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THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

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THE BLUE BOOK

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THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

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The White Desert

A thrilling novel of the Colorado lumber country, by the author of "The Wildcatters" and "The Crosscut."

By COURTNEY RYLEY COOPER

IT was early afternoon. The smaller hills simmered in the radiant warmth of late spring: the mountains above rose cool under the green of the spruces and pines, which in turn gave way before the somber blacks and whites of the main range, where yet the snow lingered from the clutch of winter, and every cluster of foliage sheltered a mound of white, in jealous conflict with the sun.

Down in the hollow which shielded the scrambling little town of Dominion, the air was warm and lazy with the friendliness of May. Far off, along the course of the tumbling stream, a jaybird called raucously as though in an effort to drown the sweeter, softer notes of a robin nesting in the new green of a quaking aspen. At the hitching post before the one tiny store, an old horse nodded and blinked—as did the sprawled figure beside the ramshackle motor-filling station, just opened after the snow-bound months of winter. Presently the figure shuffled, stretched, and raising his head, looked down the road. From the distance had come the whirring sound of a motor, the forerunner of a possible customer. In the hills an automobile speaks before it is seen.

Long moments of throbbing echoes; then the car appeared a mile or so down the cañon, twisting along the rocky walls which rose sheer from the road, threading the innumerable bridges which spanned the little stream, at last to break forth into the open country and roar on toward Domin-

ion. The drowsy gasoline-tender rose. A long, sleek yellow racer came to a stop beside the gas-tank, chortled with greater reverberation than ever as the throttle was thrown open, then wheezed into silence with the cutting off of the ignition. A young man rose from his almost flat position in the low-slung driver's seat, and crawling over the side, stretched himself, meanwhile staring upward toward the glaring white of Mount Taluchen, the highest peak of the continental backbone, frowning in the coldness of snows that never departed. The villager moved closer.

"Gas?"

"Yep." The young man stretched again. "Fill up the tank—and a half-gallon of oil."

THE young man turned away, staring at the great mountains above. Young he was, almost boyish; yet counterbalancing this, was a seriousness of expression that almost approached somberness as he stood waiting until his machine should be made ready for the continuance of his journey.

"I never seed that kind o' car before," observed the garage man. "Barry Houston, huh. Must be a new make. I—"

"Camouflage," laughed the young man. "That's my name."

"Oh, is it?" The villager chuckled with him. "It shore had me guessin' fer a minute. You've got the plate right where the name o' a car is plastered usually, and it plumb fooled me. That's your name, huh? Live hereabouts?"

The owner of the name did not answer. The thought suddenly had come to him that once out of the village, that plate must be removed and tossed to the bottom of the nearest stream. His mission, for a time at least, would require secrecy. But the villager had repeated his question:

"Don't belong around here?"

"I? No, I'm—" The young man hesitated.

Thought maybe you did, seein' you've got a Colorado license on."

Houston parried with a smile.

"Well, this isn't all of Colorado, you know."

"Guess that's right. Only it seems in the summer thet it's most o' it, the way the machines pile through, goin' over the Pass. Where you headed for?"

"The same place."

"Over Hazard?" The villager squinted. "Over Hazard Pass? Aint daft, are you?"

"I hope not. Why?"

"Ever made it before?"

"No."

"And you're tacklin' it for the first time at this season o' the year?"

"Yes. Why not? It's May, isn't it?"

THE villager moved closer, as though to gain a better sight of Barry Houston's features. He surveyed him carefully, from the tight drawn reversed cap with the motor goggles resting above the young, smooth forehead, to the quiet elegance of the outing clothing, and well-shod feet. He spat reflectively, and drew the back of a hand across tobacco-stained lips.

"And you say you live in Colorado?"

"I didn't say—"

"Well, it don't make no difference whether you did or not. I know—you don't. Nobody thet lives out here'd try to make Hazard Pass for the first time in the middle o' May."

"I don't see—"

"Look up there." The old man pointed to the splotches of white, thousands of feet above, the swirling clouds which drifted from the icy breast of Mount Taluchen, the mists and fogs which caressed the precipices and rolled through the valleys created by the lesser peaks. "It may be spring down here, boy, but it's January up there. They's only been two cars over Hazard since November, and they come through last week. Both of 'em was old stagers; they've been crossin' the range for the last ten year. Both of 'em came through here lookin' like icicles an' swearing to beat four o' a kind. They's mountains and mountains, kid. Them up there's the professional kind."

A slight, puzzled frown crossed the face of Barry Houston.

"But how am I going to get to the other side of the range? I'm going to Tabernacle."

"They's a train runs from Denver, over Crestline. Look up there—jest to the right o' Mount Taluchen. See that there little puff o' smoke? Thet's it."

"But that'd mean—"

"For you to turn around, go back to Denver, leave that there chariot o' your'n in some garage and take the train tomorrow mornin'. It'd get you to Tabernacle some time in the afternoon."

"When would I get there—if I could make the pass all right?"

"In about five hours. It's only fourteen mile from the top. But—"

"And you say two other cars have gone through?"

"Yep. But they knowed every crook an' turn!"

For a long moment, the young man made no reply. His eyes were again on the hills, and gleaming with a sudden fascination. A thrill shot through Barry Houston. His life had been that of the smooth spaces, of the easy ascent of well-paved grades, of streets and comforts and of luxuries. The very ruggedness of the thing before him lured him and drew him on—he turned, he smiled with a quiet, determined expression of anticipation, yet of grimness.

"They've got me," came quietly. "I'm—I'm going to make the try!"

The villager grunted. His lips parted as though to issue a final warning. Then with a disgruntled shake of the head, he turned away.

"Aint no use arguin' with you Easterners," he said. "You come out here an' take one look at these here hills an' think you can beat Ol' Lady Nature when she's sittin' pat with a royal flush. Go on—only jis' remember this: once you get outside Dominion an' start up the grade, there aint no way-stations, an' there aint no telephones, ner diner service, ner somebody to bring you the evenin' paper. You're buckin' a brace game when you go against Hazard Pass at a time when she aint in a mood fer company. She holds all the cards—jis' remember that—an' a few thet aint in the deck. But jis' the same,"—he backed away as Barry stepped into the racer and pressed a foot on the starter,—"I'm wishin' you luck. You'll need it."

"Thanks!" Houston laughed with a new exhilaration, a new spirit of desire. "It can't do any more than kill me."

"Nope." The villager was shouting now above the exhaust of the powerful engine, "but it shore can take a delight in doin' that! S'long!"

"So long!" The gears meshed. A stream of smoke from the new oil spat out for a second. Then, roaring and chortling with the beginning of battle, the machine swept away toward the slight turn that indicated the scraggly end of the little town of Dominion, and the beginning of the first grade.

THE exhilaration still was upon Barry Houston. He whistled and sang, turning now and then to view the bright greenness of the new-leafed aspens, to watch the circling sallies of the jaybirds, or to stare ahead to where the blues and greens and purples of the foliage and rocks merged in the distance. The grade was yet easy; there was no evidence of strain upon the engine.

The road began to twist slightly, with short raises and shorter level stretches winding among the aspens and spruces, with sudden, jagged turns about heavy, frowning boulders whose jutting noses seemed to scrape the fenders of the car, only to miss them by the barest part of an inch. Suddenly Barry found himself bending forward, eyes still on the road in spite of his half-turned head, ears straining to catch the slightest variation of the motor. It seemed to be straining—yet the long, suddenly straight stretch of road ahead of him seemed perfectly level. More and more labored became the engine. Barry stopped, and lifting the hood, examined the carburetor. With the motor idling, it seemed perfect. Reassured, he walked to the front of the machine, and with the screw-driver pried the name-plate from its position on the radiator and tossed it into the tumbling yellow stream beside the road. Then he turned back to the machine—only to stop suddenly and blink with surprise. The road was not level! The illusion which comes to one at the first effort to conquer a mountain grade had faded now. A few feet away a deserted cabin, built upon a level plot of ground, gave to Barry a chance for comparison, and he could see that the road rose before him in a long, steady sweep of difficult grades, upward, steadily upward, with never a varying downfall, with never a rest for the motor which must climb it. And this was just the beginning!

"A six per cent grade if it's an inch!" he murmured as he finished putting on his chains. "And this is only the beginning. Wonder what I'm stepping into?"

THE answer came almost before the machine had warmed into action. Once more the engine labored; nor was it until Barry had answered its gasping plea by a shift to second gear that it strengthened again. The grade was growing heavier; the turns had become shorter; more, Barry found himself righting the machine with sudden jerks as the car rounded the short curves where the front wheels seemed to hang momentarily above oblivion, as the chasms stretched away to

seemingly bottomless depths beneath. For a half-hour the machine sang along in second, bucking the grade with almost human persistence—finally, however, to gasp and break in the smooth monotony of the exhaust, to miss, to strain and struggle vainly, then to thunder on once more as Houston pressed the gears into low and began to watch the motor-meter with anxious eyes. The mercury was rising—another half-hour, and the swish of steam told of a boiling radiator.

A stop, while the hissing water splattered from the radiator cock and the lifted hood gave the machine a chance to cool before replenishment came from the stream of melted snow-water which churned beneath a sapling bridge. Panting and light-headed from the altitude, Barry leaned against the machine for a moment, then suddenly straightened, drew his coat tighter about him and raised the collar about his neck. The wind, whistling down from above, was cold; something touched his face and melted there—snow!

THE engine was cool now; Barry leaped to the wheel and once more began his struggle upward, a new seriousness upon him, a new grimness apparent in the tightness of his lips. The tiny rivulets of the road had given place to gushing streams; here and there a patch of snow appeared in the highway—farther above, Barry could see that the white was unbroken save for the half-erased marks of two other cars which had made the journey before him. The motor, like some refreshed animal, roared with a new power and new energy, but the spirit was not echoed by the man at the wheel. He was in the midst of a fight that was new to him.

