance."

"You must wait," she imparted to him with a superior air. "Perry has instructed me to make a clipping from it."

Seated at her desk, she turned to Page Seven, and with shears poised to cut, paused and read the item. It recorded a court decision, just handed down, in a test case against one Philip Weil, a jobber, and was to the effect that a written cancellation gives all the virtue of a signed contract to the original order, and hence affords redress at law.

"Mr. Hiram, come here, please," requested Nora in a thin, breathless voice. "Perry says hysterics don't get you anywhere—but I believe I'm going to have 'em."

WHEN Perry Richardson returned, he found Nora and Hiram standing at the door to the shop in evident disquietude. Nora made a gesture of relief at sight of him.

"O'Brien is back," she said under her breath when he had come over to them. "He is talking to the men."

He pressed something into her hand. "Read it at once," he enjoined, and passed on into the shop. He walked through an aisle of cutting-tables toward the men grouped in the gangway before the sewing-room. The agitator scowled and stopped in what he was saying. The men shifted uneasily on their feet. Perry spoke, silkily suave:

"Mr. O'Brien, I believe?"

The other bobbed his head ungraciously. He was a burly person with a pasty face dramatically relieved by a broad dead-black band of dyed mustache.

"I'd like to confer with you," proceeded Perry. "We may be able to arrive at an understanding that will benefit all concerned. You know me, I think. I am Perry Richardson, nephew of Mr. Abel Richardson. I am in charge here for the present."

"Huh! Well, go on and talk. I got no secrets from these boys," declared the man. Nevertheless his eyes questioned him furtively.

"I've no secrets from them, either," asserted Perry with a smile. "But I've been away during this trouble, and we can get over past ground quicker—we two, in my office, alone—than here, where a general argument may start up with no end to it. We will have a committee in from the shop when we are through."

"That's fair enough," spoke up Jenks.

There was general assent, and O'Brien made no further demur. On the contrary, he evinced now a quite docile willingness to comply. Hiram drew away from the door as they approached and sought his desk. Nora, already seated, did not look up as they entered. Apparently she was engaged with work on her machine.

Perry showed O'Brien into the private office, but lingered a fraction of time before following. In this fleeting interval his and Nora's eyes met. Then he went in and shut the door.

ALMOST instantly Nora was on her feet. She jabbed several pencils in her hair, caught up her notebook, turned to Hiram with a finger on her lip, and tiptoed to the telephone on the wall.

The bookkeeper, all agog, watched her. She slipped her book into a holding-clip on the writing-shelf and unhooked the receiver. Barely above a whisper she asked Central for a number, and got it.

"It's Nora," she said and nothing more.

In the inner office the man O'Brien, sprawled in his chair, was unceremoniously lighting a virulent cigar. Perry was restlessly moving about as if seeking a way to begin with the man. It was at this juncture that the extension telephone buzzer sounded. O'Brien pricked up his ears. Perry stepped to the desk and caught up the instrument.

"Well?" he snapped.

"Mr. Henry Harkness is on the wire," came Nora's voice.

"Harkness? Oh! Ask him to call again, please. Explain that I'm busy."

He fumbled the telephone awkwardly as he replaced it, and muttered a malediction on the thing.

"Well, O'Brien," he said as he dropped into the desk chair, "I've been thinking over this situation, and we'll get down to brass tacks from the jump. But before proceeding I'd be pleased to have you show your authority to represent the men in this shop."

O'Brien stopped him.

"It don't cut no ice who or what I am, Mister. I got the men with me. They'll stay or quit as I say. That's enough for you to know."

"I'll let it rest there," said Perry mildly. "I will tell you just how things are with us at this end of the factory, and if you want to see our books—"

"To hell with the books! Gwan, get your spiel off," interjected the gentleman courteously.

Perry smiled, but it was ominously without warmth. He set forth laconically the condition of the business, enumerated the cancellations received, the falling prices that were ruling, and lastly, the almost total cessation of buying. Against this he cited the repeated increase of wages, the enhanced cost of material, the growing burden of upkeep in the past twelve months, and now, the stringency of the money-market. O'Brien puffed away at his cigar unsympathetically. Perry concluded:

"If you can tell me how we can raise wages under existing circumstances, I'll call you a wizard. Perhaps we can pull through on the present scale, but it's a gamble. My uncle doubts it. Let up on us, O'Brien. Give us a chance. Call in the committee, and tell them what I've told you. Tell them that I've shown you we can't pay more."

Mr. O'Brien was moved to amusement at this suggestion, it was so entirely without guile.

"You're as bad as the old man," he chuckled. "He seemed to think his troubles was entertaining. I'll say to you what I said to him: 'You got it when times was flush; let go some of it now. The men helped you make it. Give 'em their share.' "

"They had their share as we went along. They can't eat their cake and have it, any more than we," retorted Perry.

The other tossed away his cigar with an impatient gesture. He leaned forward and shot out a question:

"Say, young feller, was it just to talk you wanted me in here for—alone?"

"I felt that I might prevail on you to drop this stirring up of our help," replied Perry softly. "A strike wont get them anything but lost time, and you know it. Let us alone, and we will get along."

O'Brien responded to this not in words, but with a marked and singular rubbing of his thumb and forefinger together, the while he slowly lifted and lowered his head. Perry looked at him artlessly.

"I'm afraid I don't understand you."

"Aw, come off. You wasn't born yesterday, if you do look it." Mr. O'Brien drew down one eye facetiously.

"Do you mean, in plain words, that I'll have no trouble here if I pay you something?"

"I didn't say it."

Perry grinned.

"Sure. Well, how much?"

"Five hundred. No checks."

"Call it three hundred, money," countered Perry. "I happen to have that much with me; and anyway, it's all I'll pay. If it wont answer, go ahead with your trouble-making, though I'm hanged if I can see what you, personally, will get out of it. Three hundred dollars make at least a rattle in a fellow's pocket," he added with a laugh.

O'Brien did not join in it. He scowled, swore—and finally accepted.

"These little joints aint got juice enough in 'em to wet a soda-cracker," he sneered as he stowed away the bills.

"A waste of time for a man of your ability," concurred Perry. He was in remarkably good humor. "We will go out to the other room and have the committee in. You have looked into the case and satisfied yourself. But you know what to say." He flung open the door. "Hiram, advise Jenks that we are ready for him." Nora, he noted, was at her desk and breathing a bit hurriedly. So that was all right.

O'BRIEN lounged into the room after him. He leaned himself elegantly against the outer edge of Hiram's high desk, a thumb in his armhole. Jenks entered with two of his men.

"Tell them," Perry bade O'Brien curtly.

The latter swept the air with his arm as if relegating to distant shades a dead issue.

"It's off, boys," he pronounced. "I been over it all with him. They can't give a raise an' keep on. He's showed me, an' I gotta knuckle under. Guess you better let the scale stay as it is."

Perry raised a hand for attention.

"Wait, Jenks. We've just begun. Miss Regan has something to read to you. But first a word of explanation. I talked with this fellow in there. By prior arrangement with Miss Regan she took down over the phone our conversation. I plugged the slot of the extension receiver so that the connection was kept open. It allowed not only Miss Regan but my uncle at his home to listen in. He and I planned it while I was with him this morning—"

A roar from O'Brien broke in. At first too stupefied to give voice his rage was bottled up. Now it exploded.

"By God!" he bellowed. "You can't put anything over on me like this, you dirty welcher. You—you—" He stammered to a pause.

"You see?" Perry smiled grimly at the workmen. "The gentleman is embarrassed. To spare him, I will ask Miss Regan to make a certified transcript of her notes, and post it in the shop—ah!"

HE made a spring for the street door, anticipating O'Brien's departure by seconds. The man was big but flabby. Perry, if not so big, was all pliant steel.

"Oh, you're not going yet," he stated coolly, "—not until you return those marked bills of mine. Three of them, boys, of one hundred each. A little bribe to quit talking strike to you. He would double-cross his blood brother for a dollar. A fine chap to tie to, what?"

O'Brien, snarling like a cornered dog, charged him. Perry stepped nimbly aside, and planted a whopping blow behind his ear. The man butted headlong into the door-panel, whirled half about, and slumped inertly down on the floor.

"Boys," said Perry, "look in his inside vest pocket and get the notes. You'll find each marked with a very small red R in the lower left-hand corner."

The men, thunder black, rushed forward. Jenks knelt by the prostrate man and found the bank-notes. He studied them and passed them to the others. In turn they restored them to Perry. O'Brien was coming to. His first word was an oath.

"There's a hydrant in the street. Put him under it," commanded Perry. "What further attentions you may wish to pay him don't interest me. Only"—his voice rang sharp—"see that he doesn't set foot on these premises again. And one other thing: after you've read what Miss Regan has taken down, if you think this factory isn't playing square with you—strike! But remember, you'll never see the white flag flying over this building."

WHEN the room was cleared, Perry grinned pleasantly at his tremulous clerical force.

"About that order of Hollomon's," he remarked, as if it had been under discussion and interrupted by some passing word. "I didn't get it through any salesmanship, of course—I'm too green; but I had learned that Henkel, the buyer, was a balk-line billiard sharp, after hours, and as I've done some postgraduate work of the kind myself, it furnished me a point with him. Every time I hit Baltimore, I'd call on him and talk Willie Hoppe, Schaefer and Slosson. Then, when it would come time to duck, I'd drop my card on his desk, modestly observing that some night when he was at leisure I'd be happy to teach him a few shots."

Perry's grin widened as he went on.

"It worked. Monday, when I called, Henkel said he had nothing on for the night so he might as well hang my hide on his fence and be done with it. Dear friends, he did that thing. I wont describe the battle. It lasted from eight till eleven, and he was so darn sorry for me afterward that he asked to see my samples. The result thereof you know. I couldn't sleep for thinking of it; ergo I was late at breakfast in the morning."

Nora made no comment. She sat looking at him, her eyes like stars. She knew that salesmanship was not solely a matter of talking up your goods. But old Hiram Pratt giggled.

"Heh, heh, heh! Pity all buyers aren't billiard-nuts, Perry."

"Isn't it?" he agreed cordially. "Nora, what do you say to lunch—to get a bad taste out of our mouths?"

"With the boss! It isn't done, Mr. Richardson."

"Boss *pro tem.* The real boss is so much improved he says he's coming in tomorrow. By the way, I guess I'd better phone him and tell how O'Brien took his leave."

When at last they were gone, Hiram extracted a newspaper from his pocket.

"Now, perhaps," he grumbled, "I'll have a chance to read what Abel Richardson busted into print about."

COLD

By EDISON MARSHALL

ALL the stars that the oldest killer in the oldest pack had ever seen were twinkling and gleaming, glittering like great diamonds, in the icy winter sky. They gave no warmth to the frozen world below them; the wind that crept so chill and menacing up the northern sweep of the ridge was no less cold; they were beautiful and far-off and vaguely terrible, and every forest creature was somehow fearful and disconsolate in their pale light, and not one knew why. Even the beauty that they gave to the forest was vaguely unhappy and dreadful—the blue tint of the drifts, the dim, ghostly shadows, the black witchcraft in the fringe of spruce just below the snowy backbone of the ridge. The Northern Lights had been sweeping and flaring through the sky an hour or so before; but they had gone to the same mysterious fountain from which they had sprung, and only the faintest glimmer, like a white pennant, remained of them. . . . . And the wolves came stealing, one behind another, out of the shadow of the spruce.

They didn't know the urge behind them, the call that had brought them from their hunting-trails to the bare, wind-swept ridge. They came in silence, like gray ghosts; yet there were curious yellow gleamings and sparklings in their fierce eyes. There was no sound of falling feet on the wind-incrusted snow. The old pack-leader halted near a lone, stunted spruce, gazing out over the starlit ranges.

Old Swift-leap had seen many winters; many caribou had fallen before the pack that he led, and grizzled was the hair on his gaunt, powerful back; but the stars on the snow always got to him, on certain nights, the same way. The mood never came when he was full-fed. It was a loneliness and a sorrow, a haunting fear of things he could not understand, and it was born of the despair of starvation. When summer was on the land, and the streams broke their locks of ice it was Swift-leap's way to make long, joyous runnings through the forest, hunting in the warm nights and sleeping away the long, drowsy hours of afternoon; and then the strange call never came to him. He could forget, then, about Fear—the dread spirit that now went

STEEL

This novelette is a stirring prose epic of man's battle with the wilderness—by the writing-man who has won such well-deserved fame through "The Voice of the Pack," "From a Frontiersman's Diary," "Shepherds of the Wild" and other memorable stories.

stalking over the snow—and the cold and the hopeless hunting, and these chill, mysterious stars; but there was no forgetting now. He lifted his great grizzled head, and the pack halted behind him.

It was a strange, dim picture—the ring of wolves on the ridge-top. Sensing his mood, the lesser wolves stood like forms in metal, all with lifted heads, all gazing as if with dread over the ranges that spread out before them. In a moment their voices would rise in unison in that strangest song in all the world of man and beast—the famine-chant of the wolves; but now they seemed wholly unaware of one another. It seemed to Black Rover, the strongest of the yearlings, that for the moment he was wholly alone in the presence of something mysterious and dreadful; and the beginnings of a frightened whine crept into his throat.

ALWAYS before, Black Rover had felt secure in the pack-strength—ever since that momentous winter night when his mother had first led him to the gray band; but now he was frightened and tremulous, filled with a great unhappiness that seemed about to burst open his sturdy young body. Yet the whine didn't quite get out. He choked it back in time. Some way, it was quite the thing to do—to whine when the wind swept from the north, and as the pack poised to begin the famine-song. Black Rover had the blood of forest-monarchs in him, and for all that he was but a yearling, his pride was already great. Whining was a thing for female-cubs, not yearlings who had already helped to tear down the caribou bull!

A moment of incredible silence hung over the ridge. The wolves still stood without motion. Nor was there any stir of movement in the wastes about them—those little, nervous rustlings that in the gentler seasons reveal the teeming life of the wilderness. This was the winter forest, the snow-swept heart of the northern wilds, and the wolf-pack seemed to have the whole icy world to themselves.

It might have been that a little ermine was watching from the snow-sweep below them, but if so, the wind carried his pungent smell away, and he was very, very

still. Perhaps he knew about an extra sound-gathering apparatus that the wolf wears on his skull, and thus was careful that his dainty feet made not the slightest scratching. Even the eyes of wolves, however—sharp as gimlets in the darkness—could not make out the ermine's outline. Except for a black tip that perverse gods put on the end of his tail to keep him agile, the ermine was the hue of snow itself.