Up—up—up—the grades growing steadily heavier, the shifting clouds enveloping him and causing him to stop at intervals and wait in shivering impatience until they should clear and allow him once more to continue the struggle. Grayness and sunshine flitted about him; one moment his head was bowed against the sweep of a snow-flurry, driving straight against him from the higher peaks, the next the brilliance of mountain sunshine radiated about him, cheering him, exhilarating him, only to give way to the dimness of damp, drifting mists which closed in upon him like some great gray garment of distress and held him in its gloomy clutch until the grade should carry him above it and into the sun or snow again.

Higher! The machine was roaring like a desperate, cornered thing now, its crawling pace slackening with the steeper inclines, gaining with the lesser raises, then settling once more to the lagging pace as steepness followed steepness, or the abruptness of a curve caused the great slow-moving vehicle to lose the momentum gained after hundreds of feet of struggle. Again the engine boiled, and Barry stood beside it in shivering gratitude for its warmth. The hills about him were white now—the pines had lost their greenness, and became black silhouettes against the blank, colorless background. Barry Houston had left May and warmth and springtime behind—to give way to the clutch of winter and the white desert of altitude.

But withal it was beautiful. Cold, harassed by dangers that he never before knew could exist, disheartened by the even more precipitous trail which lay ahead, fighting a battle for which he was unfitted by experience, Houston could not help but feel repaid for it all, as he flattened his back against the hot radiator, and comforted by the warmth, looked about him. The world was his—his to view in the perspective of the eagle and the hawk, to look down upon from the pinnacles and see, even as a god might see it.

The sun had broken forth again upon the great head of Mount Taluchen, and turned the serried snows to pearl. Great granite precipices stood forth in old rose and royal purple; the shadows farther melted into mantles of softest lavender. Even the gnarled pines of timber-line, where the world of vegetation was sliced off short to give way to the barrenness of the white desert, seemed softened and freed from their appearence of constant suffering. A lake gleamed, set, it seemed, upright upon the very side of a mountain; an ice-gorge glistened with a million jewels; a cloud rolled through a great crevice like the billowing of soft-colored crêpe; and then—

BARRY crouched and shivered, then turned with sudden activity. It all had faded—faded in the blast of a shrilling wind, bringing upon its breast the cutting assault of sleet and snow. Quickly the radiator was drained and refilled. Once more, huddled in the driver's seat, Barry Houston gripped the wheel and felt the crunching of the chain-clad wheels in the snow of the roadway. The mountains

had lured again, only that they might grip him in a tighter embrace of danger than ever.

Chasms lurked at the corners; the car skidded and lurched from one side of the narrow roadway to the other; once the embankment crumbled for an instant as a rear wheel raced for a foothold and gained it just in time. Thundering below, Barry could hear the descent of the dirt and small boulders as they struck against protruding rocks and echoed forth to a constantly growing sound that seemed to travel for miles that it might return with the strength of thunder. Then for a moment the sun came again, and he stared toward it with set, anxious eyes. It no longer was dazzling; it was large and yellow and free from glare. He swerved his gaze swiftly to the dash-board clock, then back to the sun again. Four o'clock; yet the great yellow ball was hovering on the brim of Mount Taluchen, and dusk was deepening in the valleys.

Anxiously he studied his speedometer as the road stretched out for a space of a few hundred feet of safety. Five miles—only five miles in a space of time that on level country could have accounted for a hundred. Five miles, and the route book told plainly that there were four more to go before the summit was reached. He veered his gaze along the dash-board, suddenly to center it upon the oil-gauge. His jaw sagged. He pressed harder upon the accelerator in a vain effort. But the gauge showed no indication that the change of speed had been felt.

"The oil-pump!" he exclaimed. "It's broken—I'll have to—"

THE sentence was not finished. A sudden, clattering roar had come from beneath the hood, a clanking jangle which told him that his eyes had sought the oil-gauge too late, that a connecting rod had broken, the inevitable result of a missing oil-supply and its consequent burnt bearing. Dejectedly, Barry shut off the engine and pulled to one side of the road—through sheer force of habit. In his heart he knew that there could be no remedy for the clattering remonstrance of the broken rod, that it was beyond hope to look for aid up here where all the world was pines and precipices and driven snow, that he must go on, fighting against heavier odds than ever. And as he realized the inevitable, he saw from the distance another, a greater enemy creeping toward him over the hills and ice-gorges: the last ruddy rim of a dying sun was just disappearing over Mount Taluchen.

CHAPTER II

HAZARD PASS had held true to its name. There were yet nearly four miles to go before the summit of almost twelve thousand feet elevation could be reached and the downward trip of fourteen miles to the nearest settlement begun.

Once more at the wheel, he snapped on the lights and huddled low, to avail himself of every possible bit of warmth from the clanking, discordant engine. Slowly the journey began, the machine laboring and thundering with its added handicap of a broken rod and the consequent lost power of one cylinder. Literally inch by inch it dragged itself up the heavier grades, puffing and gasping and clanking, the rattling rod threatening at every moment to tear out its very vitals. The heavy smell of burned oil drifted back, but there was nothing that Houston could do but to grip the steering-wheel a bit tighter with his numbed hands and—go on.

Slowly, ever so slowly, the indicator of the speedometer measured off a mile in dragging decimals. The engine boiled, and Barry stopped, once more to huddle against the radiator, and to avail himself of its warmth, but not to renew the water. No stream was near—besides, the cold blast of the wind, shrilling through the open hood, accomplished the purpose more easily. Again a sally, and again a stop. Vaguely there came to him the thought that he might spend the night somewhere on the pass—and go on with the flush of morning. But the thought vanished as quickly as it came; there was no shelter, no blankets, nothing but the meager warmth of what fire he might be able to build—and that would fade the minute he nodded. Already the temperature had sunk far beneath the freezing-point; the crackling of the ice in the gulleys of the road fairly shouted the fact as he edged back once more from the radiator to his seat.

An hour—and three more after that, with the consequent stops and pauses, the slow turns, the dragging process up the steeper inclines of the road. A last final, clattering journey, and Barry leaped from the seat with something akin to enthusiasm.

Through the swirling snow which sifted past the glare of his headlights he could discern a sign board—which told him he had reached the summit, that he now stood at the literal top of the world.

But it was a silent world, a black world in which the hills about him were shapeless, dim hulks, where the wind whined, where the snow swept against his face and drifted down the open space of his collar. And the dangers—Barry knew that they had only begun. The descent would be as steep as the climb he had just made. The progress must be slower if anything, with the compression working as a brake. But it was at least progress, and once more he started.

The engine clanked less now; the air seemed a bit warmer with the down grade; and Barry, in spite of his fatigue, in spite of the disappointment of a disabled car, felt at least the joy of having conquered the thing which had sought to hold him back, the happiness of having fought against obstacles, of having beaten them. The grade lessened for a few hundred feet, and the machine slowed. Houston pressed on the clutch pedal, allowing the car to coast slowly until the hill became steeper again. Then he sought once more to shift into gear—and stopped short!

THAT moment of coasting had been enough. Overheated, distended, the bearings had cooled too suddenly about the crankshaft and had frozen there with a tightness that neither the grinding pull of the starter nor the heavy tug of the down grade could loosen. Once more Houston felt his heart sink in the realization of a newer, a greater foreboding than ever. A frozen crankshaft meant that from now on the gears would be useless. Fourteen miles of down grade faced him—if he was to make them, it must be done with the aid of brakes alone. That was dangerous.

He cupped his hands and called—in the vain hope that the stories of Hazard Pass and its loneliness might not be true after all. But the only answer was the churning of the bank-full stream a hundred yards away, the thunder of the wind through the pines below, and the eerie echo of his own voice coming back to him through the snows.

Again he started, the brake-bands squeaking and protesting, the machine sloughing dangerously as now and again its weight forced it forward at dangerous speeds until lesser levels could be reached and the hold of the brake-bands accomplish their purpose again. Down and down, the miles slipping away with far greater speed than even Barry realized, until at last—

He grasped desperately for the emergency brake and gripped tight upon it, steering with one hand. For five minutes there had come the strong odor of burning rubber; the strain had been too great—the foot-brake linings were gone; everything depended upon the emergency now! And almost with the first strain—

Careening, the car seemed to leap beneath him, a maddened, crazed thing, tired of the hills, tired of the turmoil and strain of hours of fighting, racing with all the speed that gravity could thrust upon it for the bottom of the Pass. The brakes were gone; the emergency had not even lasted through the first hill. Barry Houston was now a prisoner of speed—cramped in the seat of a runaway car, clutching tight at the wheel, leaning white and tense-faced out into the snow as he struggled to hold the great piece of runaway machinery to the snow-crusted road and check its speed from time to time in the snow-banks.

A mile more—halted at intervals by the very thing which an hour or so before Barry Houston had come to hate, the tight-packed banks of snow—then came a new emergency. One chance was left—and Barry took it, the "burring" of the gears in lieu of a brake. The snow was fading now, the air warmer; a mile or so more, and he would be safe from that threat which had driven him down from the mountain peaks—the possibility of death from exposure had he, in his light clothing, attempted to spend the night in the open. If the burred gears could only hold the car for a mile or so more!

A sudden, snapping crackle ended his hope. The gears had meshed, and meshing, had broken. Again a wild careening thing, with no snow-banks to break the rush, the car was speeding down the steepest of the grades, like a human thing determined upon self-destruction.

A skidding curve, then a straightaway, while Barry clung to the wheel with fingers that were white with the tightness of their grip. A second turn, while a wheel hung over the edge, a third; and then—

The suspended agony of space. A cry, a crash, and a dull, twisting moment of deadened suffering. After that—blackness.

Fifty feet below the road lay a broken, crushed piece of mechanism, its wheels still spinning, the odor of gasoline heavy about it from the broken tank, one light still gleaming like a blazing eye, one light that centered upon the huddled, crumpled figure of a man who groaned once, and strove dizzily to rise, only to sink at last into unconsciousness.

VAGUELY, a long time later, Houston heard a soft voice. Something touched his forehead and stroked it. He moved slightly, with the knowledge that he lay no longer upon the rocky roughness of a mountain-side, but upon a bed. A pillow was beneath his head. Warm blankets covered him. The hand again lingered on his forehead and was drawn away. Slowly, wearily, Barry Houston opened his eyes.

It was the room of a mountain cabin, with skis and snow-shoes against the walls, with rough chinkings in the interstices of the logs, with its uncouth comfort. Barry noticed none of this; his eyes had centered upon the form of a girl, standing beside the little window, where evidently she had gone from his bed.

Fair-haired she was, small of build, and slight, yet vibrant with the health and vigor that is typical of those who live in the open places. And there was a piquant something about her, too: just enough of an upturned little nose to denote the fact that there was spirit and independence in her; dark-blue eyes that snapped as she stood watching with evident eagerness the approach of some one Barry could not see. Barry strove to call to her, to raise himself—

He winced with a sudden pain which closed his eyes and clenched tight his teeth until it should pass. When he looked again, she was gone, and the opening of a door in the next room, told him whither. Almost wondering, he turned his eyes then toward the blankets and sought to move an arm—only again to desist in pain. He tried the other, and it responded. The covers were lowered, and Barry's eyes stared down upon a bandaged, splinted left arm.

He grunted with surprise, then somewhat doggedly began an inspection of the rest of his human machine. Gingerly he wiggled one toe beneath the blankets; it seemed to be in working order. He tried the others, with the same result. Then followed his legs—and the glorious knowledge that they still were together. His one free hand reached for his head and felt it. It was there, plus a few bandages. The inventory completed, he turned at the sound of a voice, hers, calling from the doorway to some one without.

"He's getting along fine, Baptiste." Barry liked the tone and the enthusiastic manner of speaking. "His fever's gone down. I should think—"

"Ah, oui!" came the answer in booming bass. "And has he, what you say, come to?"

"Not yet. But I think he ought to, soon."

"Oui! Heem no ver' bad. He be all right tomorrow."

"That's good. It frightened me, for him to be unconscious so long. It's been five or six hours now, hasn't it?"

"Lemme see. I fin' heem six o'clock. Now eet is the noon. Six hour."

"That's long enough. Besides, I think he's sleeping now. Come inside and see—"

"Wait. M'sieur Thayer he come in the minute. He say he think he know heem."

THE eyes of Barry Houston suddenly lost their curiosity. Thayer—that could mean only one Thayer! Barry had taken particular pains to keep from him the information that he was anywhere except in the East. For it had been Fred Thayer who had caused Barry to travel across country in his yellow speedster, Thayer who had formed the reason for the displacement of that name-plate at the beginning of Hazard Pass, Thayer who—

But they were talking again.

"Know him? Is he a friend?"

"Oui. So Thayer say. He say he think eet is the M'sieur Houston, who own the mill."

"Probably coming out to look over things, then?"

"Oui. Thayer, he say the young man write heem about coming. That is how he know when I tell heem about picking heem up from the machine. He say he know M'sieur Houston is coming by the automobile."

In the other room Barry Houston blinked rapidly, and frowned. He had written Thayer nothing of the sort. Suddenly he stared toward the ceiling in swift-centered thought. Some one else must have sent the information, some one who wanted Thayer to know that Barry was on the way, so that there would be no surprise in

his coming, some one who realized that his mission was that of investigation!

The names of two persons flashed across his mind, one to be dismissed immediately, the other—

"I'll fire Jenkins the minute I get back!" he muttered vindictively. "I'll—"

He choked his words. A query had come from the next room.

"Was that heem talking?"

"No, I don't think so. He groans every once in a while. Wait—I'll look."

THE injured man closed his eyes quickly as he heard the girl approach the door, not to open them until she had departed. Barry was thinking and thinking hard. A moment later—

"How's the patient?" It was a new voice, one which Barry Houston remembered from years ago when he, a wide-eyed boy in his father's care, first had viewed the intricacies of a mountain sawmill, had wandered about the bunk-houses and ridden the great bob-sleds with the lumberjacks in the forests on a never-forgotten trip of inspection. It was Thayer, the same Thayer whom he once had looked upon with all the enthusiasm and pride of boyhood, but whom he now viewed with suspicion and distrust. Thayer had brought him out here, without realizing it. Yet Thayer had known that he was on the way. And Thayer must be combatted—but how?

The voice went on: "Gained consciousness yet?"

"No," the girl answered. "That is—"

"Of course, then, he hasn't been able to talk. Pretty sure it's Houston, though. Went over and took a look at the machine. Colorado license on it, but the plates look pretty new, and there are fresh marks on the license-holders where others have been taken off recently. Evidently just bought a Colorado tag, figuring that he'd be out here for some time. How'd you find him?"

The bass voice of the man referred to as Baptiste, gave the answer, and Barry listened with interest. Evidently he had struggled to his feet at some time during the night, though he could not remember it, and striven to find his way down the mountain-side in the darkness, for the story of Baptiste told that he had found him just at dawn, a full five hundred yards from the machine.

"I see heem move," the big voice was saying, "jus' as I go to look at my trap. Then Golemar come beside me and raise his hair along his neck and growl. I look again—it is jus' at the dawn. I cannot see clearly. I raise my gun to shoot, and Golemar, he growl again. Then I think eet strange that the bear do not move. I say to Golemar: 'We will closer go.' A step or two—then three—but he do not move. Then pretty soon I look again, close. Eet is a man. I pick heem up, like this—and I bring heem home. Eh, Médaine?"

Her name was Médaine, then. Not bad, Barry thought. It rather matched her hair, and the tilt of her lips and the tone of her laugh as she answered:

"I would say you carried him more like a sack of meal, Baptiste. I'm glad I happened along when I did—you might have thrown him over your shoulder!"

A booming laugh answered her, and the sound of a slight scuffle, as though the man were striving to catch the girl in his big embrace. But the cold voice of Thayer cut in:

"And he hasn't regained consciousness?"

"Not yet. That is, I think he's recovered his senses, all right, and then fallen asleep."

"Guess I'll go in and stay with him, until he wakes up. He's my boss, you know—since the old man died. We've got a lot of important things to discuss. So if you don't mind—"

"Certainly not." It was the girl again. "We'll go in with you."

"No, thanks. I want to see him alone."

Within the bedroom, Barry Houston gritted his teeth. Then with a sudden resolve, he rested his head again on the pillow and closed his eyes as the sound of steps approached. Closer they came to the bed, and closer. Barry could feel that the man was bending over him, studying him. There came a murmur, almost whispered:

"Wonder what the damn fool came out here about? Wonder if he's wise?"

CHAPTER III

IT was with an effort that Houston gave no indication that he had heard. Before, there had been only suspicions, one flimsy clue leading to another, a building-block process which, in its culmination, had determined Barry to take a trip into the West to see for himself. He had believed that it would be a long process, the finding of a certain telegram and the pos-

sibilities which might ensue if this bit of evidence should turn out to be the thing he had suspected. He had not, however, hoped to have from the lips of the man himself a confession that conditions were not right at the lumber-mill of which Barry Houston now formed the executive head. But now—

Thayer had turned away and evidently sought a chair at the other side of the room. Barry remained perfectly still. Five minutes passed—ten. There came no sound from the chair—instinctively the man on the bed knew that Thayer was watching him, waiting for the first flicker of an eyelid, the first evidence of returning consciousness. Five minutes more and Barry rewarded the vigil. He drew his breath in a quavering sigh. He turned and groaned—quite naturally, with the pain from his splintered arm. His eyes opened slowly, and he stared about him as though in non-understanding wonderment, finally to center upon the window ahead and remain there, oblivious of the sudden tensity of the thin-faced Thayer. Barry Houston was playing for time—playing a game of identities. In the same room was a man he felt sure to be an enemy, a man who had in his care everything Barry Houston possessed in the world, every hope, every dream, every chance for the wiping out of a thing that had formed a black blot in the life of the young man for two grim years, a man who, Barry Houston now felt certain, had not held true to his trust. Still steadily staring, he pretended not to notice the tall, angular form of Fred Thayer as that person crossed the brightness of the window and turned toward the bed. And when at last he did look up into the narrow, sunken face, it was with eyes which carried in them no light of friendship, nor even the faintest air of recognition. Thayer put forth a gnarled, frost-twisted hand.

"Hello, kid," he announced, his thin lips twisting into a smile. Barry looked blankly at him.

"Hello."

"How'd you get hurt?"

"I don't know."

"Old man Renaud, here, says you fell over the side of Two Mile Hill. He picked you up about six o'clock this morning. Don't you remember?"

"Remember what?" The blank look still remained. Thayer moved closer to the bed, and bending stared at him.

"Why, the accident. I'm Thayer, you know—Thayer, your manager at the Empire Lake mill."

"Have I a manager?"

The thin man drew back at this, and stood for a moment staring down at Houston. Then he laughed, and rubbed his gnarled hands.

"I hope you've got a manager. You—you haven't fired me, have you?"

Barry turned his head wearily as though the conversation were ended.

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"You—don't— Say, you're Barry Houston, aren't you?"

"I? Am I?"

"Well, then, who are you?"

The man on the bed smiled.

"I'd like to have you tell me. I don't know, myself."

"Don't you know your name?"

"Have I one?"