Perhaps a ptarmigan was buried in the snow near enough to feel the tremor of the wolves' feet; but it was never the way of Plump-breast to make himself overly conspicuous when the wolf-pack is about. A wolverine had left his tracks in the snow, and the dying smell of Tuft-ear the lynx wakened an instant's interest in old Swift-leap; but mostly the forest people were gone as the flowers, and no one could tell them where.

THERE were no raucous cries of jays in the spruce. They had flown south months before, and the water-birds had spread their ninety-mile-an-hour wings and had left the lakes to the iron lock of the ice. The wailing of wild geese no longer filled the sky; and even the loons, those cheerful maniacs that fish and laugh and dive and shriek on the waterways, were long since stilled. The moose had yarded up in the lowlands beside the lakes; every creature that could dig, from his majesty the grizzly to the little blind mole, had established comfortable winter quarters under ground. Swift-leap could not tell where the caribou had gone. They always seemed lacking when he wanted them most. As for Black Rover, he was much too young to venture an opinion, but he knew that his insides were empty and racked with famine-pains, and he wished the herds would return to the hunting-trails.

There was no easy route to good feeding by preying on live-stock. The simple reason was that stockmen had not yet driven their herds into the virgin Clearwater country of the northern Selkirks. The only sheep on the steeps were the incomparable bighorn, veritable masters of the high trails; and the caribou and the moose fed unmolested—except by their natural enemies the wild hunters—in the green meadows and the dark woods. Throughout all the breadth of mountain and forest over which Swift-leap looked there was no trail made by the feet of men, no fences shutting out the wild, never a camp-fire filling the forest with the pungent smell of wood-smoke, not a trapper's cabin or a miner's shaft.

This was the virgin wilderness; and as is the case of vast territories of the North, it could not be truly said ever to have been explored. Perhaps an Indian had passed thence now and again—although the Indians were never people to leave the waterways; but the chance was small that a white man had ever trod within two days' march of the ridge on which Swift-leap stood. This was a land where the primitive forces of the wilderness still held full sway—where the wolves established their dark reigns over the snow-wastes, and the venerable grizzly never knew the gleam of a hunter's rifle in the thicket.

It was not a gold-country—the tireless prospector had never passed its outer edges. The land was ice-locked now, cold and drear beyond description, but it would teem with life when the summer came again. It was a realm of virgin forest, broken only by the yellow marshes beloved by the moose and the wide parks where the caribou fed in the dawns; of mighty mountains, range on range past any counting; of rivers that flowed from secret sources down through untraveled gorges to the sea; of sparkling lakes, like great jewels lost in the deep blue-green of the spruce; of waterfalls and many-hued cañons and strange, dark glens where even the wolves seemed afraid to go, and a thousand streams flashing with trout that had never known the shadow of a fly-rod over the pools. Men had simply not yet come to Clearwater. It was still the stronghold of the wild.

NO blazes had been cut in the secret places of the Clearwater country. No bridges arched the tumultuous rivers; no axes rang in the forest; no wheels turned; and the slumbering richness of the soil was not yet wakened for the good of man. The wind still swept unchallenged, never knowing a homestead wall to repel its fierce assault.

But this wilderness would not always endure. As the wolves raised their muzzles to chant the famine-song, they were wholly unaware of a more dreadful foe that was even now threatening their ramparts. They knew the full might of the elements, this gray band. No one had to tell Swift-leap, the pack-leader, of the fury

of the winter storms that sometimes swept down from Bering Sea; he knew cold as well as he knew famine, snowslide and treacherous ice; but he had the most bitter lesson of all yet to learn. This unknown foe threatened the very existence of his breed.

Clearwater would not go unpeopled forever. Even now the more hardy and brave of the frontiersmen were beginning to wonder about the virgin interior of the vast territory. These were the homesteaders, already dreaming of erecting their cabins on the rich tracts of Clearwater meadow. It wouldn't be long now until the first of them would come, with packhorses through the trailless forest; perhaps they would stay and conquer, and perhaps the wild would crush them and drive them out. If they kept a foothold, the trapper would establish his lines over the ranges, and hay would ripen in the clearings, with the inevitable result that roads and trails would penetrate the deepest fastnesses, taming the wild for men.

It all depended on those first few—lean, brown frontiersmen that can never find peace in the villages and settled countrysides. Would the pack sing in triumph at last at the door of their deserted cabins, or would the forces of the wild be vanquished before ax and gun? Not every northern forest has yielded to man's advance. More than often the wild has remained impregnable, and the trail-builder has come mushing back at last, half-blind from the glittering wastes of snow, his livestock slain by the wild hunters, his spirit broken by a hopeless task. Few travelers in the North have failed to see the dead cities—those eerie deserted mining-camps that the spruce-forest is already reclaiming.

The fate of the pack hung in the balance. Their existence was incompatible with that of men. As if in lament of the bitter war that was to come, they raised their long, fierce muzzles to the stars.

YET that first note was cut short before it had even begun to gather volume. A yearling wolf—little more than a cub—suddenly uttered the pack-signal of danger.

It was curious that the entire band stiffened in the same fraction of an instant. The sound that the cub had made was not particularly loud or sharp, hardly perceptible above the first note of the famine-chant—yet it seemed to go home to every wolf like a high-voltage shock. Swift-leap whirled, one lightning motion that the eye simply could not follow, and ended braced and ready to fight, facing the same direction that the yearling faced. The other wolves seemed to snap about in their tracks, forming a solid front.

They moved absolutely in silence. It is not the lupine way to cry out, when silence would be better. No breed of animals in the world seems to find such exultation in its folk-songs; but also it knows how to move like feathers in the wind. Then for an instant they stood braced and motionless, gazing at and beyond the terrified cub that had given the warning.

The cub was Black Rover—strongest of the yearlings, and named for the peculiar rich sable of his fur. At first it would have been hard to understand what had frightened him. There were no living foes in the sweep of snow in front, no snarling grizzly or charging moose. Besides, the sight of living flesh would have called forth the signal for killing rather than of danger. This was the famine time, and the pack was at its greatest strength: it knew of no living thing from which it must flee. But at once the quick senses of Swift-leap beheld the cause of the cub's fear.

Something was thrust into the wood of the lone, stunted spruce beside which Black Rover had stood. The cub had sprung back on perceiving it, and in spite of the fact that it resembled no thing of danger he had ever seen, that it was neither living nor had powers of motion, a wave of icy terror had swept through him.

He couldn't possibly have told why. He only knew that here was something unutterably sinister—something that, now the first leap of fear was past, sent a strange, haunting uneasiness through all the network of his delicately tuned nerves. But it was plain to see that the old pack-leader had made some sort of an intepretation. He was no longer braced for battle. His eyes were gleaming and yellow, and he had walked over to the little spruce, sniffing at the thing that was thrust into its wood. For a moment he stood motionless, and no man may know the thoughts that chased each other through his cunning, brute brain.

Presently the same message of uneasiness and dread passed from one wolf to another through the circle. Swift-leap growled softly in his throat, and the hair stood

stiff on his shoulders, but he made no further motion. He simply stood with lifted head, an apprehension upon him that was beyond his ken, gazing out over the starlit ranges to the mysterious south.

The thing fast in the wood was merely an old, rusted hunting-knife, left there by some wandering Indian weeks before. But the blade of the thing was steel—cold steel that is the symbol of man's dominance, the instrument and tool that makes him the monarch of the world, that chill, fearful mystery that the wild things dread no less than they dread the fire.

CHAPTER II

THE threatened invasion of Clearwater by frontiersmen did not materialize in Black Rover's second year, that of 1915. The simple reason was that the frontiersmen were busy elsewhere. A war had broken out in Europe, and the work of taming the wilderness was given over to that of crushing a barbarian foe. The North has always been peopled by the young and strong, the kind of men that can stop a charge as well as hew a home out of the wilderness; and the long arm of the service practically depopulated the country. The ring of the ax was no more to be heard along the lower waterways, and the track of pack-horses faded from the nearer trails. Thus it was that Black Rover saw the spring come with lightness of heart.

The change of seasons is not a matter of light moment in the North. It is more important to the Northern people than the change of rulers in a kingdom—and it really amounts to about the same thing. As the year progresses, each change is watched with greater dread, because each brings that ice-bound terror, the Northern winter, ever closer. One seasonal change, and one alone, brings new hope and happiness to the whole unmeasured breadth of the forest, and that is when old Winter gives way to Spring.

One day, and the icy locks of the cold were still unbroken. The clouds were seer and threatening; the little spruce trees were lifeless things in their shrouds of snow, and the whole land lay desolate and silent in the grip of the winter. The next—and a miracle had come to pass.

Spring had come, and there was no gainsaying it. It had arrived like an express passenger in the night; and the entire forest world was simply tremulous with rapture. Just as all small boys bring out their tops, without premeditation, on the same day in spring, all the forest creatures suddenly knew the truth. It was true that the rivers were still locked tight with ice and that the snow still lay deep over marsh and forest, ridge and valley; but they had suddenly ceased to matter. King Winter had gone, and these were simply his garments that he hadn't had time to pack.

Without the aid of an alarm clock, or even of a call from some earlier riser, old Shaggy-sides, the grizzly, suddenly aroused himself in his cavern. He had been sleeping rather deeply, for the past four or five months, but he was fully awake at once. His blood had been rather cold during his slumbers—dropping down in that mysterious way of hibernating creatures to about half its normal temperature; but at once it began to heat up like the water in the radiator on a warm day, and came surging warmly through the mighty channels of his veins. He had been really too sleepy to breathe properly, also—only taking one breath every several minutes; but now he found himself breathing fast enough for a run or a fight, immediately upon wakening. He crawled out of the cavern, stretched all nine feet of himself, grunted twice or thrice just to see if his lungs were working, and then sat down, like a talkative old man, in the scant yellow sunlight that was beginning to peer through the breaking clouds.

He hadn't sat there long before he began to think of another normal function—that of filling his ten-gallon-capacity stomach with food. It was true that the mountains were still mostly swept with snow; yet he might be able to search about and find himself two or three hundredweight of green stuff. Presently his quick ear heard the long, roaring rumble of a distant snowslide.

He got up and ambled away toward its source. The slide would sweep some steep ridge of snow, and he had simply to walk along behind it and devour the plants that were uncovered.

Various of the other digging people began to waken in their burrows, and even the whistling marmots, hidden deep under the rocks of the high plateaus, felt a new stir of living twitching their furry skins. Old Shaggy-sides would likely be along

soon, digging up these very rocks, and at least it might be well to be awake and ready to jump—for the old grizzly had an unreciprocated love for the furry whistler, thinking nothing of putting down a dozen of him at a meal.

ON the high steeps the bighorn yearling showed a sudden tendency to run himself to exhaustion along the ledges, kicking his heels as no self-respecting ram would think of doing; and even Methuselah, a venerable white goat ordinarily so cross that few living creatures dared to meet him on the trail, smiled amiably at his gamboling grandchildren. The caribou romped, full to the brim with moss, and the old moose moved ever farther from his yard.

The wolf-pack was not spared the spring fever that was so contagious in the wildwood; and the sense of unity, the close relationship one with another, seemed somehow breaking. They no longer ran and hunted as one body. Stragglers slipped off now and again, and perhaps quite failed to come back; and some of the females in particular made curious expeditions along the ledges as if in search of cozy and watertight caverns. A miracle was forthcoming—and it was well to be sheltered when it arrived.

This miracle had already come upon the wolverine—that middle-sized, furry demon of the snow that never receives a compliment from the year's beginning to its end. But the female was no longer savage and wicked-eyed as she lurked about a certain cavern in the gorge of the Yuga. She knew a secret that wild horses could not drag out of her, and her eyes were now soft and tender.

The first lesson that spring sent home to Black Rover was that he had been abruptly cut off from parental attention. He found out that he was suddenly obliged to shift for himself. If he got into difficulties, he had to get out of them the best he could—with no frantic, white-fanged mother to yield assistance. The truth was that his mother, barren the year previous, had her mind full of a forthcoming brood, fathered by Swift-leap himself.

BUT Black Rover had had good schooling, and before the snows were gone, he had definitely solved—at least for the summer months—the problem of his own existence. In the first place, he was unusually large and powerful for a two-year-old. An additional strength seemed to accompany his black coat—lending proof to the idea that he was a hark-back to some Siberian ancestor that had wandered across the ice of Bering Sea. In the second, his long tutorage by his mother—one of the fastest and most cunning wolves in the pack—gave him a craft and guile not possessed by many of his fellows.

Rapture was upon him, these warming days of spring. He couldn't get enough exercise to satisfy the itch in his muscles, and often the dawns found him thirty miles from his previous afternoon lairs. He loved to fall into that easy, lupine lope that few living things can pass, and feel the sweet, cool air rush by him as he ran. He liked to romp with the other two-year-olds who accompanied him on his jaunts—but it was already to be noted that they were ever less inclined to engage him in friendly combat. They usually had enough of fighting before he ever began.

EVERY day was full of glory for him, sleeping in the afternoon,—a sleep so light that a bending grass-blade could waken him,—running in the night, romping in the forenoons, hunting in the dawns. And he picked up the skill of hunting as if by instinct.

Every day he learned some new wile. His eye was sharp enough to discern a whole row of Franklin's fowl sitting on a dead log against the marvelous, protective background of the under-foliage; and after a shadow-like stalk, his fangs were swift enough to strike thrice before the awkward birds could tumble into flight. His tireless run made short work of the snow-shoe rabbits, and it was his delight to find the spore of marten or fisher far out on the open parks, away from the refuge of trees.

One day Black Rover caught the glimpse of a caribou fawn, seemingly alone and unprotected on a hillside, but that adventure had all but fatal consequences for him. The fawn's mother heard her darling bleat for help, and came at a leap. A calf is one thing, but a raving, slashing, infuriated cow is quite another. One down-slash of those wicked front hoofs would bring even a full-grown wolf to an unhappy and humiliating end. Black Rover was well-schooled for a youngster, with more than his share of courage, but he

did not linger to do battle. The retreat he made would have done credit to the swallows in the north wind's menace.

SOMETIMES Black Rover met old Urson, the porcupine—but long ago his mother had told him about Rattle-quill. Black Rover essayed no close acquaintance. Urson is only medium-sized; he is slower than the snails on the log, and nothing is sharp about him but his quills; but it is wise for all hunters, high and low, to pass him by. Urson's quills, although he cannot throw them, are detachable, and eat their way viciously into flesh. No wolf likes to die, ignominiously and in agony, many days after the thrill of the fight is dead.

Black Rover could creep along a lake shore to a flock of geese, sleeping in the sun, and snatch a mighty-winged honker in one savage leap. "Kill at one bite," is the old rule for goose-hunting—for the beating, flail-like wings of a wounded bird are weapons not to be despised. He caught ermine and gophers and all manner of the Little People—and one night he chased a full-grown coyote clear out of the district.