THAYER, wondering now, drew a hand across his forehead, and stood for a moment in disconcerted silence. Again he started to frame a question, only to desist. Then, hesitatingly he turned, and walked to the door.

"Baptiste."

"Ah, oui!"

"Come in here, will you? I'm up against a funny proposition. Mr. Houston doesn't seem to be able to remember who he is."

"Ah!" Then came the sound of heavy steps, and Barry glanced toward the door, to see framed there the gigantic form of a grinning, bearded man, his long arms hanging with the looseness of tremendous strength, his gray eyes gleaming with twinkling interest, his whole being and build that of a great, good-humored, eccentric giant. His beard was splotched with gray, as was the hair which hung in short, unbarbered strands about his ears. But the hint of age was nullified by the cocky angle of the blue-knit cap upon his head, the blazing red of his double-breasted pearl-buttoned shirt, the flexible freedom of the muscles as he strode within. Beside him trotted a great gray crossbreed dog, which progressed step by step at its master's knee. The voice came, rumbling, yet pleasant:

"He no remember, eh?"

"No. I know him, all right. It's Barry Houston—I've been expecting him to drop in most any day. Of course, I haven't

seen him since he was a kid out here with his father—but that doesn't make any difference. The family resemblance is there—he's got his father's eyes and mouth and nose, and his voice. But I can't get him to remember it. He can't recall anything about his fall, or his name or business. I guess the accident—"

"Eet is the—" Baptiste was waving one hand vaguely, then placing a finger to his forehead in a vain struggle for a word. "Eet is the—what-you-say—"

"Amnesia." The answer had come quietly from the girl. Baptiste turned excitedly.

"Ah, oui! Eet is the amnesia. Many time I have seen it—across the way. Eet is when the mind, he will no work—what you say—he will not 'stick on the job.' See,"—he gesticulated now with both hands,—"eet is like a wall. I see eet with the shell-shock. Eet is all the same. The wall is knocked down—eet will not hold together. Blooey!" He waved his hands. "The man, he no longer remember!"

THIS time the stare in Barry Houston's eyes was genuine. To hear a girl of the mountains name a particular form of mental ailment, and then further to listen to that ailment described in its symptoms by a grinning, bearded giant of the woods was a bit past the comprehension of the injured man. Thayer had bobbed his head as though in deference to an authority. When he spoke, Barry thought that he discerned a tone of enthusiasm, of hope:

"Do they ever get over it?"

"Sometime yes. Sometime—no. Eet all depend."

"Then there isn't any time-limit on a thing like this."

"No. Sometime a year—sometime a week—sometime never. It all depend. Sometime he get a shock—something happen quick, sudden—blooey—he come back; he say, 'Where am I,' and he be back again, same like he was before!" Baptiste gesticulated vigorously. Thayer moved toward the door.

"Then I guess there's nothing more for me to do, except to drop in every few days and see how he's getting along. You'll take good care of him."

"Ah, oui."

"Good. Want to walk a piece down the road with me, Medaine?"

"Of course. It's too bad, isn't it—"

Then they faded through the doorway, and Barry could hear no more. But he found himself looking after them, wondering about many things—about the girl and her interest in Fred Thayer, and whether she too might be a part of the machinery which he felt had been set up against him, about the big, grinning Baptiste, who still remained in the room, fumbling about with the bedclothes at the foot of the bed and—

"Ouch! Don't—don't do that!"

Barry suddenly had jerked his feet far up under the covers, laughing and choking and striving to talk at the same time. At the foot of the bed, Baptiste, his eyes twinkling more than ever, had calmly rolled back the covering, and just as calmly tickled the injured man's feet. More, one long arm had stretched out again, as the giant once more reached for the sole of a foot, tickled it, then stood back and boomed with laughter as Barry involuntarily sought to jerk the point of attack out of the way. For a third time he repeated the performance, followed by a third outburst of mirth at the recoil from the injured man. Barry frowned.

"Pardon me," he said rather caustically. "But I don't get the joke."

"Ho, ho!" Baptiste turned to talk to the shaggy dog at his side. *"L'enfant* feels it! *L'enfant* feels it!"

"Feel it!" grunted Houston. "Of course I feel it! I'm ticklish."

"You hear, Golemar?" Baptiste, contorted with merriment, pointed vaguely in the direction of the bed. "M'sieur Nobody, heem is ticklish!"

"Of course I'm ticklish. Who isn't, on the bottom of their feet?"

THE statement only brought a new outburst from the giant. It nettled Houston; further, it caused him pain to be jerking constantly about the bed in an effort to evade the tickling touch of the trapper's big fingers. Once more Baptiste leaned forward and wiggled his fingers as if in preparation for a new assault, and once more Barry withdrew his pedal extremities to a place of safety.

"Please don't," he begged. "I—I don't know what kind of a game you're playing—and I'm perfectly willing to join in on it when I feel better—but now it hurts my arm to be bouncing around this way. Maybe this afternoon, if you've got to play these fool games, I'll feel better."

The thunder of the other man's laugh cut him off. Baptiste was now, it seemed,

in a perfect orgy of merriment. As though weakened by his laughter, he reeled to the wall and leaned there, his big arms hanging loosely, the tears rolling down his cheeks and disappearing in the gray beard, his whole form shaking with series after series of chuckles.

"You hear heem?" he gasped at the wolf-dog. "M'sieur Nobody, he will play with us this afternoon! M'sieur Ticklefoot! That is heem, Golemar, M'sieur Ticklefoot! Oh, ho—M'sieur Ticklefoot!"

"What in thunder is the big idea?" Barry Houston had lost his reserve now. "I want to be a good fellow—but for the love of Mike, let me in on the joke. I can't get it. I don't see anything funny in lying here with a broken arm and having my feet tickled. Of course, I'm grateful to you for picking me up and all that sort of thing, but—"

Choking back the laughter, Baptiste returned to the foot of the bed and stood wiping the tears from his eyes.

"Pardon, mon ami," he said seriously at last. "Old Baptiste must have his joke. Listen, Baptiste tell you something. You see people here today, *oui,* yes? You see the petite Médaine. *Ah, oui!"* He clustered his fingers to his lips and blew a kiss toward the ceiling. "She is the, what-you-say, fine li'le keed. She is the—the *bon bébé!* You no nev' see her before?"

Barry shook his head. Baptiste went on.

"You see M'sieur Thayer? *Oui?* You know heem?"

"No."

"You sure?"

"Never saw him before."

"So?" Baptiste grinned and wagged a finger. "Baptiste, he like the truth, *oui.* Baptiste, he don't get the truth, he tickle M'sieur's feet."

"Now listen! Please—"

"No—no!" The giant waved a hand in dismissal of the threat. "Old Baptiste, he still joke. Baptiste say he tell you something. Eet is this: You see those people? All right. You don' know one. You know the other. Yes? *Oui.* Baptiste not know why you do it. Baptiste not care. Baptiste is right—in here." He patted his heart with a big hand. "But you—you not tell the true. I know. I tickle your feet."

"You're crazy!"

"So mebbe. Baptiste have his troubles. Sometime he wish he would go crazy—like you say." The face suddenly aged. The twinkling light left the eyes. The big hands knitted, and the man was silent for a long moment. Then: "But Baptiste, he know—see?" He pointed to his head, then twisting, ran his finger down his spine. "When eet is the—what-you-say, amnesia, the nerve eet no work in the foot. I could tickle, tickle, tickle, and you would not know. But with you—blooey—right away, you feel! So you are, what-you-say?—shamming. But you are Baptiste' gues'. You sleep in Baptiste' bed. You eat his food. So long as that, you are Baptiste' frien', an' "—he looked with quiet, fatherly eyes toward the young man on the bed—"Baptiste shall ask no question, an' tell no tales!"

CHAPTER IV

IN all Houston's dealings with Thayer, conducted as they had been, at a distance, Barry Houston could not place his finger upon one tangible thing that would tell his crookedness. But he had suspected—at last had investigated and had learned even before he was ready to receive the information, that his suspicions had been justified. To follow those suspicions to their stopping-place Barry had feigned amnesia. And it had lasted just long enough for this grinning man who stood at the foot of the bed, to tickle his feet!

Had it been a ruse? Was this man a friend, a companion, even an accomplice of the thin-faced Thayer—and had his simple statement been an effort to take Barry off his guard? If so, it had not succeeded, for Barry had made no admissions. But it all affected him curiously—it nettled him and puzzled him. For a long time he was silent, merely staring at the grinning features of Baptiste. At last:

"I should think you would wait until you could consult a doctor before you'd say a thing like that."

"So? It has been done."

"And he told you—"

"Nothing. He does not need to even speak to Baptiste." A great chuckle shook the big frame. "Baptiste—he is heem."

"A doctor?"

Slowly the big man nodded. Barry went on. "I—I didn't know. I thought you were just a trapper. I wondered—."

"So! That is all, jus' a trapper—now."

Slowly the big man turned away from

the bed and stood looking out the window, the wolf-dog edging close to him as though in companionship and some strange form of sympathy. There was silence for a long time; then the voice of Baptiste came again, but it was soft and low, addressed, it seemed, not to the man on the bed, but to vacancy. "Baptiste, he is only a trapper now. He had swear he never again stand beside a sickbed. But you," he turned swiftly, a broken smile playing about his lips,—"you, *mon ami,* you, when I foun' you this morning, with your head twisted under your arm, with the blood on your face, and the dust and dirt upon you—then you look like my Pierre! And I pick you up—so!" He fashioned his arms as if he were holding a baby. "And I look at you, and I say: 'Pierre! Pierre!' But you do not answer—just as he did not answer. Then I start back with you, and the way was rough. I take you under one arm—so. It was steep. I must have one arm free. Then I meet Médaine, and she laugh at me for the way I carry you. And I was glad. Eet made Baptiste forget."