This was nothing compared to his triumph the dawn he met the lynx. The coyote was Black Rover's own poor relation—a notorious coward at whom the larger forest creatures snarl at with contempt; but a lynx, and a full-grown one at that, is so many pounds of scratching, clawing wild-fire. He had seen the time, in puppyhood, that he was glad enough to seek his mother's side when the lynx mewed in the darkness. His first impulse, when he met Tuft-ear on the trail, was to beat a precipitate retreat.

But for one little instant he hesitated, sizing up the situation. Lately he had experienced an increasing dislike at running away from any living thing. Some queer little hot flame inside of him, some swift urge of his blood that was almost rapture, was always urging him to stand his ground. The truth was that Black Rover had the blood of masters in him—the grandson of as noble a wolf as ever crossed over from the Asiatic side; and the idea of flight was inherently abhorrent to him. It wasn't as if he could retreat with grace, pretending to ignore the great, tawny cat. They had already met eye to eye.

Presently something exploded, like hot gases, in the wolf's breast. Live steam seemed to shoot all over him. He snarled and leaped forward like an arrow.

The lynx didn't noticeably linger. She spat, squeaked, hissed like a steam-engine, and leaped into the nearest spruce. And for full ten minutes Black Rover snarled about the trunk in triumph, the beginnings of a great conceit growing under his skin.

THERE were, however, plenty of creatures to take it out of him. He never contested the trail with the bull moose. Knowing legends in plenty, all with a sad end, of the power of these mighty front hoofs and many-pronged horns, he simply pretended not to see him. There are many things more healthful than waging battle with this mightiest of the deer.

The bull caribou, his white mane gleaming like snow itself, also had uncontested right of way; and Black Rover had only words of politeness for the grizzly bear. Yet the knowledge of their physical superiority did not in the least cost him his joy in hunting. Their presence rather tended to make life more interesting for him.

There are few creatures in the world that, previous to man's conquests, had solved the problem of living more successfully than the wolves. They had spread from the uttermost south to the boreal pole, and have come to be the very symbol of the wild—the representative breed. No creatures know the forest as the wolves know it, read its moods more clearly, or respond with greater fire to its passions. When all is said and done, the wolf-pack rules the wildwood—and even now Black Rover felt himself destined for sovereignty. When the night came down, tremulous and soft, and the wind brought a thousand smells a nose less keen could not interpret, when the forest was hushed and enthralled by a thousand little sounds, each one to speed the blood in the veins, a rapture past any imagining would creep over him.

THE months passed; the seasons changed; and ever the wild sent home its lessons. Again he knew the strange exultant call of the pack on the ridge, the haunting fear of the breaking winter, the desolate famine-times of the snow-swept world, the might of the blizzard and the roaring crash of the snowslide.

He took his place in the pack; and now, in his fourth year, he took a mature wolf's part in the hunt. He knew what it was to find the caribou spore, to bay in exultation on the trail, to run in relays, to cut off the quarry as it dashed about the lake shore, to bring it to bay at last against the cliff. He would thrill to his wild heart as old Swift-leap poised to spring—and his voice would rise in the far-carrying triumph-call of the old males when the quarry finally fell bleeding on the snow. He knew the stir of running with his fellows in the starlight along a snow-swept ridge, singing the oldest song that the world knows—that strange rising and falling chant of fear and despair that no man fully understands.

Every year found Black Rover larger, more powerful, more cunning and swift in hunting. It isn't common for a wolf to weigh in excess of a hundred pounds. In his fifth year he reached that figure, in the fall days of plenty, and fifty pounds besides. It was no longer a matter of concern to him when he met the caribou on the trail. As yet he did not believe himself capable of handling a caribou single-handed; yet he was keen enough to notice that even the mighty bulls yielded him the trail. Caribou calves and young cows were now his legitimate game.

IN this same fifth year there were momentous signs abroad in Clearwater. The bees worked late and early in the flowers, cloudy days and fair, as if a seer had told them that they would have need of brimming combs before the spring came again. The little digging people, in response to the same mysterious whisper, dug their burrows deep, and never rested until they were jammed full of winter stores. The moose moved early to the yarding grounds, and the wild-fowl, circling over lakes, uttered frightened cries.

Black Rover, the keenest brain in the forest, sensed only too plainly the ominous whisper in the wind. Already, before the fall was half done, a strange hush and suspense throbbed in the air, and even the masterless grizzly eyed uneasily the northern sky. Then, one late September dawn, days before the rightful time, the ptarmigan wakened to find they had the coverts to themselves.

The birds had all gone. Even the loons and the geese had left the lakes. That night the snow came, never to cease again until it had swept the land, from the barren tundras of the north to the settlements far to the south.

Ever so much too soon the tracks of the Little People—the burrowers and the lesser hunters—largely vanished from those far-stretching fields of white. The grouse burrowed in the snow; the grizzly himself sought his winter lair. And early in October, days before his wont, Swift-leap called his pack together on the ridge.

Already his wild, fierce eyes had seen a dread spirit stalking him over the snow. It was not near yet, but ever it walked closer: it was Famine, and the time of its triumph was near.

CHAPTER III

BUT Sergeant Jim Elden, on his way home from France aboard an army transport, had no mind or opportunity for such visions as this. He could only see one picture that enchanted his days and crept into his dreams at night. The spirits of famine and danger could not enter into *this*. Sergeant Jim was going home.

It was true that the home was yet to be built. But had not an Indian, a member of his own company, told him of a section of the richest meadow ever farmed to be had almost for the asking? The native had seen it on a cross-country journey of long before—and remembered it particularly because he had lost his hunting-knife on the ridge above! Jim Elden was going to homestead, and as soon as due preparations were made, he would head back.

Jim wouldn't go alone. Bess was waiting in the little frontier town of which they were both native, and they had always planned such a venture as this. Jim's picture was simply a cabin in a rich meadow between mighty mountains, smoke curling from a chimney, and some one slender and laughing in the doorway, waiting for him to come in from the fields.

THE early winter glory, born of strength and power, passed the pack by the winter of Jim's return. The very problem of living was a deadly business from the first. The forces of nature had seemingly gone into conspiracy against them.

At first great blizzards retarded their hunting, fretting the channels of the air

so that it was almost impossible to get a true scent, and obscuring even the nearer ridges from their sight. The ever-falling snow, sifting down with a merciless rhythm that was dreadful to the spirit of man and beast, never permitted the formation of that fragile crust so beloved by the pack—snow firm enough to uphold the light feet of wolves but breaking under the heavy step of caribou or moose. Besides, the game seemed utterly gone from Clearwater.

Hour after hour the gray band ranged the snowfields, fighting through the endless drifts; and scarcely ever did they make a kill. At first there was little outward change in the pack. The wolves are gluttonous eaters when occasion demands, but they also know how to starve. Perhaps the old veterans of the band looked slightly more gaunt; but for the first few weeks their strength was hardly impaired.

Again the famine-song rose and fell from the singing-place on the ridge, and every living unsheltered creature in the snow-wastes below listened in fear. The snowfall ceased at last, and through the pale-blue icy nights, lighted by glittering stars and a moon that seemed to have a razor-edge in the freezing sky, the pack hunted for game it could never find. Yet the wolves did not dare to rest. The worst madness of all had come upon them—the final breaking of all pack-law, which meant that the weaker wolves were no longer safe from the stronger.

A quiet wasting-away, with a comparatively peaceful death at the end, was never the fate of the wolves. As the weeks grew into the months, the famine began to take its toll, but in a more indirect manner. None of that gray band, from the weakest cub to the strongest three-year-old, died tamely. There was always a mighty fight—with the final, desperate strength born of the final fear—before every death.

To keep your feet—that was the law of life in the pack. To fall, to lie just an instant in the snow, brought the whole band pouncing down like demons—and then it was too late to rise. First the cubs, and then the yearlings, and then even some of the weaker females were slain and devoured by their fellows.

By the last of March the pack-strength was cut down to less than half. Perhaps nine wolves still ran the snow-swept ridges, a grim, shadow-like band like some demon-troop of legend. And now the famine-song no longer rose and fell over the desolate drifts. They were past that; they could only murmur and whine at visions brought by the madness of starvation. Strange yellow fires glowed ever in their fierce eyes.

OF the nine wolves that remained, two alone still retained most of their strength—Swift-leap the pack-leader, and Black Rover. Both had superior strength to start with, and both had managed to take more than their share of such meat as fell to the pack. Yet like all the rest they were desperate with hunger, seemingly ready to attack any living thing, no matter how fearful, that crossed their path. And the exigencies of the famine brought them to grips at last.

The battle broke like a mountain storm—in an instant. The pack had been weaving along the very crest of a high ridge, far above timber-line, in search of fresh caribou traces; and outwardly there was the closest unity and coöperation between the nine gaunt wolves that composed the band. It was easy to overlook the grim and ghastly fact that every wolf was watching every other, eyes luminous with madness and curiously intent. All at once Gray Lightning, the wiry little female with whom Black Rover had mated the previous fall, half slipped on the snow.

Swift-leap was just beside her, and his spring seemed only a continuation of her fall. The yellow sparks in his eyes flared up; his muscles snapped like steel springs, and his fangs flashed—straight for her throat. She had fallen, just for an instant; but starving wolves know no mercy for those that cannot keep their feet. The whole pack seemed to surge forward, so fast and so deadly that the sense of reality was destroyed, and they seemed rather like mechanical things, propelled from some weird machine of death.

They were never to see quite clearly why that first murderous blow of their leader did not go home. The eye of the wolf is fast, but now they were half-blind with blood-lust, and the thing that saved Gray Lightning was swifter still. Black Rover had leaped forward with his fellows, but he had leaped stronger and faster and farther. A great sable form, seemingly without the limitations of living flesh, sprang to intercept Swift-leap's attack.

There was no premeditation behind

the act. There was no time for it, in the first place. Black Rover had simply obeyed his instincts. And the thing went farther than the mere defense of the female by the male that is so often beheld in the animal world. There were various deductions to be made from the incident—deductions that Swift-leap, because he suddenly found himself fighting for his life, and the pack-fellows, because they knew that some measure of food awaited them at the battle's end—had no time or inclination to draw.

One of them was that Black Rover was obviously not so weakened and maddened by the famine as was most of his fellows. It is a dreadful fact, having few counterparts even in the world of beasts, but one that few naturalists attempt to deny—that even the basic relationships of mates are forgotten when famine is on the pack. It was not the expected thing for Black Rover to spring to her defense. According to the usual grim procedure of the pack, he would have sprung to add his fangs to the work of tearing out her life.

The act implied a fidelity not often found among the wild creatures. Individuals of one breed of animals, the same as human beings, vary greatly from one another; and in this case the variation raised him far above the level of his fellows. It was the kind of thing that, appearing often enough, leads to the evolution of more noble species. He had kept faith, and in wolves or dogs or men, this is the greatest thing of all.

BLACK ROVER did not stop to consider that he was engaging in deadly combat with the gray, old pack-leader himself. This was no untried cub. Swift-leap was a proven veteran of ten winters, he knew every wile of battle; his thews were like steel, and his leap was as a thrown blade. In weight he was perhaps inferior to Black Rover, but surely his cunning made up for it. For his followers it seemed simply a matter of waiting, patiently as possible, until Black Rover should lie for their pleasure in the snow.

Black Rover himself had never dreamed until that instant of challenging Swift-leap. He was only four years old; he knew that in experience and likely in craft he was but a cub compared to this gaunt old monarch of the snows. But it was too late to back out now. To fight till he died was his fate.

The lesser wolves that had sprung forward to be in at Gray Lightning's death met with a shock, snarled in unison—a sharp, savage sound—whirled, then drew back. And almost at once they found themselves in a ring with the two antagonists in the center.

Youth against age—as ever they were standing front to front. And the gaunt spectators knew—as they watched, fiery-eyed, every flash of fangs—that rarely indeed had the wintry mountains beheld the death-fight of two such noble wolves as these.

CHAPTER IV

THE scene where Swift-leap fought Black Rover was perfectly in accord with the savage grandeur of the battle itself. These were the high Selkirks, range on range swept with dazzling snow, and the two had met on the very crest of one of the lofty ridges. As far as their keen eyes could reach, they could see one range rising behind another, still snowy valleys between, gleaming glaciers, and far, far below, the snow-draped woodland. The winter sun was pale and yellow on the ice, bringing out the savage figures in vivid outline.

Black Rover's first leap carried him straight toward Swift-leap's throat; and the battle would have ended quickly enough if those sharp fangs had gone home. But the pack-leader was schooled against surprise attack. Only too well he knew the hatred that some of his fellows bore him, and throughout all the years of his leadership he had been on guard against this very thing. As in the world of men, he who leads must risk, and he who in power relaxes vigilance soon finds himself superseded. For all his weight and age, Swift-leap sprang aside as lightly as a fluttering ribbon evades the hand.

There could be no greater proof of the veteran's prowess. This was not the act of one whom old age was about to claim, whose day was done and whose powers were failing. Rather it showed a marvelous muscle-control, an absolute discipline of nerves and a hair-trigger recoil that the swiftest yearling might envy. And his wise old pack-fellows, watching with hungry eyes, saw the act and gave it credit.

As he sprang aside, his fangs flashed down like white steel blades whirling in the air. From his position he could not send home a vital bite; yet the fangs ripped the flesh from the other's shoulder. The pack yelled, surging one leap nearer.

The snow slowly reddened; and the little mountain winds took the wild, maddening blood-smell and blew it to the keen senses of the watching wolves. It seemed to set them on fire, but the time of glory wasn't yet. Black Rover still kept his feet.

For a single second they faced each other, snarling, but now all but the oldest and the wisest of the spectators, and perhaps, in her female hope, Gray Lightning herself—thought that Swift-leap had already shown himself unquestionably the master. The old king-wolf shared this same delusion, and he came with bold assurance as he sprang in again. For all his bulk and strength, his opponent was only a youngster,—hardly full grown and untried to battle,—and surely the fight need last but a second more. Swift-leap sprang fiercely and straight, with all his power, intending to rip out the jugular vein in one swift, true bite.

BUT at that instant Swift-leap wakened to learn that he had been too hasty in his conclusions. It wouldn't be such a simple, expeditious affair, after all. The pack also—savage old fight-fans that they were—felt that they had settled the matter too swiftly. There was nothing to do but give over the hope of an immediate repast.

Black Rover met that fierce assault not with flight or evasion, but with a ferocious counter-attack. His frame seemed to snap up, and his own body met that of the pack-leader full in the air.

The thing was unbelievable to the watching wolves. Swift-leap's spring was like a launched arrow, the head of a serpent from the ledge, and yet in that fraction of a second that his muscles contracted, Black Rover had gathered himself to meet the blow. Nor was it merely a move of defense. He not only lurched forward, but he came with power, and the two seemed to strike with equal velocity. The next instant they were fighting furiously, neither having the advantage, in the blood-stained snow.

The watching wolves crept nearer. The pungent smell of blood seemed to be setting them on fire. The pale sun slipped in and out of filmy clouds, and the chill winds swept the ridge-top with clouds of snow-dust.

Almost at once it became evident that a new power had risen in the Clear-water pack. Black Rover was such a wolf as lives in legend—one of the true breed; and the old males, never presuming to contest Swift-leap themselves, watched him with ever-growing excitement. Had the grizzled old patriarch met his match at last?

Black Rover was stronger—that much was sure. His heavy frame contained even more steel than the gaunt, steel-wire body of the leader. He was heavier, and he knew how to put his full might into his assaults. Black Rover was swifter too. In the most hard-fought battles that the oldest wolf had ever seen, there had never been such lightning recoils, such unbelievable agility of movement. Swift-leap could cover up in time to avoid the slashing assaults, but his own attacks were met with a peculiar side-lash that he could neither checkmate nor turn aside. And slowly the conviction grew that, for all his youth, Black Rover was as cunning a wolf as ever ran the highlands. The one thing in which he was deficient was experience. Would this handicap more than counterbalance his own advantage of strength and agility?

LUNGING, slashing, recoiling; breathless seconds of truce when each sought a new opening; circling, then lunging to slash again—this was the battle on the ridge-top. Through all the far-flung wilderness there was no more savage picture: the gaunt gray forms of the wolves watching with lurid eyes from their silent ring, the wastes of snow, the celestial beauty of the far sunlit peaks. Flashing fangs and red, hateful eyes, wrenching muscles; and already the snow turned scarlet underfoot: the monarchs of the wild in combat!

Ever they fought with greater fury. Seemingly they had merely been testing each other out at first: now they were putting their full might into the struggle. The wolves no longer watched in silence. The hair stood stiff on their powerful shoulders; they growled in savagery; and now they were pacing back and forth like caged creatures, half-insane with excitement. Ever the combatants were taking

greater risks, leaping farther and more fiercely even at the risk of exposing their own throats to a death-bite.

These were not good tactics for Swift-leap; but Black Rover forced him into them. The pack-leader's forte was to rely on his greater mastery of the art of fighting, to cover up and permit his foe to exhaust himself, then to kill him at his ease—never to put mere strength and agility to test against this younger, stronger, more agile antagonist. But Black Rover rushed him too hard. No trick of his could protect him against the fury of the other's onslaughts: his only chance was to meet this leaping, slashing demon on his own ground.

They were no longer sparring for time. The issue had got down to a simple matter of who would be the first to land a death-blow. They no longer attempted to protect themselves from side and flank attacks. Both of them took frightful punishment, but already the battle was drawing to its tremendous crisis.

They were fighting for their lives, and neither was holding back one little ounce of energy, saving one little muscle. Each knew what mercy he might expect from the other, and from the watching, blood-mad pack. Hard had they fought for life through all the weeks of famine; and death was a dread darkness they dared not face. Time after time the watching wolves, thinking they saw the end, leaped forward with a yell; but always the mighty recoil of his powerful body brought the fallen to his feet again.

But Swift-leap could not stand the test of strength and agility alone. In the wild, pell-mell battle he had no chance to call upon his ancient wile—and the fight ended suddenly, as it began. They had been leaping farther and farther; and presently Swift-leap had sprung too far.

The whip of a dark body, the flash of cruel fangs—and then a scarlet flood surging out upon the snow. Black Rover sprang clear, then braced himself against possible attack by the pack. The lesser wolves, however, needed no further proof of Black Rover's prowess. They were mad with the smell of blood and the lust of battle, but they were glad enough to give him free berth. Wolves that they were, they sprang upon the fallen.

Old Swift-leap, tried and gray, had led his pack along the ridges for the last time. But who could bewail his fate? He had come to a fighting end, after a glorious battle with a worthy rival of his own breed. White fangs had laid him low, not cold steel! He had fallen as the forest gods might have fittingly ordained, by the laws of the wild rather than ignominiously in a frontiersman's trap. Would his victor be as fortunate in the times of stress and danger that were to come?

CHAPTER V

LOST in the spruce forest, at the very end of the little road that wound up from the river landing, stood the settlement of Snowy Gulch, the jump-off to the unexplored wilds to the north and east. A little row of unpainted shacks, a rough church,—by its cross and spire evidently one of the parishes of the far-spread Church of England,—a street where the snow lay deep: this was all there was to tell that men had come with their cold steel and had gained a foothold. And one clear morning in April most of its sixty or seventy people were gathered about the door of the rough frontier inn.

They were dressed as befitted a ten-below-zero temperature; but they were laughing and jesting among themselves in defiance to the cold. This fact alone would have mystified an old bull moose that might have been peering down from the top of the brushy hill at the end of the street. The wild creatures cannot laugh. They know excitement, the joy of mating days, and in the case of the beasts of prey the wild rapture of the hunt; but the hand of Manitou is too heavy upon them to let them laugh. The very travail of existence is too great. It is true that certain of the more intelligent creatures possess an unmistakable sense of humor—for instance the old black bear that every naturalist loves; yet not even Woof can really laugh. And the moose would have been puzzled still further had he known that the man in the crowd who laughed most easily and happily had seemingly less cause of all.

Evidently the gathering was in farewell to him; and he was about to start forth on some expedition to the interior. Yet his friends did not seem in the least surprised at his high spirits. They knew this man, his breed and the strength of his thews, and it was to be expected that he would

find a grim pleasure in such a journey as this: on snowshoes across the interminable wastes when the winter desolation still lay over the land. He was dressed for travel, and he stood at the head of a hand-sled packed full of supplies.

"So you're off at last, Jim," one of the older men said. "I'd think at least you'd wait till spring."

"Boy, I want to be there, and have my wickiup up and my wood cut before its time to seed," was the genial reply. "Lord knows the growin' season is plenty short in this climate! I aint got any time to burn."

PEOPLE naturally liked Jim Elden's voice. It was deep, manly, and as is the case of many men who know the open places of nature rather than the shadowed cañons of city streets, it had an unmistakable quality of kindness. It wasn't a loud voice. Men who know the great silences rarely speak loudly. The man's face only strengthened the impression given by his voice.

He was about thirty-three years of age, and his rather gaunt form gave no immediate image of strength. The power that dwelt in those dangling arms was never discovered at first; and sometimes—as was from time to time the case with certain self-styled supermen whom he had met abroad—not until too late to make amends. Nor would he have taken any prizes in a dancing academy. His face did not in the least resemble that of a Greek god—and Jim Elden would have probably fought like a tiger if anyone had told him that it did. Rather he looked like a healthy farm-hand who could wield a hoe or load a rack with hay in record time. His brow was erect and good, wrinkled a little, perhaps, and brown as leather; and his eyes never seemed quite to lose their good-humored twinkle. The leanness of his form extended into his face, revealing his cheek-bones and the strong tendons of his neck.

"You aint goin' to try to raise a crop this year?" some one asked him.

Jim laughed again, cheerily. "Not much of one; that's sure. But I've made arrangements with Bud Fairfax to bring up a team late next month and help me plant a garden and a few acres o' hay—enough to feed the team all year. I'll have to depend on the traps for a few years, of course. Meanwhile I'll be drainin' the land, cuttin' out the spruce-clumps, and improvin' the place." He turned with a smile that was singularly winning and boyish to the girl who was pushing toward him from the door of the inn. "Bess, are we ready to go?"

NO one could make any mistake about Bess. She was his mate—any other destiny for her was simply inconceivable. She was a slender girl, but her slenderness did not conceal a womanly strength and abounding, perfect health. She had a girlish mouth around which a little smile ever flickered and danced; gray eyes that were bright and laughing under straight, fine brows; soft dark hair; and brown, capable little hands. There were girls in plenty in the world of more classic beauty, but none that went so straight home to Jim! She was a pretty, cheery, capable girl who could lend her fine young strength to the man she loved—and she was Jim Elden's happiness, now and forever.

She too was dressed warmly, in a set of dark furs Ben had taken from his own traps, and the brisk cold had brought a high color to her cheeks. Still chattering with her friends, she took her place at the rear of the sled.

At that instant a curious silence fell over the little gathering. They *were* going, after all—mushing away into the virgin interior to hew out a home in the wilds! What struggle, what toil, how many disappointments and dangers would be theirs before the townspeople saw their faces again? And if they won—what then? Nothing rich or glorious—only a humble home in fertile fields, green things growing, and the smoke curling from the chimney of a home.

For one little second, perhaps, the townsmen saw in this departure something significant and epic beyond any power of words. It was nothing new—the farewell to pioneers at the frontier inn. It was true that these were the first to attempt to tame the desolate wastes of Clearwater, but all through the nation's history the best and bravest men had done the same. Always they had pushed on to the new frontier. For the instant these two were the very symbol of the mighty, marching spirit of mankind—that ancient greatness that has given man his dominance of the earth!

"You're really going?"

It was an incredulous voice, that of an old man who had reached and taken Bess' hand. Yet he was a man of thews, too. He was gray; he had seen sixty winters in the North; yet his grip was strong and his eye steady.

The girl smiled. "We're really going, Dad," she told him cheerily. "Don't worry about me."

"Hadn't—hadn't you and Jim better think about it all a little longer?" he asked hesitatingly, quietly, so that few of the crowd could hear. "Your mother and I—we went to the frontier the same way. It's work, Bess—from dawn to dark sometimes; and it's danger, and endless difficulties—and never riches, only a decent living."

Quietly Jim stepped to his wife's side, and for an instant his big brown hand rested at her waist. "Let me tell him, Bess," he said. He turned, his eyes meeting those of the older man. "Tell me this, Pop," he said slowly. "If you had it all to do over—wouldn't you do the same again?"

The older man hesitated. "If I had it all to do over, I wouldn't know how hard it was—so of course I would. You don't know, either—but I can tell you easy enough, now. Jim, if you and Bess would go to the cities, you might find something easy—maybe even get rich—and not have to work with your hands—"

"There's none too many jobs for them that wants to stay in the cities," Jim replied quietly. "But you aint answered me yet. Supposin' you had known—everything that faced you—wouldn't you have gone just the same?"

The two men eyed each other, and the older man's thoughts were flowing back to the glorious, mighty battles of his own young days. Then a grin slowy widened over his weather-beaten cheeks.

"You've got me down, son," he answered. "I 'spose if I was young enough, I'd be hittin' off with you today."

"Course you would. I knew your old insides hadn't weakened none. I'd hate to see it hard for Bess, but I'll make it as easy for her as I can. We wont mind work—will we, honey?"

Bess looked up, her eyes strangely luminous. "I like work—when I'm doin' somethin' that counts."

"She's said it," Jim went on. "We're tryin' to do somethin' that counts—build a home and raise crops. Some one's got to raise 'em—there's more mouths to feed in the world every day, and some one's got to go out and break the land. That might as well be me, I reckon, as anyone else. There's goin' to be a trail out there sometime, then a good road, and then we'll be settin' pretty, first on deck. Besides—"

Jim hesitated, and the old man grinned again. "Besides—you like it!" he added. "Jim, I know you from your hairy old skin to your gizzard! You want to go partly to build a home, and partly because you've got an old devil in you that wont stay put. You've got to smell the spruce and see moose-meat hangin' beside your door. Well, good-by kids—and plenty o' luck!"

Gayly the two adventurers started with their sled down the snowy village street.

CHAPTER VI

IT could not be that Jim and Bess could mush four days over the desolate wastes and not learn something of the dangers and difficulties that Bess' father had promised for them. They made their way by the slow process of exploration, and only the tried woodsman knows the meaning of the word! They knew what it was to seek their way over silent, snow-swept plateaus where the feet of white men had never trod, to fight across "down timber," to come into camp so tired that it was hard to care whether a fire was built or not. Yet for all their own secret fears of what the next hour might bring forth, they had only words of encouragement and optimism for each other. Such is the unwritten law of the trail.

These were the forerunners. In their own stumbling way they were, perhaps, laying out the highway for the years to come. They were the empire-builders—no less than the great financiers that might sometime lay rails of steel. If they won in their venture, if they kept their feet in the battle with the wilderness and established their homestead, sometime a hard-packed trail would follow where they had led; it would later be widened to a road, and Clearwater would be simply part of the domain of man. But it was easy enough to fail. The grizzly might yet measure his length on their blazed trees, wondering who had passed that way and why they never came again.

It soon became evident that they had severed all ties with even the far-scattered outskirts of civilization. Until the Government could be induced to build a trail,—an impossibility until Clearwater had been proven a "white man's country,"—communication would be a matter of the greatest difficulty. The ranges that lay between were not piled up to climb and pass in a day. Besides, there were wide-spread beaver-marshes that would be practically impenetrable except when gray with ice; there would be mighty rivers, and miles of brush thicket that only the deep mantle of snow enabled them to pass with ease. Yet these were the pioneers, and this was their life.

They found out what it was to rely on a tent and a fire to fight off the fatal cold of the northern winter. They learned something of the climate in general, and Jim made at least one momentous discovery in regard to the season in particular. He noticed, even the first day, the scarcity of tracks in the snow.

"Bess, I don't know where the animals have all skinned out to," he observed. "But I know one thing—"

Bess turned and faced him. "Yes?"

"That there's some beasties goin' mighty hungry upon these ridges this year. It looks to me like a year of famine for the wolves."

FOUR days they fought their way through the drifts, and never gave a thought to turning back. For all the hardship and their little disappointments and tragedies, they found plenty of things to laugh at; they had little triumphs that carried them high-hearted throughout hours of bitter toil; and because they were of the frontier breed, they found a delight and a thrill in the wintry grandeur of the silences through which they moved. And they made it through at last.

The Red Gods never doubted but that they would. Jim and Bess were of a breed that, as long as a chance remains, almost always make it through. They came at last to a treeless valley—a full section where, in large meadow-tracts, the snow lay an even sheet, smooth as the white coverings of a housewife's bed—fringed by the dark, snow-draped spruce. As might the Puritans of old, the two pioneers halted in the trail, gazing with exultant hearts and bated breath over the fields that were to be.

The Indian had not exaggerated when he had described the place. The land lay between low hills; a stream flowed through, and the great range to the north mostly protected them from the bitter winter winds. Where the creek-bed had cut deep, Jim brushed away the snow from the banks—and what he beheld made him roar like a moose with delight. The free soil, black and rich, went down fifteen feet to the very bed of the stream.