"What?" Barry said it with the curiosity of a boy.

"My Pierre—and my Julienne. Baptiste, he is all alone now. Are you all alone?" The question came quickly. Barry answered before he thought.

"Yes."

"Then you know—you know how eet feel. You know how Baptiste think when he look out of the window. See?" He pointed, and Barry raised slightly that he might follow the direction of the gesture. Faintly, through the window, he could see something white rearing itself in the shadows of the heavy pines which fringed the cabin—a cross, standing guard over a mound of earth where pine-boughs had been placed in smooth precision. Baptiste stared at his palms. "Julienne," he murmured, "my wife." Then, with a sudden impulse, he turned and sat beside the sick man.

"Have they been gone long?" asked Barry.

THE big man counted on his fingers.

"One—two—t'ree year. Before that —*bon!*" He kissed his fingers airily. "Old Baptiste, he break the way—long time ago. He come down from Montreal, with his Julienne and his Pierre—in his arms. so. He like to feel big, and strong—to help other people. So, down here where there were few, he came, and built his cabin, with his Pierre and his Julienne. And, so happy! Then bime-by Jacques Robinette come too, with his petite Médaine—"

"That's the girl who was here?"

"*Ah, oui.* I am *M'sieur le Médecin.* I look after the sick for ten—twenty—thirty mile. Jacques, he have more head. He buy land." A great sweep of the arm seemed to indicate all outdoors. "Ev'where —the pine and spruce, it was Jacques'. Bime-by, he go on, and leave Médaine alone. Then she go 'way to school, but ev' summer she come back, and live in the big house. And Baptiste glad—because he believe some day she love Pierre, and Pierre love her and—"

Another silence. At last:

"And then war come. My Pierre, he is but eighteen. But he go. Baptiste want him to go. Julienne, she say nothing—she cry at night. But she want him to go too. Médaine, she tell funny stories about her age and she had gone too. It was lonely. Baptiste was big, strong. And Julienne say to him: 'You too—you go. You may save a life.' And Baptiste went."

"To France?"

Baptiste bowed his head.

"Long time Baptiste look for his Pierre. Long time he look for Médaine. But no. Then"—his face suddenly contorted—"one night—in the cathedral at St. Menehould, I find heem. But Pierre not know his *père.* He not answer Baptiste when he call 'Pierre! Pierre!' Here, and here, and here"—the big man pointed to his breast and face and arms—"was the shrapnel. He sigh in my arms—then he is gone. Baptiste ask that night for duty on the line. He swear never again to be *M'sieur le Médecin.* All his life he help—help; but when the time come, he cannot help his own. And bime-by Baptiste come home—and find that."

He pointed out into the shadows beneath the pines.

"She had died?"

"Died?" The man's face had gone suddenly purple. His eyes were glaring, his hands upraised and clutched. "No! Murder! Murder, *mon ami!* Murder! Lost Wing,—he Médaine's Indian,—he find her —so! In a heap on the floor—and a bullet through her brain. And the money we save, the ten thousan' dollar—eet is gone! Murder!"

A shudder went over the young man on the bed. His face blanched as the big

French-Canadian bent over him; at last he turned dully at the sharp, questioning voice of the trapper:

"Murder—you know murder?"

There was a long moment of silence. Then, as though with an effort which took his every atom of strength, Houston shook himself, as to throw some hateful, vicious thing from him, and turned with a parrying question:

"Did you ever find who did it?"

"No. But sometime—Baptiste not forget. He always wait. He always look for certain things—that were in the deed-box. There was jewelry—Baptiste remember. Sometime—" Then he broke off. "Why you look so funny? Huh? Why you get so pale?"

"Please!" Barry Houston put forth a hand. "Please—" Then he straightened. "Baptiste, I'm in your hands. You can help me, or you can harm me. You know I was shamming when I acted as though I had lost my identity. Now—now you know there's something else. Will you—"

HE ceased suddenly. From without there had come the sound of steps. A moment later the door opened and shadows showed on the floor, of a man and a girl. Thayer and Médaine had returned. Soon they were in the room, the girl once more standing in the doorway, regarding Barry with a quizzical, half-wondering gaze, the man coming forward and placing one gnarled hand on the Canadian's shoulder, staring over his head down into the eyes of the man on the bed.

"I couldn't go back to the mill without making one more try," he explained. "Has he shown any signs yet?"

Barry watched Baptiste closely. But the old man's face was a blank.

"Signs? Of what?"

"Coming to—remembering who he is."

"Oh!" Baptiste shrugged his shoulders. "I have give eet up."

"Then—"

"So far Baptiste is concern'," and he looked down on the bed with a glance which told Barry far more than words—"he is already name'. He is M'sieur Nobody. I can get no more."

Thayer scratched his head. He turned.

"Anyway, I'm going to make one more attempt at it. See what you can do, Médaine."

The girl came forward then, half smiling, and seated herself beside the bed. She took Barry's hand in hers, then with a laugh, turned to Thayer:

"What shall I do? Make love to him?"

"Why not?" It was old Baptiste edging forward, the twinkle once more in his eyes. "Good! Make love to him."

"Do you suppose it would help?" The girl was truly serious now.

"Why not?"

"I don't think—" Thayer had edged forward. Baptiste pushed him away gently.

"And when did M'sieur Thayer become M'sieur le Médicin? Baptiste say ask him if he like you."

Médaine laughed.

"Do you like me?"

Brown eyes met blue eyes. A smile passed between them. It was with an effort that Houston remembered that he was only playing a part.

"I certainly do!"

"Ask him: 'Do you like me better than anybody you ever—' "

"What sense is there to all this?"

"Blooey! And why should you ask? Why should you stand with a frown on your face? It is ugly enough already!" To Barry, it was quite evident that there was some purpose behind the actions of old Baptiste, and certainly more than mere pleasantry in his words. "Enough. Ask him, Médaine."

"But—" the girl was laughing now, her eyes beaming, a slight flush in her cheeks, —"maybe he doesn't want me to—"

"Oh, but I do!" There was something in the tone of Barry Houston which made the color deepen. "I—I like it."

"That's enough!" Thayer, black-featured, his gnarled hands clenched into ugly knots, came abruptly forward. "I thought this was a serious thing—I didn't know you were going to turn it into a burlesque!"

"Perhaps M'sieur Thayer has studied the practice of medicine?"

"No. But—"

"Nor, pardon, the practice of politeness. Baptiste will not need your help."

"Whether you need it or not, I'll come back when you're through with this infernal horseplay. I—"

"Baptiste choose his guests."

"You mean—"

"Baptiste mean what he say."

"Very well, then. Come on, Médaine."

The girl, apparently without a thought of the air of proprietorship in the man's tone, rose, only to face Baptiste. The Canadian glowered at her.

"And are you a chattel?" he stormed. "Do you stand in the cup of his hand, that he shall tell you when to rise and when to sit, when to walk and where to go?"

She turned.

"You were abrupt, Fred. I'm glad Baptiste reminded me. I don't see why I should have been drawn into this at all, nor why I should be made the butt of a quarrel over some one I never saw before."

"I'm sorry—terribly sorry." Barry was speaking earnestly and holding forth his hand. "I shouldn't have answered you that way. I'm—"

"WE'LL forget it all." A flashing smile crossed the girl's lips. "Fred never knows how to take Baptiste. They're always quarreling this way. The only trouble is that Fred always takes in the whole world when he gets mad. And that includes me. I think—" and the little nose took a more upward turn than ever—"that Baptiste is entirely right, Fred. You talked to me as though I were a sack of potatoes. I wont go with you, and I wont see you until you can apologize."

"There's nothing to apologize for!" Thayer jammed on his hat and stamped out the door. Médaine watched him with laughing eyes.

"He'll write me a letter tonight," she said quietly. Then: "Lost Wing!"

"Humph!" It was a grunt from outside.

"I just wanted to be sure you were there. Call me when Mr. Thayer has passed the ridge."

"Humph!"

Médaine turned again to Baptiste, a childish appearance of confidence in her eyes, her hand on the chair by the bed.

"Were you really fooling, Baptiste—or shall we continue?"

The twinkle still shone in the old man's eyes. "Perhaps—sometime. So mebbe sometime you—"

"Wah-hah-hai-i-e-e-e!" The Sioux had called from without. Médaine turned.

"When you need me, Baptiste," she answered with a smile that took in also the eager figure on the bed, "I'll be glad to help you. Good-by."

That too included Barry, and he answered it with alacrity. Then, for a moment after she had gone, he lay scowling at Baptiste, who once more, in a weakened state of merriment, had reeled to the wall, followed as usual by his dog, and leaned there, hugging his sides. Barry growled:

"You're a fine doctor! Just when you had me cured, you quit! I'd forgotten I even had a broken arm."

"So?" Baptiste straightened. "You like her, eh? You like Médaine?"

"How can I help it?"

"Good! I like you to like Médaine. You no like Thayer?"

"Less every minute."

"I too no like heem. He try to take my Pierre's place with Médaine. And Pierre, he was strong and tall and straight. Pierre, he could smile—like you can smile. You look like my Pierre!"

"Thanks, Baptiste." Barry said it in whole-hearted manner. "You don't know how grateful I am for a little true friendliness."

"Grateful? You? Bah, you shall go back, and they will ask you who helped you when you were hurt, and you—you will not even remember what is the name."

"Hardly that." Barry pulled thoughtfully at the covers. "In the first place, I'm not going back; and in the second, I haven't enough true friends to forget so easily. I—I—" Then his jaw dropped and he sat staring ahead, out to the shadows beneath the pines and the stalwart cross which kept watch there.

"You act funny again. You act like you act when I talk about my Julienne. Why you do eet?"