There was draining to do in plenty, and acres of brush to clear and burn, but neither of these things appalled him in the least. And as soon as the tent was erected, he went to the edge of the glade to cut the first logs for his cabin.

There are few more distinctive, far-carrying sounds than the ring of an ax in the arms of a powerful man against green timber. The sound reëchoed over hill and valley, snow-sweep and frozen marsh, intriguing a bull caribou on the heights, arresting a marten in his hunt for ptarmigan in the snow. Slowly it dimmed, until it was merely a single staccato note pricking sharply through the still air. And so dim that only the faintest tremor remained of it, far too faint for any less-marvelous hearing-mechanism than that of the wild-creatures, the starving wolf-pack heard it in a still, far-distant valley.

Every wolf seemed to freeze in his tracks, muzzle pointing toward the sound, ears straining, luminous eyes gazing over the snow-swept fastnesses. No physiologist may tell how any living organism could perceive sound so far. And their strange beast-memories, more infallible than any memory of man, unrolled the long, wild script of their forest-experiences to give some sort of an interpretation.

THEY knew the natural wood-sounds, these gray rangers of the snow. They knew the ringing blare of the bull moose in rutting days, the plaintive note of his cow, the grunt of the caribou, and even that most rare of forest voices,—one that naturalists may spend a lifetime in the forest without ever hearing,—the wild, disconsolate crystal-clear bugle-note of an old grizzly forced into the oblivion and darkness of his winter lair by the cold and the drifts and his hunger. But this was none of these sounds. It had no counterpart of any wilderness articulation they had ever heard. The hair stood stiff on their necks, and their lips drew in a snarl!

It was something beyond them, something mysterious and dreadful that was wholly out of the bourne of their wilderness life. It set up a curious train of thoughts, disquieting and vaguely fearful, in their brute minds. Black Rover found himself recalling, in some vague way, an incident of his second year—the finding of something mysterious and alien thrust into the wood of a spruce-tree on a distant ridge. The sound had a ringing note, like nothing in the whole life-experience of the pack: it was hard, sharp, not tempered and mellow like the native forest voices. But not even Black Rover, the most cunning of the pack, guessed the truth.

The sound was that of Cold Steel—the symbol and scepter of man's dominance.

PRESENTLY the instincts of the pack took a different turn. This was no time to disregard strange sounds. It was the voice of no living creature that they knew—*but anything that lived must not be ignored!* When their bellies were full and the season was verdant, it was time to take the way of discretion and flee from such baffling sounds as this! But these were the days of famine.

These were creatures of cunning and intelligence, and they had at least some dark and misty knowledge of what the future had in store for them if the famine persisted. They were on their last legs, and they knew it. *Death*—that was what stalked them on these unpeopled ridges. Could the least chance be overlooked? Was not the pack-strength ever less, and the cold and darkness of oblivion ever nearer? This was no time to follow the usual paths of caution. Even a coward will take a fighting chance if no other way remains. The wolves suddenly turned their fierce, famine-lighted eyes to their leader.

But it was a curious fact that Black Rover himself, ordinarily the bravest wolf in the band, was the most appalled of all by the puzzling sounds. He suddenly knew, in secret ways, that the voice that spoke so sharp and clear in that far-off valley was the most deadly and terrible foe the pack had ever faced. Perhaps his intelligence went farther, possibly it was merely a matter of more keen perceptions. But Black Rover trembled as he listened, and for a moment the pack waited for him in vain.

No naturalist can say how far the beast-intelligence really goes. What thought glimmer in the dark minds of such creatures as these, what laws they follow, what obligations and impulses control their conduct, is a mystery as inscrutable as the floor of the deepest ocean or the dim origins of life. It can not be doubted, however, that Black Rover knew some sense of responsibility to the pack that he led. In the very springs of his being he knew that their lives were mainly dependent upon his—and perhaps he also knew that they would turn upon him in an instant if they lost faith. He lifted his nose for the dimmest message that the wind might bring him; then slowly, rather reluctantly, he turned down toward the source of the sound.

His famished pack, already thrilled by a savage hope, trotted quietly behind him.

AT the door of the tent and flushed by the camp-fire's glow, Bess Elden prepared a little surprise for her husband, working at the edge of the forest. It was a long tramp back across the snowy fields to the tent, and she had simply decided to prepare his lunch and carry it to him where he worked. It would be pleasant, she thought, to sit in the pale winter sunlight on some great log from which he had scraped the snow, and to talk over their prospects together.

She had broiled him a moose-steak and baked light biscuits in the reflector-tins; then she coated the latter with marmalade. Wrapping the food into a parcel, she started on her snowshoes across the half-mile of prairie and thicket.

She had gone halfway across the clearing when she suddenly found herself listening in vain for the sound of Jim's ax. Peering closely, she tried to make out his form in the fringe of timber, but she could only see the spruce trees, each with its load of snow. She was inexplicably startled when, searching back through the moments, she realized that she had not heard him at work since before her departure from the tent.

Of course his absence could be easily explained. Perhaps he was exploring the farther end of the valley: more likely still he had caught a glimpse of game and was trying to get a shot. Yet the snow-fields were unutterably bleak and desolate without him. They vaguely appalled her.

She hurried on. Now she was within a

thousand feet of the fringe of timber. Then she halted, undeniably shaken, in the snowy waste.

It seemed to her that her quick senses had caught the glimpse of a dark figure among the farther trees. It was only a glimpse—just a vanishing flash; and yet she found herself vaguely fearful as to what manner of creature it was. She didn't presume an instant that she had merely caught an instant's sight of Jim. Only the wild things have that fleeting, furtive quality of motion that reveals them and hides them again in the wink of an eye. It was just a shadow, yet curiously sharp in outline, that for an instant stood in relief against the snow.

Yet surely there was not the least cause for alarm. She was a northern girl; she had lived off and on in the forests since she was able to toddle; and she knew perfectly well that not one time out of a thousand are the creatures of the wild dangerous to man. They know the cold steel, and they give it wide berth.

It is true that in the rutting season the bull moose, once in a man's lifetime, will charge a hunter on sight. Perhaps he mistakes the man's tall form for that of another bull on whom he can wreak his ill temper: more likely still he is simply in a fighting mood, with death in his antlers for any living thing that crosses his path. But the rutting season had died with the last days of fall. The moose were no more to be feared than cattle. The venerable grizzly who, particularly when wounded, has sometimes declared war on men, was deep asleep in his winter lair. Likely the thing she had seen was just a fox, hunting for willow grouse, or perhaps a wolverine or otter, hunting along the frozen stream.

BESIDES—there was not the least advantage in turning back. The only shelter behind her was the thin walls of the tent: her husband had carried the rifle on his arm when he had gone out to work. And she was woodswoman enough to know that safety lies in the deep forest rather than the open brushlands. The larger hunters of the northern wildernesses are unable to follow their prey into trees.

But she couldn't laugh at her own fears. The air was so still, so crisp and cold, so vaguely charged with a sense of impending danger. How far the snow stretched! As far as she could see, over mountain and forest, lay the glistening deserts of snow. Resolved, however, not to yield to such vague and imaged apprehensions, she did not attempt to hurry her step. In a moment she would see the tall form of her husband—and he would laugh at her dismay.

But that reassuring sight was not in store for her, as her eyes probed farther between the spruce trees. Nor did she hear him laugh. The sound that suddenly rolled out to her, in mighty waves, was as far from Jim's laugh as the night was from day. It was the very antithesis of love and happiness: rather the dreadful voice of the wilderness itself, in which laughter never comes and the only joy is the savage blood-lust of the beasts of prey.

The snowfields had been deeply silent before. Not a twig moved under its load of snow; the soft crunch of her own snowshoes was the only breadth of sound in the forest. This new sound seemed to burst upon and overwhelm the silence, a sudden fierce yell that shattered the air.

Not for one instant did she mistake its meaning. Many times before she had heard the wolf-pack running the ridges: she knew, as far as human knowledge goes, the full, unhappy meaning of its songs. This wolf-pack was hunting; there was no other possible interpretation. Nor do wolves yell when the trail is cold. As a rule they only utter that deep, far-carrying bay—a clear, tremendous note as of a mighty bugle, and charged with all the hunting-fury of the most savage hunters in all the wild—in the very last moment of the chase, *when the quarry is actually in sight.*

Because she was a woman, her first thought was for the man who held her heart—somewhere in the dark forests in front. Yet at once she knew she need not fear for him. He was well-armed; there were trees in plenty for him to climb. She halted, as if frozen, a single instant. Then she started to turn back across the brushwood.

But instantly the full control of her faculties swept back to her. Her nerves seemed quiet, waiting for the command of the brain, her muscles set in readiness. She was trained to crises, this girl of the forest, and her cool, ever-watchful underconsciousness came quickly to possession.

She must not turn back toward the tent.

It was fully seven hundred yards away. If indeed the dreadful worst was true, there would not be the slightest chance of reaching its shelter until the ravening pack would be upon her. The fire was dying at the tent-mouth: it would not likely hold at bay the starving band. On the other hand the wolf-pack was still within the fringe of the forest; she might yet reach the shelter of its nearer trees.

It took all the cold courage that frontiersmen ancestors had implanted in her to hasten directly toward the source of that frenzied yell. Instinct—faithless so often—would have carried her into helplessness, back across the snow. Her muscles responded with all their youthful power, and she mushed at a swift pace toward the dark spruce.

Her eyes searched the tree-lanes for the sight of the wolves, but the underbrush hid them. Had they paused? Another moment, and she would be safe. Perhaps, running on the trail of game, they had merely passed near to her and had already sped on and away. Her experience told her that in all probability the wolves were at that instant fleeing from her in wild panic.

Yet a terrible image persisted—an overtone that some subtler keener side of herself had heard in the hunting-yell of an instant before. She was shaken and terrified at the realization that the very voice of Famine had sounded in the call. It was a frenzied utterance, charged with desperate courage, thrilling with savage hope. And the pack that is starving forgets even its fear of men.

She sped on. All at once the pack burst into view. Yelling, they came straight toward her, wholly cutting off her escape into the forest.

CHAPTER VIII

THE first wolf to leap into the open was the sable leader of the pack, Black Rover; but he drew to a sliding halt at the close view of the quarry. Somehow, the sight of the tall form before him, the white face and the straight-out eyes, sent an icy wave of fear through all the nervous channels of his frame. A strange smell was upon her, similar to that he had experienced when the lighting made a yellow, dancing pillar of a tree, and he felt baffled. This was not the caribou, meeting him on common grounds, or even the mighty grizzly that has right-of-way on the trails. It was a more fearful foe than either.

Gray Lightning, the female, was just beside him, but her leap carried her farther into the open. The other wolves sprang beside her. But it was true that they received no such image of fear as had their leader. Their strength had never been that of Black Rover; they had succumbed to a greater degree to the madness of famine, and they had simply forgotten the meaning of fear. It was possible, also, that their perceptions were less keen. They only halted now because Black Rover had done so, and another instant would see them launched into the attack.

It was well enough to follow the leader in ordinary hunting. In the days of plenty, the leader's will was their own. But laws were impotent now—and the game was before them, ready for their fangs. Nothing held now—only the frantic craving of their starved bodies remained. It was the end of the hunt, and here was living flesh.

The blood of every wolf scalded through his veins like molten metal. Then they went creeping across the snow.

A THOUSAND feet back in the timber, seeking a shot at a caribou that had trotted past him, Jim Elden heard the first wild chorus of the running pack. It was never written that human beings, with ordinary human limitations, could go on with ordinary pursuits when the hunting song rocked through the forest. The ancient apprehension swept over him, and he paused in his tracks.

But his fears took no definite form at first. Of course the pack was running game—they would likely plunge deep into the forest in an instant. He had full trust in the rifle in the hollow of his arm, and any one of the towering trees would give him shelter. Yet there was a ghastly quality of madness in the call, and it crept through the veins like great cold. . . . . Then he thought of Bess.

No man can measure the speed of thought in a crisis. Seemingly the instant that he remembered Bess, he had launched into the fastest gait that was possible for snowshoes, straight toward the clearing. In the twinkling of an eye the whole truth had gone home—how he had left his wife in a flimsy tent, and that he carried in his arms the only weapon they possessed.

It was only a chance that the pack

might molest her, but that chance was the source of the most cruel and devastating moment of terror Jim had ever known. The webbed shoes on his feet seemed to have wings. But before half the distance was covered Jim knew the full, dreadful truth. Clear through the silences he heard Bess' high-pitched scream for help.

EVEN at the sight of the leaping wolves, Bess knew that her only shadow of a chance was to head bravely on toward the timber. The thews of her womanhood had never been put to a harder test. There is no more appalling sight in the whole wilderness world than the onslaught of these gaunt gray demons of the snow; yet she knew she must face them to the last. To attempt to flee was to die: there could be no other outcome. They would overtake her in an instant in the snow. On the other hand, if she could hold them off for the space of a moment, cow them into a few seconds' hesitation, she might reach the forest and the shelter of a tree. She cried out once for help, a sound that leaped forth without the conscious impulse of her will, and then, shouting loudly, she tried to frighten the pack from the path.

But even as she shouted, this one last frail hope flickered out like a feeble flame. The wolves could not be turned aside by shouts alone. The cow-caribou at bay made appalling sounds too, but she fell easily before their fangs! The final, desperate courage of starvation was upon them, and they merely snarled in answer, ever drawing nearer.

Already she could see their fangs gleaming with the whiteness of the snow itself, and the lurid glowings of madness in their fierce eyes. There were nine in the band —and only the fangs of one would be needed. Cautiously, but with unswervable intent, they formed in a ring about her.

It did not even occur to Bess that there was further use to hope. She was of the wilderness, and she knew the remorseless ways of the open places. Her shout broke in a great, racking sob, but already the fear of death was giving way to those strange, last images of the lost. In those grim seconds when the pack lessened their circle and drew nearer, she saw the erect spruce trees in their shrouds of snow, the far beauty of the peaks, the desolate stretching wastes over which a faint smoke-cloud from her fire drifted faintly blue. In that instant she remembered Jim and all their plans and hopes—the miracle that the fall would have brought to them, the promise that was blighted and the prayers that were betrayed.

Thereafter she was no longer aware of fear. Every thought that her mind could hold was of Jim—the strong man who gave her all and to whom she had given all. It was hard to leave him—at the very dawn of their great adventure. He would wipe the woods free of wolves in vengeance—but she prayed that he would not grieve too long. . . . . She dropped to her knees.