Barry Houston did not answer at once. Old scenes were flooding through his brain, old agonies that reflected themselves upon his features, old sorrows, old horrors. His eyes grew cold and lifeless, his hands white and drawn, his features haggard. The chuckle left the lips of Baptiste Renaud. He gripped the younger man by his uninjured arm. His eyes came close to Barry Houston, his voice was sharp, tense, commanding:

"You! Why you act like that when I talk about murder? Why you get pale, huh? Why you get pale?"

CHAPTER V

THE gaze of Baptiste Renaud was strained as he asked the question, his manner tense, excited. Through sheer determination, Barry forced a smile and pulled himself back to at least a semblance of composure.

"Maybe you know the reason already—through Thayer. But if you don't—Bap-

tiste, how much of it do you mean when you say you are a man's friend?"

"Baptiste may joke," was the quiet answer, "but he no lie. You look like my Pierre—you help where eet has been lonesome. You are my frien'."

"Then I know you are not going to ask me for something that hurts in the telling. And at least, I can give you my word of honor that if I'm a bit—sensitive at the word *murder,* it isn't because of my conscience!"

Baptiste was silent after that, walking slowly about the room, shaggy head bent, hands clasped behind his back, studious, as though striving to fathom what had been on the man's mind. As for Barry, he stared disconsolately at vacancy, living again a thing which he had striven to forget. It had been forced upon him, this partial admission of a cloud in the past; the geniality, the utter honesty, the friendliness of the old French-Canadian, the evident dislike for a man whom he, Barry, also thoroughly distrusted, had lowered the younger man's guard. The tragic story of Pierre and Julienne had furthered the merest chance acquaintance into what seemed the beginning of close friendship.

"Eet is enough!" said Baptiste abruptly now. "There is something you do not want to tell. I like you—I not ask. You look my Pierre—who could do no wrong. So—good! Baptiste is your frien'. You have trouble? Baptiste help."

"I've had plenty of that, in the last two years," admitted Houston. "I think I've plenty ahead of me. What do you know about Thayer?"

"He no good."

"Why?"

"I don't know. On'y—he have narrow eyes, too close together. He have a quirk to his mouth I no like. He have habit nev' talkin' about himself—he ask you question an' tell you nothing. He have hatchet-face; I no like a man with hatchet-face. Besides, he make love to Médaine!"

Barry laughed.

"Evidently that's a sore spot with you, Baptiste."

"No. But if my Pierre had live, he would have make love to her. She would have marry him. And to have M'sieur Thayer take his place? No! Mebbe—you like Médaine, huh?"

"I do! She's pretty, Baptiste."

"Mebbe you make love?"

But the man on the bed shook his head.

"I can't make love to anybody, Baptiste—not until I've—I've found something I'm looking for. I'm afraid that's a long ways off. I haven't the privileges of most young fellows. I'm a little—hampered by circumstance. I've—besides, if I ever do marry, it wont be for love. There's a girl back East, who says she cares for me, and who simply has taken it for granted that I think the same way about her. She stood by me—in some trouble. Out of everyone, she didn't believe what they said about me. That means a lot. Some way, she isn't my kind—but she stood by me, and I guess that's all that's necessary, after all. When I've fulfilled my contract with myself, if I ever do, I'll do the square thing and ask her to marry me."

BAPTISTE scowled.

"You dam' fool," he said. "Buy 'em present. Thank 'em—*merci beaucoup*. But don't marry 'em unless you love 'em. Baptiste, he know. He been in too many home where there is no love."

"True. But you don't know the story behind it all, Baptiste. And I can't tell you, except this: I got into some trouble. I'd rather not tell you what it was. It broke my father's heart—and his confidence in me. He—he died shortly afterward."

"And you—was it your fault?"

"If you never believe anything else about me, Baptiste, believe this: it wasn't. And in a way, it was proved to him, before he went. But he had been embittered then. He left a will, with stipulations. I was to have the land he owned out here at Empire Lake, and the flume-site leading down the right side of Hawk Creek to the mill. Some one else owns the other side of the lake and the land on the opposite side of the stream."

"*Oui*—Médaine Robinette."

"Honestly? Is it hers?"

"When she is twenty-one. But go on."

"Father wouldn't leave me the mill. He seemed to have a notion that I'd sell it all off—and he tied everything up in a way to keep me from doing anything like that. The mill is rented to me. The land is mine, and I can do everything but actually dispose of it. But on top of that comes another twist: if I haven't developed the business within five years into double what it was at the peak of its best development, back goes everything into a trust-fund, out of which I am to have a hundred dollars

a month, nothing more. That's what I'm out here for, Baptiste, to find out why, in spite of the fact that I've worked day and night now for a year and a half, in spite of the fact that I've gone out and struggled and fought for contracts, and even beaten down the barriers of dislike and distrust and suspicion to get business —why I can't get it! Something or some one is blocking me, and I'm going to find out what and who it is!

"I think I know one man—Thayer. But there may be more. That's why I'm playing this game of lost identity. I thought I could get out here and nose around without his knowing it. When he found out at once who I was, and seemed to have had a previous tip that I was coming out here, I had to think fast and take the first scheme that popped into my head. Maybe if I can play the game long enough, it will take him off his guard and cause him to work more in the open. They may give me a chance to know where I stand.

"And I've got to know that, Baptiste. I don't care what happens to me personally. I don't care whether five minutes after I have made it, I lose every cent of what I have worked for. But I do care about this: I'm going to make good to my father's memory. I'm going to be able to stand before a mirror and look myself straight in the eye, knowing that I bucked up against trouble, that it nearly whipped me, that it took the unfairest advantage that Fate can take over a man in allowing my father to die before I could fully right myself in his eyes; but that if there is a Justice, if there is anything fair and decent in this universe, some way he'll know —he'll rest in peace, with the understanding that his son took up the gauntlet that death laid down for him, that he made the fight, and that he won!"

"Good!" Old Baptiste leaned over the foot of the bed. "My Pierre—he would talk like that. Now—what is it you look for?"

"In the first place, I want to know how many accidents can happen in a single plant, just at the wrong time. I want to know why it is that I can go out and fight for a contract, and then lose it because a saw has broken—or an off-bearer, lugging slabs away from the big wheel, can allow one to strike at just the wrong moment and let the saw pick it up and drive it through the boiler, laying up the whole plant for three weeks. I want to know why it is that only about one out of three contracts I land are ever filled. Thayer's got something to do with it, I know. Why—that's another question. But there must be others. I want to know who they are, and weed them out. I've only got three and a half years left, and things are going backward instead of forward."

"How do you intend to fin' this out?"

"I don't know. I've got one lead—as soon as I'm able to get into town. That may give me a good deal of information; I came out here, at least, in the hope that it would. After that, I'm hazy. How big a telegraph office is there at Tabernacle?"

"How big?" Baptiste laughed. "How little! Eet is about the size of the—what-you-say—the peanut."

"Is there ever a time when the operator isn't there?"

"At noon. He go out to dinner, and he leave open the door. If eet is something you want, walk in."

"Thanks." A strange eagerness was in Houston's eyes. "I think I'll be able to get up tomorrow. Maybe I can walk over there—it's only a mile or two, isn't it?"

BUT when tomorrow came, it found a white, bandaged figure sitting weakly in front of Baptiste's cabin, nothing more. Strength of purpose and strength of being had proved two different things, and now he was quite content to rest there in the May sunshine, to watch the chattering magpies as they went about the work of spring housebuilding, to study the colors of the hills, the mergings of the tintings and deeper hues as the scale ran from brown to green to blue, and finally to the stark red granite and snow whites of Mount Taluchen.

Baptiste and his constant companion Golemar were making the round of the traps and had been gone for hours. Barry was alone—alone with the beauties of spring in the hills—and with his problems.

Of these there were plenty. In the first place, how had Thayer known that he was on the way from the East? Houston had spoken to only two persons, Jenkins, his bookkeeper, and one other. To these two persons he merely had given the information that he was going West on a bit of a vacation. And yet, the news had leaked—Thayer had been informed, and his coming had been no surprise.

That there had been need for his coming, Barry felt sure. At the least, there

was mismanagement at the mill—contract after contract lost just when it should have been gained, told him this. And—he drew a sheet of yellow paper from his pocket and stared hard at it; there was something else, something which had aroused his curiosity to an extent of suspicion, something which might mean an open book of information to him if only he could reach Tabernacle at the right moment, and gain access to the telegraph files without the interference of the agent.

SUDDENLY he ceased his study of the message and returned it to his pocket. Two persons were approaching the cabin from the opposite hill, a girl whom he was glad to see, and a man who walked, or rather, rolled, in the background—Médaine Robinette and a sort of rear guard who, twenty or thirty feet behind her, followed her every step, trotted when she ran down the steep side of an embankment, then slowed as she came to a walk again. A bow-legged creature he was, with ill-fitting clothing and a broad "two-gallon" hat which evidently had been bequeathed to him by some cowpuncher, long hair which straggled over his shoulders, and a beaded vest which shone out beneath the scraggly outer coat like a candle on a dark night. Instinctively Barry knew him to be the grunting individual who had waited outside the door the night before, Lost Wing, Médaine's Sioux servant—apparently a self-constituted bodyguard.

Closer she came, and Barry watched her, taking a strange sort of delight in the grace with which she negotiated the stepping stones of the swollen little stream which intervened between her and the cabin of Baptiste Renaud, her arms full of flowers. Barry brightened with sudden hope.

"Wonder if she's bringing them to me?"

The answer came a moment later as she faced him, panting slightly from the exertion of the climb, the natural flush of exercise heightened by her evident embarrassment.

"Oh, you're up!" came in an almost disappointed manner. Then with a glance toward the great cluster of wild roses in her arms: "I don't know what to do with these things now."

"Why?" Barry's embarrassment was as great as hers. "If—if it'll do any good, I'll climb back into bed again."