THE prayer at her lips was not in hope of life, but only that the first wolf might leap true and clean, with oblivion falling after. So often the pack lingered over its prey. . . . . The first of the band was almost in leaping range already. One motion now, from her, would hurl the great beast toward her throat. The others—except for the greatest of them all that still hovered at the shadow of the forest—were just behind.

Wholly lost to hope, she gave no thought to the curious sound that reached her from the timber, as of many repeated impacts on the snow. They were nearing at a breakneck pace—but of course it was only the tramp of other wolves, coming to aid their fellows. On her knees, gazing with horrified fascination into the eyes of the nearest of the pack, she couldn't tell for sure. . . . . The sound had ceased, now, anyway.

But at that instant a great wolf before her crumbled into a shuddering, impotent heap in the snow. She saw its gushing blood before ever she interpreted the sharp report from the fringe of forest. She rose up, shrieking: she saw the two foremost wolves of the remaining band fling themselves, maddened by the scarlet fountain, upon the body of the fallen. One of the others sprang toward her, but battling again for life, she whipped to one side and the gleaming fangs only caught her garments. Then the rifle spoke again.

The bewilderment of the instant before passed from her at the second shot, and she knew the truth. Jim had come to her aid. Even now he was standing at the fringe of timber, his nerves in icy discipline, and firing with remorseless and certain aim into the floundering pack. Henceforth she gave herself wholly to the effort of avoiding the fighting, leaping wolves until the rifle had delivered her from peril.

She did not have to consider the possibility of being hit with a stray bullet. The man was shooting where he looked, straight as light-rays, with never a false motion. Men never had to worry about wild-flying lead when Jim Elden was the man behind the gun. The second wolf fell kicking, and the third, with equal promptness, followed the second.

From then on, the scene was of the wildest confusion. Two of the remaining five had pounced on the fallen; the rest were facing the timber, stricken to their wild hearts with terror at this new and undreamed-of foe that spoke death at them across the drifts. Jim was firing at a distance of fifty yards—and a miss was not in him at that range. The fourth wolf died, and now Bess was fleeing toward her deliverer, with only one wolf in pursuit. The fifth shot shattered the life from him in one strangled cry.

Only three of the eight were left; and bewildered, they attempted flight across the open fields. Yet the rifle never rested in Jim's arms. The glory of battle was upon him now, and still his cold gray eyes glittered along the sights. The sixth wolf died, and Jim slipped more shells into his rifle magazine.

The seventh shot was aimed at the most distant of the two wolves; and it clipped the hair at his flank. But he was not to live to tell the story of that shot to his cubs in the lair. He was still within three hundred yards, and Jim's arm was never steadier. The last of the eight followed him into oblivion in a moment more.

But there had been nine in the pack, and only eight had fallen. The greatest of them all did not lie among his fellows; and weakened at last at what might have been, and kneeling on the snow at Bess' hands, the remorseless rifleman had no time or thought to seek him out. With a fear born of a more penetrating intelligence, the great sable leader of the pack had not taken part in the attack, and in the second of crisis Jim had passed him by. Now he sped up the ridge at his fastest pace, the lesson of cold steel planted deep in his soul.

CHAPTER IX

THOUGH Black Rover had missed Jim's bullets, the famine was still waiting for him when he got to the ridge top. Its terror was greater than ever now. Running alone, only the lesser creatures could be taken as game—and mostly they were hidden under the snow. The icy grip of the night closed down; the snow in the moonlight was the hue of cold steel itself; and the sable wolf knew Fear as he had never known it before.

A shadow of himself ran beside him like the specter of death, and it filled him with haunting dread. Even the familiar trees were fearful tonight, and the pressing, eerie silence seemed a spell that he dared not break. . . . . He crushed back the disconsolate cry of despair that rose in his throat.

Apparently there was nothing to hunt or to kill in the mountains of Clearwater. All the night and all the next day he roamed through the fastnesses, failing to make a kill of any kind. But the next night the wind brought a message that thrilled him with new hope.

It was true that the trail would lead him into danger—almost to the lair of the dreadful annihilator of the pack—but the darkness would hide him tonight. In the open meadow he would find the bodies of his slain pack-fellows.

Black Rover was a wolf—a breed that has no compunction against cannibalism in the famine season. He fell into the long, easy lope that almost in a moment carried him down the ridge to the meadows. At the fringe of timber he halted, scouting.

The valley was silent even to Black Rover's ears, that could hear the fall of dewdrops on the grass. His nose told him at once that Jim was not on guard over the slain. He lay in his lair, a half-mile across the opens; and surely he was not to be feared tonight. And Black Rover's dead pack-brethren lay just beyond the fringe of timber.

Softly, taking advantage of every One step more, and the devastating crav- shadow, yet shivering with eagerness, he crept up to the nearest of the dead wolves. ing in his frame could be appeased. But he drew up abruptly, shivering with fright.

A voice that seemed to have its origin in a source beyond any of his five senses had warned him on his life not to take another step. He stood poised, seeking a true scent. Presently he understood.

He hadn't got away from cold steel when he had escaped Jim Elden's rifle. Here it was again—lying in wait for him beside the body of the dead wolf. He

couldn't see it; it had no motion by the means of which he usually interpreted life; yet he felt the curse of its presence in the very air. . . . . There was no hope left for him as he turned and trotted up the ridge. Seemingly the cold power would hound him to his death.

Jim Elden had had long acquaintance with wolves; yet the tracks in the snow next morning, and the unsprung trap caused him a moment's amazement. "The old boy that came down last night is sure a wise old head," he commented to Bess. "Starving—and yet he had sense enough to stay out of the first trap ever set in Clearwater. From the size of his track, I'd say he was the big black fellow we both saw at the edge of the timber."

BUT the gods of the forest had not preserved Black Rover from steel to let him die an unhappy death by famine. In the same dawn, in the moment when he had abandoned hope as far as the brute mind can conceive of hope, he suddenly found full feeding.

A caribou cow, a yearling bull and a fawn had floundered in a mighty drift, helpless against any beast of prey that chose to attack them. They were mighty game for a lone wolf, and in any other season Black Rover would have contented himself with the fawn only, but thoughts of ordinary danger no longer swept his famine-maddened brain. Fired with desperate courage, he sprang upon the largest of the three.

It was curious how easily she died. Perhaps he need never fear the cow caribou again—only the horned bulls. He killed the two lesser caribou, ate his fill, then stood on guard to fight off any coyotes or lesser wolves that might try to rob him of his prey.

The meat lasted for days; and strength flowed back into his weakened tissue. There was no time really to starve again before spring. When the last flesh was stripped from the bones, the lesser folk had begun to waken and listen in the burrows, and the ptarmigan were whistling on the steeps.

With that spring began Black Rover's time of triumph. With the good feeding the flesh of his body turned to muscles of steel, until his strength was a rapture and an exultation that seemed to set him on fire. Again he sang from the ridge—a long-drawn, far-carrying cry that Jim listened for from the door of his cabin—but it wasn't the famine chant now. The mighty wolf sought in vain for the articulation of the new pride that was growing upon him, the glory and the sense of power that tingled in every nerve.

Slowly the knowledge came to him that there was nothing in the forest—except for the region immediately about Jim Elden's home—for him to fear. The lynx took to the trees at the sight of him; the big bulls stood at bay until he went away. Late in May he made a bold attack upon a cow caribou, free to fight on hard-crusted snow; and his triumph-cry rang far and clear when he laid her low. He ate his fill, then yielded to the coyotes that had begun to haunt his trail for the carrion he left.

The grizzly himself no longer menaced him. In his new pride Black Rover felt that he could dodge the bear's blows by superior agility, and if need be he could send in painful bites through the furry hide.

The spring yielded to summer; and life had a full meaning for him at last. With his added strength he developed a higher degree of cunning; he could trap the caribou in their beds, and the ewe bighorn on her rocky ledges. He knew how to lie motionless as a stone beside a game trail, stalk silently as sunlight; and his swift run could wear out any ordinary game.

IF the lower creatures ever have self-realization, Black Rover had it then. He began to be aware of himself as never before, seeing himself as an entity rather than the pawn of the elemental powers of the forest. The enthralling pride and conceit that is sometimes beheld in a particularly intelligent dog began to engross him. Was he not master of the wild? Was he not the greatest survivor of the greatest breed? Had he not defeated the great-horned leader of the bighorn flock, Surefoot himself, in the battle of the ledges—fought to the death in the very heights of the interior Selkirks? What was left from which he must turn, what creature who would not fall as his prey? As he stood, bloodstained and exalted on the ledge, he was the Wolf—the living symbol of the wild and fountain of its laws. And men—except for their cold steel—why should they terrify him either? They were not so mighty as this game he had just felled.

They too would fall and lie still for his pleasure.

That night the dwellers of the hills and forests below heard a song of triumph such as had not been sung since the world's young days, when the sway of beasts was still supreme over the land. It rose and fell; it throbbed in the still air; it soared to the ears of the moose in the distant beaver-meadow and to the grizzly, digging for marmots on the high plateaus. And all of them listened, and all of them knew fear.

CHAPTER X

IN the days when summer was newly dead, and the fall should have been at its height, a sudden storm broke on the little settlement of Snowy Gulch. The clouds that had been so lowering and sullen shattered into a million fragments that suddenly choked full the air, and a blustering, biting wind from the north pounced down to menace the frame shacks on their foundations of stone. All these things were as of old, and mostly the Snowy Gulch citizens put them out of their minds. It was not so easily done, however, for the fear of the northern winter goes deep, and can never be quite forgotten.

But one man, at least, the storm filled with consternation. He was Jim Elden, down to the settlements after his winter supplies, and he found himself in a most uncomfortable situation. It isn't considered wisdom, in the North, to launch out on a four-day journey at the break of winter storms. Yet for once Jim couldn't bicker with Fate. It had him down: his course had already been laid out for him by powers beyond his control.

There could be no waiting in the snug inn for the storm to die down. There were several interfering factors. One of them was the fact that he would probably wait all winter, for the northern snows are incessant and relentless when they once start in. The second was the ugly fact that the supplies that he secured in Snowy Gulch, bought with the returns from his season's trapping, were already bitterly needed in his snug cabin on his homestead.

Within four days, if not already, Bess would be down to a diet of meat alone. The harvesting of their little hay crop had delayed the expedition clear to the danger-point, and not one day dared he delay his return. There was no corner grocery near his homestead from which Bess could replenish her larder. For this reason alone Jim must turn his face to the storm.

There was also the disturbing fact that Bess was without snowshoes, a condition that, after the snow was a certain depth, practically confined her to the house. Her own shoes had been irreparably broken the spring before; the webs had rotted away and were lost; and one of the reasons for his journey into town was to procure her another pair. Snowshoes are as great a necessity in the northern winter as food or shelter. She needed them much worse than the new rifle he was bringing her, strapped among the supplies. Behind the stout cabin walls there was no wilderness foe that she need fear.

But these grim necessities were not alone. Beyond them and above them there was an urge that carried Jim forward like a wind. He would not only try to beat winter to his cabin. His race was also with a miracle —a visitation so beautiful that it thrilled each strong nerve of the man, and yet so awful that he sought all heaven and earth for strength to meet it.

HE had to be with Bess in the weeks that followed. There was no physician in Snowy Gulch to send in his place. No fact of his life had ever wakened more fierce anger within him than that of his absence from her now. In the stress that was to come, she had to have fresh, nutritious food. No other course than to brave the storms was open to him. And the frontiersmen at the settlement, knowing life and knowing death, spoke not one word to urge him to stay.

It was not that he feared his own ability to force his way through the drifts. With snowshoes, even soft, wet snow may be encompassed at a certain pace. But he had to make time, and most of all, he had to consider his horses. They were powerful animals, for all their cayuse ancestry, as good stock as could be secured in these mountain realms; yet they could not push through the drifts that swept the high ranges after the first great storms. On the foothills travel would not be impossible for some days, but the mountains had to be crossed before Jim could reach his wife's side.

The simple truth was that the plateaus were already snow-covered to the depth of two feet. The moisture that in the

autumn storms had fallen as rain in the forests had turned to snow in the chill, thin atmosphere of the heights. Only a little more was needed to increase the drifts beyond the horses' depth. Jim simply had to surmount the passes at once in order to get through with his supplies.

Walking in front, with the heavily laden animals in file behind him, he started up his own blazed trails into the fastnesses. Like most men of the open places, Jim was tender-hearted as a child, but he had no mercy for horseflesh today. Bess' life, and the little, helpless life that was to be, depended on his speed.

The snow deepened steadily as the trail led him higher. The stunted forest gave way to park lands, broken by scattered clumps of spruce; then he climbed to the great, glittering barrens above timber-line. At this point he took one of the two pairs of snowshoes from the pack and slipped them on. Further progress was simply impossible without them.

Evidently the snow had fallen intermittently ever since his previous crossing; and it was already over three feet in depth. Ever the great white flakes sifted down from the sullen skies, swiftly obliterating the tracks they made. And as they reached the highest levels of the range, the snow-depth was at the absolute limit in which the horses could make progress.

Jim had started none too soon. Within a few hours more, perhaps within a single hour, the passes would be closed to pack-animals for the winter. Only a man on snowshoes, or the light-footed wolf, could hope to cross the range at all.

But already he saw that he would make it through. He was on the down grade now; the depth of the snow was already slightly less. Whooping his delight, he urged the horses steadily down to the wooded foothills.

THERE was only a foot of snow in the forest; and before the day's end he took off his snowshoes and returned them to the packs. The snow was wet, clinging to the webs like soft mud, and he could make better time without them.

He made his night camp beside a charred cooking-rack that Bess and himself had erected on the first journey out. Curiously, he felt no particular fatigue. He would have been glad to mush on farther, if light had permitted. He was tired enough, truly, but the exhaustion that might have been expected from a day of such arduous toil had not encroached upon his body. He was all steel, as much a stranger to fatigue as the wolves that ran the ridges.

Although the snow had not entirely ceased, the next two days he made splendid time. It was still only two feet in depth in these lower expanses of the forest, and he scarcely felt its resistance. He was glad enough, however, that he was safely past the ranges between him and the village. Occasionally he could look back and see that the storms still beat with undiminished fury on the lofty plateaus.

He started his fourth day with a high heart. Unless he encountered one of the thousand delays that oppress travelers in the wilderness, he would reach his own cabin—and Bess—before nightfall. The horses seemed to realize the same fact—and Heaven knew they had had enough of grubbing for grass in the snow-swept forest. The man sang as he walked—a song with a lilt to which he had marched in France.

But the forest gods are jealous of those that sing in the fastnesses. Just before noon something like thunder pealed on the steep mountain-side above him.