"No—don't. Only I thought you were really, terribly ill, and—"

"I am—I was—I will be. That is—gosh, it's a shame for you to go out and pick all those and then have me sitting up here as strong as an ox. I—"

"Oh, don't worry about that." She smiled at him with that sweetness which only a woman can know when she has the advantage. "I didn't pick them. Lost Wing"—she pointed to the skulking, outlandishly dressed Indian in the background—"attended to that. I was going to send them over by him but I didn't have anything to do, so I just thought I'd bring them myself."

"Thanks for that, anyway. Can't I keep them just the same—to put on the table or something?"

"Oh, if you care to." Barry felt that she was truly disappointed that he wasn't at the point of death, or at least somewhere near it. "Where's Baptiste?"

"Out looking after his traps. He'll be back soon. Is there—"

"No. I usually come over every day to see him, you know." Then the blue eyes lost their diffidence, to become serious. "Do you remember yet who you are?"

"Less right at this minute than at any other time!" spoke Barry truthfully. "I'm out of my head entirely!" He reached for the flowers.

"Please don't joke that way. It's really serious. When I was across,—army nursing,—I saw a lot of just such cases as yours. One has to be awfully careful with shell-shock."

"I know. But I'm getting the best of care. I—ouch!" His interest had exceeded his caution. The unbandaged hand had waved the flowers for emphasis, and absently gripped the stems. The wild-roses fluttered to the ground. "Gosh!" he complained dolefully. "I'm all full of thorns. Guess I'll have to pick 'em out with my teeth."

"Oh!" She picked up the roses and laid them gingerly aside. "You can't use your other hand, can you?"

"No. Arm's broken."

She hesitated a moment, at last to shake her head. "No—he'd want to dig them out with a knife. If you don't mind—" She moved toward Houston, and Barry jabbed forth his hand.

"If *you* don't mind,"—he countered, and she sat beside him. A moment later:

"I must look like a fortune teller."

"See anything in my palm beside thorns?"

"Yes—a little dirt. Baptiste evidently isn't a very good nurse."

"I did the best I could with one hand. But I was pretty grimy. I—I didn't know I was going to be this lucky."

SHE pretended not to hear the sally. And he shifted the conversation, from himself to her.

"Do you live out here?"

"Yes. Didn't Baptiste tell you? My house is just over the hill—you can just see one edge of the roof through that bent aspen."

Barry stared.

"I'd noticed that. Thought it was a house, but couldn't be sure. I understood Baptiste to say you only came out here in the summer."

"I did that when I was going to school. Now I stay here all the year round."

"Isn't it lonely?"

"Out here? With a hundred kinds of birds to keep things going? With the trout leaping in the streams in the summertime, and a good gun in the hollow of your arm in the winter? Besides, there's old Lost Wing and his squaw, you know. I get a lot of enjoyment out of them when we're snowed in—in the winter. He's told me fully fifty versions of how the Battle of Wounded Knee was fought; and as for Custer's last battle—it's wonderful!"

"He knows all about it?"

"I'd hardly say that. I think the best description of Lost Wing is that he's an admirable fiction-writer. Baptiste says he has more lies than a dog has fleas."

"Then it isn't history?"

"Of course not—just imagination. But they're well done, with plenty of gestures. He stands in front of the fire and acts it all out while his squaw sits on the floor and grunts and nods and wails at the right time, and it's really entertaining. They're about a million years old, both of them. My father got them when he first came down here from Montreal. He wanted Lost Wing as a sort of bodyguard. It was a good deal wilder then than it is now, and Father owned a good deal of land."

"So Baptiste tells me. He says that practically all the forests around here are yours."

"They will be, next year," she admitted, "when I'm—" She stopped and laughed.

"Baptiste told me. Twenty-one."

"He never could keep anything to himself," she replied.

"What's wrong about that? I'm lots older myself, I guess."

"H'm! You seem remarkably clear in your mind to be afflicted with amnesia. Are you perfectly sure you don't remember anything?"

"No—not now. But—I think I will. It acts to me like a momentary thing. Every once in a while I get a flash as though it were all coming back—it was just the fall; I'm sure of that. My head's all right."

"You mean your brain?"

"Yes. I don't act crazy, or anything like that, do I?"

"Well,"—and she smiled quizzically,—"of course, I don't know you, so I have nothing to go by. But I must admit that you say terribly foolish things."

Leaving him to think over that, she turned, laughed a good-by, and with bow-legged old Lost Wing in her wake, retraced the path to the top of the hill.

CHAPTER VI

NEXT day Houston found himself strong enough to venture abroad, and Baptiste accompanied him to the little village of Tabernacle. They skirted the two clapboarded stores forming the main business district and edged toward the converted box-car that passed as a station. "Good!" exclaimed Baptiste, "the agent, he is leaving."

Barry looked ahead and saw a man crossing an expanse of flat country toward what was evidently a boarding-house. Baptiste nudged him.

"You will walk slowly, as though going into the station to loaf. Baptiste will come behind—and keep watch."

Barry obeyed. A moment more, and he was within the converted box-car, and found it deserted and silent, except for the constant clack of the telegraph-key rattling off the business of a mountain railroad-system like some garrulous old woman, to anyone who would listen. There was no private office, only a railing and a counter, which Barry crossed easily. A slight crunching of gravel sounded without—it was Baptiste, now lounging in the doorway, ready at a moment to give the alarm. Houston turned hastily toward the file-hook and began to turn the pages of original copy which hung there.

A moment of searching, and he leaned suddenly forward. Messages were few

from Tabernacle; it had been an easy matter for him to come upon the originals of the telegrams he sought, in spite of the fact that they had been sent more than two weeks before. Already he was reading the first of the night-letters:

Barry Houston,
Empire Lake Mill and Lumber Co.,
212 Grand Building, Boston, Mass.
Please order six-foot saw as before. Present one broken today through crystallization.
F. B. THAYER.

"That's one of 'em." Houston grunted the words, rather than spoke them. "That was meant for me, all right. Humph!"

The second one was before him now, longer, and far more interesting to the man who bent over the telegraph file, while Baptiste kept watch at the door. Hastily he pulled a crumpled message from his pocket and compared them—and grunted again.

"The same thing—identically the same thing, except for the address! Baptiste," he called softly, "what kind of an operator is this fellow?"

"No good. A boy. Just out of school."

"That explains it." Houston was talking to himself again. "He got the two messages and—" Suddenly he bent forward and examined a notation in a strange hand: *"Missent Houston. Resent Blackburn."*

It explained much to Barry Houston, that scribble of four words. It told him why he had received a telegram which meant nothing to him, yet caused suspicion enough for a two-thousand-mile trip. It explained that the operator in sending two messages had, probably through absent-mindedness, put them both on the wire to the same person, when they were addressed separately—that he later had seen his mistake,—and corrected it. Barry smiled grimly:

"Thanks very much, operator," he murmured. "It isn't every mistake that turns out this lucky."

SLOWLY, studiously, Houston compared the messages again, the one he had received, and one on the hook, which read:

J. C. Blackburn,
Deal Block, Chicago, Ill.
Our friend reports Boston deal put over O. K. Everything safe. Suggest start preparations for operations in time compete Boston for the big thing. Have Boston where we want him and will keep him there.
THAYER.

It was the same telegram that Barry Houston had received and puzzled over in Boston except for the address. He had been right, then; the message had not been for him; instead, it had been intended decidedly *not* for him, and it meant—what? Hastily Houston crawled over the railing, and motioning to Baptiste, led him away from the station. Around the corner of the last store he brought forth his telegram and placed it in the bigger man's hands.

"That's addressed to me—but it should have gone to some one else. Who's J. C. Blackburn of Chicago?"

"Baptiste don' know. Try fin' out. Why?"

"Have you read that message?"

The giant traced out the words, almost indecipherable in places from creasing and handling. He looked up sharply.

"Boston? You come from Boston?"

"Yes. That must refer to me. It must mean what I've been suspecting all along—that Thayer's been running my mill down, to help along some competitor. You'll notice that he says he has me where he wants me."

"Yes. But has he? What was the deal?"

"I don't know. I haven't been in any deal that I know of—yet he must refer to me. I haven't any idea what he means by the reference to starting operations, or that sentence about 'the big thing.' There isn't another mill around here?"

"None nearer than the Moscript place at Echo Lake."

"Then what can it be." Suddenly Houston frowned. "Thayer's been going with Médaine a good deal, hasn't he?"

"*Oui*—when Baptiste can think of no way to keep him from it."

"It couldn't be that he's made some arrangement with her—about her forest lands?"

"They are not hers yet. She does not come into them until she is twenty-one."

"But they are available then?"

"*Oui.* And they are just as good as yours."

"Practically the same thing, aren't they? How much of the lake does she own?"

"The east quarter, and the forests that front on eet, and the east bank of Hawk Creek."

"Then there would be opportunity for everything, for skidways into the lake, a flume on her side and a mill. That must be—"

"Baptiste would have hear of eet."

"Surely But Thayer might have—"

"Baptiste would have hear of eet," came the repetition. "No, eet is something else. She would have ask me, and I would have said: 'No. Take nothing and give nothing. M'sieur Thayer, he is no good.' So eet is not that. You know the way back? Good! Go to the cabin. Baptiste will try to learn who eet is this Blackburn."

They parted, Baptiste to turn lounging back into the tiny town, Houston to take the winding road which led back to the cabin. A pretty road it was, too, which trailed along the stream, fringed with whispering aspens, bright green in their new foliage, with small spruce and pine. But with all its beauty, Houston noticed it but slightly. His thoughts were on other things —on Thayer and his duplicity, on the possibilities of the future. The outlook was not promising. Yet even in its foreboding, there was consolation.