HE was leading his animals through a little cañon that led far to the snowy heights of the range. He did not look up at that first dread roar of warning. There was no time for that. In one flash of thought, fast as lightning through the spaces of the sky, he knew the origin of that awful sound; and his powerful muscles seeemed to hurl him forward as he leaped for his life.

There was no chance to brace the heart and prepare the eardrums for that stupendous sound. It grew and swelled with incredible rapidity, with never a lull, until it surpassed the uttermost limits wherein human ears could imagine sound. It was a mighty crashing, rumbling roar, a thousand times the volume of the mightiest thunder-clap, a sound such as might herald the end of the earth and the destruction of the heavens.

With starting eyes and blanched face Jim ran to escape the blow. Fortunately for the soul of the man, there were no obligations, in this single second of his chance, to save anything but himself. Even the bravest men could have hardly remembered their most sacred trusts in such terror as the cataclysm wakened. He ran

for the cañon wall—the inner curve, where he knew he had the greatest chance for safety.

The whole forest world was lost in a thundering sea of sound. It was as if the top of the mountain had been broken off by a giant's hand and hurled down the slope. Uncounted thousands of tons of snow, laden with stone to bury a city, came sweeping through the cañon where a moment before Jim had stood. The earth trembled and quaked, and the powdered snow flew up in mighty billowing clouds.

It was the avalanche—the snowslide that all mountain people know and dread. Nothing could stand before it. Great trees snapped like reeds, but their dying sounds were wholly obscured in the roar of the slide itself. The little stream at the base of the glen was covered to the depth of hundreds of yards with ice and stones, never again to ripple through the forest, a drinking place for caribou and moose. The face of the wilderness seemed utterly changed.

CHAPTER XI

JIM came to himself lying beside a great spruce that had been broken sharply off by the outer fringe of the slide. Only the fact that he had taken the inner curve of the cañon, and that centrifugal force had swerved the avalanche to its outer curve, had spared him the fate of the other living things that had been in its path.

He did not know how long he had lain unconscious. For a full half-hour after he opened his eyes he still lay motionless, unable to muster his faculties to understand what had occurred. His muscles were inert, making no response to the commands of his nerves. Then the light grew slowly in his brain like a slow dawn.

He remembered Bess first. Bess had need of him—far away in their homestead cabin. The impulses of his nerves made stronger onslaughts: he forced himself to lift his head. Then he staggered to his feet.

A stabbing pain in his forehead indicated that he had been struck by a flying stone; but otherwise he seemed uninjured. And now his thoughts were escaping from the mist of bewilderment and once more were clear and true. Presently he remembered his horses.

They were nowhere to be seen. The animals, with their precious burdens, had been swept down before the avalanche and buried beneath tons of rocks and snow.

The slide had made a clean sweep through the glen: not a tree was left alive or a stone in its place. With the idea of searching for some of his lost supplies, he started down, walking rather unsteadily, toward the mountain-like heap of stones and ice below.

But almost at once he saw the hopelessness of such a search. The only possible course for him was to seek a way over the snowy barrier that had been heaped in his trail.

It was not easy to get his directions after such a disaster as this. The trees that had carried his blazes had been swept away; the familiar landmarks were destroyed. An hour sped away before he encircled the snow-sweep and reached the hillside opposite from which the way was clear. Then he halted a moment to consider his course.

His food and supplies were gone, and he did not forget the disquieting fact that the larder at home was practically empty. Could he retrace his steps to Snowy Gulch to procure more? Yet he knew in an instant that no such course was open to him. The deep snows had already enshrouded the high mountains: three days before they had been impassable except with snowshoes. Fully another foot of snow had fallen since. And both pairs of snowshoes had been swept away by the avalanche.

Until further snowshoes could be made, —a difficult and laborious process with such tools and supplies that he had at the homestead,—the range was impassable to man or beast.

But at least he wasn't faced with the question of out-and-out starvation. The famine that haunted Clearwater in the winter surely could not invoke its curse on Bess and Jim. A huge ham of a moose had been swinging outside his cabin door when he had left, and certainly little of it had been consumed in his absence. It would supply nourishing broth for Bess and sustenance for himself until he could either manufacture snowshoes or procure further meat from the wild.

But it was hard to fight off the haunting dread that crept over him when he remembered that, except by the slow process of trapping, the swarming fields of game were closed to him too. The rifles had been

lost in the same disaster that had destroyed his supplies.

NEVERTHELESS his only course was to go on. The traps must be baited and set in the earliest dawn. He circled about the hill, opposite from his old trail, and after he had passed the fallen avalanche, turned down into the valley until he found his blazes. Then with gathering strength he strode on.

Twilight fell soon after, finding him still weary miles from his homestead. Slowly the winter sky darkened, the blazes dimmed. He tried to quicken his pace, for he had not forgotten that he marched without ax or blankets. He knew the old mountain rule against trying to make progress after dark, but tonight it could not be observed.

The gray of dusk deepened; the trees blurred before his sight. Ever it was a harder fight to find his way. From this point on, as the twilight shot full of darkness and the night lowered, Jim Elden was fighting for his life—and for the life of his wife and his child that was to be. Was not the hour of Bess' trial almost at hand? And he knew the cost of losing the trail in these winter woods: without ax or food or blankets, in these snow-wet forests, death would likely overtake him before the dawn.

He plunged on, straining into the gloom. The hours were interminable. And at last he was calling upon his most deeply buried instincts, those secret voices whose source no man may trace, to show him the way as he walked blindly through the still aisles of the trees.

But the time came at last when he saw the light of his cabin window, over the clearing. And in a moment more Bess' hand, icy and leaping with that dread agony that is the glory and the martyrdom of women, was clasped in his own.

Jim had come just in time. The heart of the man leaped in thankfulness, and he saw in Bess' painracked face that she blessed his coming too. The fear and the darkness was somehow lessened now.

IT was not the first time that a baby has come into the world in a lonely cabin, in the desolate wastes of the forests. It was a common thing, with the breed that used to be. No doctor or nurse was needed tonight: Bess herself had the strength of the wild creatures, and had implanted it in her child. No physician could delight in a more satisfactory case, more free from complications; and the mother herself was able to smile wanly when Jim, the battle won, knelt at last in thankfulness beside her bed.

He was a man of the open places, and thankful prayer came easily to his lips. Still with no knowledge of fatigue, he rose and turned toward the doorway with the idea of preparing broth for his wife from the moose-flesh that was their only source of food.

Then he halted at the threshold, staring blankly at the snow. The gods of the forest, resenting his intrusion in their silences, were not done with him yet. In his absence from the cabin they had dealt him the cruelest blow of all.

The ham had been torn from its hook and the bone stripped of its flesh. Great wolf tracks showed dimly in the pale light.

CHAPTER XII

IN all the strange train of thoughts that brightened and passed in Jim's mind there was not one of yielding. He knew his situation, none better; but he also knew his stakes. The idea of surrender was as incompatible with his nature as disloyalty or lies.

If the breed from which he sprang had known how to give up, the West would be an unpeopled wilderness today. No grain would ripen, no wheels would turn, no cities send forth their shipping on the western seas. He was of the blood of the frontier; and the life of his wife and his son, the strong race that would spring from him and carry on his work, depended upon his steadfastness now. He couldn't lose hope now, in this new glory that had just come to him. There was no flaw in his faith or his manhood that would let him accept the supposition that the night's victory had turned to immutable and cruel defeat.

The first words at his lips were neither in blasphemy or despair. Instead they were in promise to the wife and son of his within the cabin. "I'll find the way out!" he said.

But where did it lie? The pass to the settlements was closed. He had no gun—not even bait that would draw game quickly to his traps. It wouldn't be availing to find food in a few weeks from then,

or even a single week. He needed it at once to give strength to his wife, and through her, to her child. Yet still the man kept faith. He heard the soft crying complaint of his son through the open door.

He turned farther into the meadow, instinctively following the tracks. But there was no hope of finding some of the meat yet undevoured. The tracks were at least twenty-four hours old, and now he saw that the tracks of coyotes, evidently scrap-eaters that habitually followed, joined those of the wolf. And where could he find manna in these desolate wastes?

He wondered if Bess knew of the loss. If she did, she of course supposed that Jim's return, with the winter stores, would prevent any disastrous consequences. He had not told her about the avalanche, and there was no possible good in telling her now. Slowly he strode back into the cabin.

Bess was asleep, the child in the curve of her arm. For a long time the man stared dully into the smoldering fire, seeking the way out.

Was there a chance in ten thousand that any of the wild creatures would walk into an unbaited trap? Had not the snow obscured the usual runways of the game? No one had to tell him that it was a losing venture to be taken only as the last alternative of despair. But did any other alternative remain?

He would not admit he was beaten; yet he had only to listen to the wind's voice to know the truth. "You came into our fastnesses, but we have crushed you at last," he might have heard in the weird cry that came so softly, yet so triumphantly across the unending snow. "Your cold steel rang in our forest, but it will be silent now! You will not return to the village of men, and they will not dare to follow. Your cabin will rot, and the caribou will browse in your hay-fields. Cold steel is beaten, and we have conquered."

But the man stiffened, still keeping faith. Then he started at a far-off, savage utterance that came sharp and clear above the eerie murmur of the wind.

It was the ringing voice of one of the wild creatures—native to the wastes—and at first it seemed that he was merely joining in the triumph-song of the wind. Jim whirled, his thoughts speeding instinctively to his rifle. But he remembered in an instant—the gun had been lost under the avalanche. Thrilled in spite of himself, the man walked swiftly to the door.

On a snowy, almost treeless hillside across the valley, dimmed by the sparse snowfall, his eye rested upon the dark figure of an enormous wolf. Not for an instant did he mistake the animal's identity. Wolves grow to such proportions but rarely: the animal was none other than Black Rover, the forest monarch he had sought in vain to trap and which had come boldly to his cabin to rob him of his meat. And it is true that his thoughts at first were only of revenge.

Then his eye quickened, and his body made an almost imperceptible start. The wolf had not called for Jim's ears. He had simply uttered the hereditary hunting-cry of his breed; and his gait, his lowered head, and his presence in the clearing in daylight told plain and sure that at that moment he was on the trail of game!

Even such a kingly wolf as Black Rover is silent on the trail until he is sure of his success. Jim's face blazed, and his nerves thrilled and sang when his mind leaped to the unmistakable conclusion. The trail was hot: Black Rover had almost overtaken his prey.

In a few minutes more, perhaps in an hour, some forest creature would be lying still in the encrimsoned snow, fallen before Black Rover's fangs. *Jim had only to follow his trail to frighten him from his dead!*

He did not conjecture on the fact that he would go forth unarmed either with pistol or rifle. Such a thing as this could not possibly be considered now. Black Rover was the forest tyrant, the mightiest wolf of his breed, and he had not yet learned obeisance to this intruder from the settlements, yet the stern possibility that suggested itself was not worth a thought. Jim slipped on his heavy coat and his fur cap, kissed his sleeping wife, then hastened out into the softly falling snow.

CHAPTER XIII

DRAWING a hand-sled that he had left for Bess' convenience at the cabin, Jim quickly crossed the valley to the wolf's trail. He had guessed right: Black Rover was running game, and the trail was hot. A caribou, evidently a large bull, had left his tracks in the snow a few minutes before.

Those who know the woods learn to read fully and with ease the story of the tracks. The arrangement of and distance between the separate imprints, as well as the imprints themselves, told Jim instantly that the animal was hard pressed and on the last lap of the race. Ever since the dawn, perhaps, the race of death had gone on, and at last the wolf was swiftly overtaking his prey.

Jim had an instant's wonder at the daring of a lone wolf to attack a full-grown caribou bull. These were not the late-winter days of famine when the hunger-maddened wolves forgot all natural caution. Could he conquer? Wouldn't the great horns and slashing front hoofs of the bull cut the furry body into ribbons? Yet Jim felt some measure of consolation in the thought that if ever the wolf overtook his quarry, one body at least would be at his disposal in the snow.

Still, Jim found himself believing that Black Rover would conquer. The bull caribou is a terrible fighter, and the down-lash of his front hoofs is death to almost any living thing in the northern forest—but Black Rover was the very monarch of his breed. In all his years in the forest Jim had never seen a wolf-track to compare with this that led him over the snow.

The chase was short, just as he had predicted. He climbed a long hill, and the whole drama was suddenly revealed to him in the snow-covered glade below.

THE battle that Black Rover the wolf and Spread-horn the caribou fought in that far wintry glen of the Selkirks was short. The hunter overtook his quarry in an almost open glade, broken only by scattering clumps of spruce—and the caribou had no choice but to turn and fight.

He hadn't been able to reach some stony refuge where he could stand backed to the cliff, meeting his foe in the teeth. He had sought in vain for such a place throughout the last half-hour of the race. Perhaps, had he found it, Black Rover himself—ruling the wilderness with a high hand—would have never tried to get past that deadly guard of hoofs and horns. In this battleground, however, the wolf could attack from any point.

Yet there was an element of glory in this battle in the glade. The caribou wore his coat of winter splendor—white mane gleaming, body a burnished brown, horns rubbed free of velvet and at their greatest yearly development. His effort in defense seemed more like some tragic dance than a battle to the death in the snow. Every motion he made was consummate grace; there was beauty in every wheeling blow, in every toss of his streaming horns.

But if he was swift, Black Rover was lightning. For all his size and power, the caribou hardly had a chance. The wolf danced about him, evading his assaults with an incredible lightness and ease, and sending home one vicious bite after another as the caribou lunged past. As the bull grew frenzied with anger and pain, the wolf seemed ever lighter, cooler, more and more the master of the situation. Then he caught the bull's throat in a true, deep bite.

His dignity would permit no frenzy of madness when the caribou lay still in the snow. The old pride and exultation surged through him and thrilled him, but he made no sign other than one far-carrying bay of triumph. Then he sat down in the snow, panting, beside his dead.

He was not particularly hungry. He had fed to the full some thirty hours before. But he got up at last, worrying at the torn throat. Suddenly he whirled, facing the direction he had come.

The wind had brought him a message, and he read it as clearly as men read words in type. Some living creature was following his trail. Some habitant of his own wilds dared to hunt him in the snow, perhaps to contest his own mastery, perhaps—after the wood's custom—to despoil him of his game. The hair bristled on his shoulders, and the yellow-green fighting light returned to his eyes.

He made no mistake about the nature of this foe. It was not one of the lesser hunters, nor even one of the mighty grass-eaters that since the beginning have taken their chance of death with him on the forest trails—fair foes and fair prey for such as could master them. He didn't hate these: he simply played the game of life with them. He had not even felt hatred for the antlered bull he had just torn down. But he hated to the depths of his savage heart this foe that walked so erect and so steadily upon his trail. It was the intruder, the master of steel and fire, the traditional enemy of all the forest people.

A noble rage surged through the wolf's frame. Was he to turn aside, to leave his prey in the snow and flee into hiding like

a cowardly cub? Was he not Black Rover the wolf, who had felled the horned ram on the high pass? He crouched low, waiting for the man to come.

The memory of the destruction of the pack had dimmed greatly in these past months of triumph. Now he no longer connected it up with the man himself, but rather with the fearful thing of steel that he carried in his arms. It was even true that the fear of cold steel itself was not the haunting sickness that it was. He had not encountered it lately: he had almost forgotten about it. Fortunately for his courage, there was nothing about the tall, dark form that emerged on the hilltop to recall it to him.

The gleaming weapon—that unspeakable mystery that could hurl death from a distance—was gone from his arm. He was just a fellow wilderness-creature now, never of the proportions of the caribou or moose, and not to be compared with some of the trophies he had taken. He was just *flesh*, after all, soft to his fangs.

Black Rover snarled, bracing himself to fight.

JIM drew steadily nearer. The wolf and the body of the caribou were already clearly outlined against the snow. The wolf was standing his ground—there could be no mistake. In any other case he would have fled long since, mysteriously as a shadow, whisked away as if by magic at the first smell on the wind. And curiously, Jim felt no particular surprise.

He had seemed to sense from the first that there would be fighting to do at the end of the trail. Black Rover was the wolf of wolves, imperious in his strength—and he could brook no rivals. Isolated in the interminable wastes of Clearwater he had never found out about men—the undeniable fact that any breed that meets him in fair, open battle is sooner or later wiped from the face of the earth. Besides, his rifle was gone from his arm, and the wolf knew the fact at a glance.

Jim's pace neither quickened nor slowed. There was nothing about him to suggest that he was going into battle with a mighty, merciless foe. His face was perfectly in repose. He walked easily as ever, muscles rippling, great shoulders slightly stooped. Once he shouted, loudly, hoping the cry would frighten the wolf away, but the animal only snarled in answer.

The thought of turning back did not even occur to Jim. The dead caribou meant life to his wife and child and to himself—sustenance in plenty to carry them through until he would have time to make snowshoes and mush over the ranges to the settlements. To turn back meant starvation and death, swiftly and sure as the sun. The chance before him was long and fearful, but any chance was better than hopeless defeat! Grim and purposeful, he was not even aware of being afraid.

Now the wolf was crouching, on guard over his dead. The wolf and the man were face to face at last. One stood as the representative of the dominant breed, the mighty race that cuts away the forest and sows the grain in the meadows: the other the savage forces of the wind. In that snowy glen, inutterably vivid against the white drifts, they symbolized the oldest war that mankind knows—the struggle of fire and steel against fang and claw.

The issue at stake for Jim was the life of his wife and child; but his stand had a deeper, more far-reaching significance. As he faced those bared fangs, he was the ambassador and agent of the spreading forces of civilization! He drew nearer, and his hand slipped to his thigh.

Jim Elden was not wholly unarmed. The steel was with him still, in its naked, elemental form—a long-bladed hunting knife that he carried from a sheath at his belt. The issue was steel against fang, as ever. He drew it slowly from the sheath, and Black Rover caught the glitter of its blade.

But it was only a little thing—not half the length of the antlers of the bull he had just torn down. The little icy wave of fear that surged through him was obliterated at once in the red tide of his wrath. He wouldn't give way. The fighting fury was at its height.

He crouched lower. Jim drew nearer. Now he was in leaping range; and the knife made blue lightning in the air. . . . . There was only three paces between them now. Jim was stooping forward, knees bent, swaying on the balls of his feet, white blade gleaming.

Then the wolf sprang, a sable missile in the air. His fangs gleamed, aiming straight for the man's brown, rugged throat. They need tear but once at that vulnerable spot to end the battle swiftly! He came with incredible velocity and power.

But Black Rover had met his match.

Jim's arm swung up and out with all the might of his shoulders behind it, and the knife made a glittering trail in the air. It caught the wolf in the middle of his leap—and the cold steel went home.

BUT that fight in the snow was not the end of all things for Black Rover, mightiest of the wolves. It ended the war between him and Jim Elden, but it was the beginning of a new time, a phase in his life that, in a far different way, was no less happy and stirring with wonder than that of his dominance of the wild.

Jim had not dealt him the death-stroke. The blow laid him instantly low from the violence of the shock to his nervous system, and the blood gushed from his side, but the man saw at once that the mighty engine of his life was not yet destroyed. He felt no hatred for this creature whose hunting had been his salvation; and so he did not spring on him at once and sever the glossy throat with his hunting-knife. He went quietly to the work of cutting up the dead caribou and loading the meat on the sled. Then holding his knife ready, he bent to examine the wolf's condition.

These fangs, those powerful muscles had been the means of preserving his wife and child! Jim owed Black Rover a debt, and a quiet smile played about his lips when he considered how he might pay it. It is the way of wise conquerors to preserve the lives of their vanquished and draw them into willing service. Jim loaded the quivering body onto the sled.

Of course it was highly probable that Black Rover would die. If he did, the fur that he wore would find good use in the cradle Jim was planning. But at least he could be given every chance to recover. The power that dwelt in that gaunt sable frame might be of use to him again.

Thus Jim shaped his course. The wound was deep, but the blade had missed the vital organs, and the cold quenched the flow of blood. Jim made a bed for him in the barn, administered food and kept him warm, all with an interest and anticipation that he would have found hard to explain. And when the days had rolled into the weeks, he came to Bess with word that the wolf would live.

"And that aint the beginnin' of it," he told her with a sparkle of enthusiasm in his eyes. "I don't believe the old warrior's ever goin' to run wild again."

He explained in a moment—that in the days of his weakness Black Rover had learned to eat from his conqueror's hand. What was more natural than that a fervid, deathless love should have been wakened, taking the place of hate, in the beast-heart? Black Rover was of the canines, the dog people from which sprung the most faithful servants and most noble friends that men ever won; and of all the wild creatures, his breed was the most easily domesticated.

It would be a wholly natural development. Black Rover was a wolf—simply a dog that had not been tamed—and he was as subject to domestication as the wolves trapped by the German peasants to keep up the strain of that breed of wolfish shepherd-dogs that most men know. In his days of helplessness he had responded easily to the caress of the hand that fed him. Now that strength was returning to him, would he find a new force surging in his blood?

Would he go back to the forest trails? But already Jim could discern a curious light of happiness in Black Rover's eyes as he bent over the almost helpless form, and of a strange trembling when his hand rested upon the great shaggy head. The love of the dog-people is no little thing. Perhaps already the voice of the man thrilled him and moved him more than the most triumphant pack-songs he had heard as a cub, and the sight of his face was dearer than the first gleam of the sun after the winter famine.

"I believe I've tamed him," Jim told his wife. "He's free to go if he wants, but I think he'll stay. He's just a big, wild dog, after all—and now I think I've made him a one-man dog."

THE man shifted his son in his arms, and smiled into the little toothless face. "He'd be a good pet for the kiddie, Bess," he suggested. "Instead of bein' a danger, he'd be a protection—I'd like to see any other varmint tackle him when Rover is around. I'll put him on his back in a day or two, just so he can see who's boss."

Jim spoke true. Even now they heard a soft whine from the barn, as if the wolf were longing for the touch of a hand he loved. He had lost in his fight for dominance in the wild. Wheels would turn, and grain would ripen in Clearwater in spite of him. Black Rover had found his master, and so had fulfilled his destiny.

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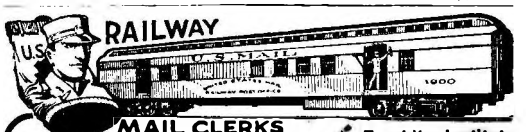

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DRAW THIS GIRL and win $50.00

JUST copy the girl and send in your drawing. You may win the first prize of $50. No expense is attached to this contest. Anyone may enter. All you need do is copy the above illustration and send it in with your name and address.

You may win one of the following prizes:

1st Prize - $50

2nd Prize - - $25

3rd to 7th Prizes, $5 each

First prize drawing will be selected by "Bart," famous cartoonist, dean of Federal Schools. In addition, he will send a personal criticism to the winner of the first prize.

Whether or not you win one of the money prizes, you will be given free a lesson written by Sid Smith himself on "Idea-getting in Cartoon Work." In addition, each contestant will receive a full color print of a Neysa McMein pastel painting suitable for framing.

RULES FOR CONTESTANTS

This contest is open only to amateurs, 17 years of age or more. Professional illustrators and cartoonists and Federal Students are not eligible. Note carefully the following rules:

1. Make your drawing of the girl exactly 4 inches high, on paper 3½ inches wide by 7 inches high.
2. Use only pen or pencil.
3. No drawings will be returned.
4. Write your name, address, age and occupation on the back of your drawing.
5. All drawings must be received at the Federal Schools by August 20, 1922.

Capable illustrators and cartoonists make big money. Does your hand itch for a pencil? Have you talent for drawing? *The purpose of this contest is to discover, advise and help people whose talent is worthy of development.* Hundreds of successful Federal Students are enjoying increased earning power through developing their ability to draw. With proper training under America's leading illustrators and cartoonists, you, too, should succeed. Copy the girl. Enter this contest. See for yourself what you can do. All drawings must be mailed to

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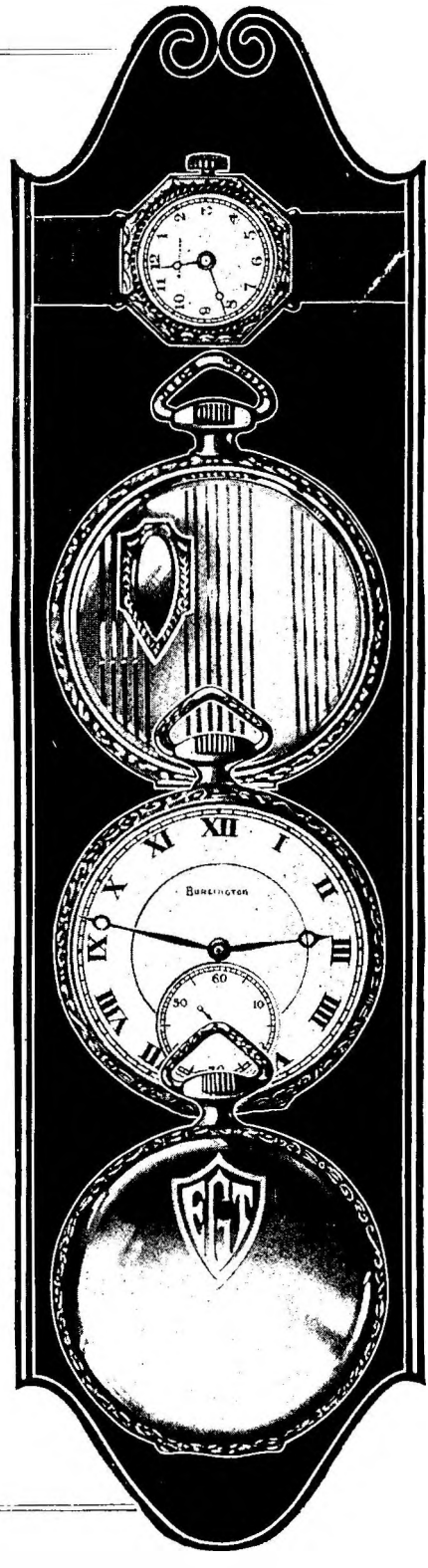

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No More Gray Hair—Says Science

Wonderful, Clean, Colorless Liquid Restores Normal Color —Results in a Week

Secret Sought by Thousands Now Revealed

What is the story your mirror tells? Have you reason to feel that your friends are whispering, "She is showing her age. See how gray she is?" Or are you a man still full of ambition and the ability to win and yet regarded as "too old for active service" because your hair is gray?

But no matter how gray it may be, you can see your hair restored to its former color with all the glossy richness which it had in early years.

You are to be shown how in the privacy of your own room, you can make a change which will bring youth to your appearance, joy to your heart.

Always—Youthful Appearance Wins the Admiration

Restores the Original Shade

This wonderful treatment comes in the form of a liquid, clean and colorless and known as Kolor-Bak. Simply apply it as directed and soon you will see the lost color returning to give your hair its former luxuriance and beauty.

You will find that Kolor-Bak brings perfect uniformity in the restored color. It will be the same color from roots to tips. It will not appear streaked or faded.

And, wash and clean your hair as often as you wish, the restored color will not be changed—it is there to stay.

You not only have this uniformity, but you see your hair the actual shade it had in the past. Hair once brown becomes brown once more, once red it becomes red, once black it becomes black, once blonde it becomes blonde.

That faded appearance is gone, any brittleness is absent also. Your hair is luxuriant brilliant, soft, glistening, beautiful as it ever was in youth.

A Marvelous Relief for Dandruff, Itching Scalp and Falling Hair

Thousands have found also that Kolor-Bak works wonders in the most persistent cases of dandruff, itching scalp and falling hair. There is no nitrate of silver, no mercury, no coal tar, no henna or sage tea, no wood alcohol in Kolor-Bak. It is not greasy or mussy.

Gray haired—"Too old for active service."

My Hair Was Quite Gray

"Only a short time ago my hair was quite gray and becoming grayer. It was falling out. My scalp itched and dandruff appeared.

"Only a few applications of Kolor-Bak stopped the itching and dandruff. My hair soon stopped coming out. Most wonderful of all, however, is that my hair is again its original color, I look ten years younger. No wonder I'm so thankful for Kolor-Bak!"

(A typical letter)

This Guarantee Your Protection

With every full treatment we send our legal, written, binding agreement and guarantee—

—That Kolor-Bak will restore gray hair to its original color, will remove dandruff, stop itching scalp and falling hair, and will promote the health of hair and scalp.

Thousands Tell You

"What do I think of Kolor-Bak? Simply wonderful. No more gray hairs for me and dandruff a thing of the past."

"It restored the natural color to my hair and has cured my little girl of dandruff."

"My hair was perfectly white—now brown as when young."

"My hair began to turn natural color in twelve days."

"Am 60 years old. Hair was white. Now brown as in youth."

"Hair was streaked with white. Now a nice even brown and dandruff all gone."

"My hair was falling out badly. Kolor-Bak has stopped it and put it in fine condition."

From everywhere come words like the above praising this wonderful treatment for the hair.

Special Free Trial Offer

To give you the fairest opportunity to learn by actual experience what Kolor-Bak will do, we are making a special proposition, particulars of which will be sent by mail. No money to send, only the coupon.

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