"I at least know Thayer's a crook. I can fire him and run the mill myself," Barry was murmuring to himself as he plodded along. "There may be others—I can weed them out. At least, saws wont be breaking every two weeks, and lumber wont warp for lack of proper handling. Maybe I can get somebody back East to look after the office there and—"

He ceased his soliloquy as he glanced ahead and noticed the trim figure of Médaine Robinette swinging along the road, old Lost Wing, as usual, trailing in her rear, leading the saddle-horse which she evidently had become tired of riding. Barry hurried toward her. He waved airily as they came closer, and called. But if she heard him, she gave no indication. Instead she turned, swiftly, Houston thought, and mounted her horse. A moment later she trotted past him, and again he greeted her, to be answered by a nod and a slight movement of the lips. But the eyes had been averted; Barry could see that the thinnest veneer of politeness had shielded something else as she spoke to him, an expression of distaste, of dislike—almost loathing!

CHAPTER VII

"WHY?"

Barry Houston could not answer the self-imposed question. He could only stand and stare after her and the Indian as they moved down the road and disappeared. A strange chill went over him.

"Thayer's told her!"

He spoke the sentence like a man repeating the words of a death-sentence. His features suddenly had grown haggard. He stumbled slightly as he made the next rise in the road and went on, slowly, silently toward the cabin.

There Baptiste found him slumped on the bench, staring out at the whites and rose pinks of Mount Taluchen, yet seeing none of it. The big man boomed a greeting, and Barry, striving for a smile, answered him. The Canadian turned to his wolf-dog.

"Golemar! Loneliness sits badly upon our friend. He is homesick. Trot over the hill and bring to him the little Médaine!" Then, seeing that the man was struggling vainly for a semblance of cheeriness, he slid beside him on the bench and tousled his hair with one big hand. "Nev' min' old Baptiste," he said hurriedly. "He joke when eet is no time. You worry, huh? So, mebbe, Baptiste help. There are men at the boarding-house."

"The Blackburn crowd?"

"So. Seven carpenters, and others. They work for Blackburn, who is in Chicago. They are here to build a mill."

"A mill?" Barry looked up now with new interest. "Where?"

"Near the lake. The mill, eet will be sawing in a month. The rest, the big plant, eet will take time for that."

"On Médaine's land, then!" But Baptiste shook his head.

"No. Eet is on the five acres own' by Jerry Martin. He has been try' to sell eet for five year. Eet is no good—rocks and rocks—and rocks. They build eet there."

"But what can they do on five acres? Where will they get their lumber?"

The trapper shrugged his shoulders.

"Baptiste on'y know what they tell heem."

"But surely there must be some mistake about it. You say they are going to start sawing in a month, and that a bigger plant is going up. Do you mean a complete outfit—planers and all that sort of thing?"

"So!"

Houston shook his head.

"For the life of me, I can't see it. In the first place, I have the only timber around here with the exception of Médaine's land, and you say that she doesn't come into that until next year. But they're

going to start sawing at this new mill within a month. My timber stretches back from the lake for eight miles—they either will have to go beyond that and truck in the logs for that distance, which would be ruinous as far as profits are concerned, or content themselves with scrub pine and sapling spruce. I don't see what they can make out of that. Isn't that right? All I know about it, is from what I've heard. I've never made a cruise of the territory around here. But it's always been the belief that with the exception of the land on the other quarter of the lake—"

"That is all."

"Then where—"

AGAIN Baptiste shrugged his shoulders. Then he pulled long at his grizzled beard, regarding the wolf-dog which sat between his legs, staring up at him.

"Golemar," he said at last, "there is something strange. We shall fin' out, you and me and *mon ami.* Suddenly he turned. "M'sieur Thayer, he gone."

"Gone? You mean he's run away?"

"By gar, no. But he leave hurried. He get a telephone from long distance. Chicago."

"Then—"

"I not know. M'sieur Shuler, in the telephone office, he tell me. Eet is a long call; M'sieur Shuler is curious, and he listen in while they, what-you-say—chew up the rag. Eet is a woman. She say to meet her in Denver. This morning M'sieur Thayer take the train. Good!"

"Good? Why?"

"What you know about lumber?"

Houston shook his head.

"A lot less than I should. It wasn't my business, you know. My father started this mill out here during boom times when it looked as though the railroad over Crestline would make the distance between Denver and Salt Lake so short that the country would build up like wildfire. He got them to put in a switch from above Tabernacle to the mill and figured on making a lot of money out of it all. But it didn't pan out, Baptiste. First of all, the railroad didn't go to Salt Lake; and in the second—"

"The new road will," said the French-Canadian. "When they start to build eet, blooey! Eet will be no time."

"The new road? I didn't know there was to be one."

"*Ah, oui!*" Baptiste became enthusiastic. "They shall make eet a road! Eet will not wind over the range like this one. Eet shall come through the mountains with a six-mile tunnel, at Carrow Peak, where they have work already, one, two, t'ree year. Then eet will start out straight; eet will cut off a hundred miles to Salt Lake. Then we will see!"

"When is all this going to happen?"

The giant shrugged his shoulders.

"When the railroad eet is ready, and the tunnel is done. When that shall be? No one know. But the survey, eet is made. The land, eet is condem'. But you say you no know lumber?"

"Not more than any office man could learn in a year and a half. It wasn't my business. Father thought less and less of the mill every year. Once or twice, he was all but ready to sell it to Thayer; and would have done it, I guess, if Thayer could have raised the money. He was sick of the thing, and wanted to get rid of it. I had gone into the real-estate business, never dreaming but that some day the mill would be sold and off our hands. Then—my trouble came along, and my father—left this will. Since then I've been busy trying to stir up business. Oh, I guess I could tell a weather scantling from a green one; and a long time ago, when I was out here, my father taught me how to scale a log. That's about all."

"Could you tell if a man cut a tree to get the greatest footage? If you should say to a lumberjack to fell a tree at the spring of the root, would you know whether he did it or not? Heh? Could you know if the sawyer robbed you of fifty feet on ever' log? No? Then we shall learn. Tomorrow we shall go to the mill. M'sieur Thayer shall not be there. Perhaps Baptiste can tell you much. *Bien!* We shall take Médaine?"

"I—I don't think she'd go."

"Why not?"

"I'd rather—" Houston was thinking of a curt nod and averted eyes. "Maybe we'd better just go alone, Baptiste."

"*Bien.* We shall go into the forest. We shall learn much."

NEXT morning behind a plodding team hitched to a jolting wagon, they made the journey, far out across the hills and flats from Tabernacle, gradually winding into a shallow cañon which led to places which Houston remembered from years long gone. Beside the road ran the rickety

track which served as a switch spur from the main line of the railroad, five miles from camp, the ties rotten, the plates loosened and the rails but faintly free from rust—silent testimony of the fact that cars traveled but seldom toward the market. Ahead of them a white-faced peak reared itself against the sky as though a sentinel against further progress—Bear Mountain, three miles beyond the farthest stretch of Empire Lake. Nearer, a slight trail of smoke curled upward, and Baptiste pointed to it.

"The mill," he said. "Two mile yet."

"Yes, I remember in a hazy sort of way." Then Houston laughed, shortly. "Things will have to happen fast if I ever live up to my contract, Baptiste."

"So?"

"Yes, I put too much confidence in Thayer. I thought he was honest. When my father died, he came back to Boston, of course, and we had a long talk. I agreed that I was not to interfere out here any more than was necessary, spending my time, instead, in rounding up business. He had been my father's manager, and I naturally felt that he would give every bit of his attention to my business. I didn't know that he had other schemes, and I didn't begin to get onto the fact until I started losing contracts. That wasn't so long ago. Now I'm out here—and if necessary, I'll stay here, and be everything from manager to lumberjack, to pull through."

"Good! My Pierre, he would talk like that." Then the old man was silent for a moment. "Old Baptiste, he has notice some things. He will show you. Golemar! Whee!"

IN answer to the whining call of the giant, the wolf-dog, trotting beside the lazy team, swerved and nipped at the horses' heels. The pace became a jogging trot. Soon they were in view of the long smooth mound of sawdust leading to the squat, rambling saw-shed. A moment more, and the bunk-house, its unpainted clapboards blackened by the rain and sun and snows, showed ahead. A half-mile; then Baptiste left the wagon, and Barry following him, walked toward the mill and its whining saws.

"Watch close!" he ordered. "See ever'thing they do. Then remember. Baptiste tell you about it when we come out."

They went within, where hulking, strong-shouldered men were turning the logs from the piles without, along the skidways and to the carriage of the mill, their cant-hooks working in smooth precision, their muscles bulging as they rolled the great cylinders of wood into place, steadied them, then stood aside until the carriages should shunt them toward the sawyer and the tremendous revolving wheel which was to convert them into board feet of lumber. Hurrying "off-bearers," or slab-carriers, white with sawdust, scampered away from the consuming saw, dragging the bark and slab-sides to a smaller blade, there to be converted into boiler-fuel and to be fed to the crackling fire of the stationary engine far at one end of the mill. Leather belts whirred and slapped; there was noise everywhere, except from the lips of men. For they, these men of the forest, were taciturn.

To Barry it all seemed a smooth-working, perfectly aligned thing; the big sixteen-foot logs went forward, to be dragged into the consuming teeth of the saw, then through the sheer force of the blade, pulled on until brownness became whiteness, the cylindrical shape a lop-sided thing with one long, glaring white mark—to be shunted back upon the automatic carriage, notched over for a second incision, and started forward again, while the newly sawn boards traveled on to the trimmers and edgers, and thence to the drying racks.

Log after log skidded upon the carriage and was brought forward, while Houston, fascinated, watched the kerf-mark of the blade as it tore away a slab-side. Then a touch on the arm, and he followed Baptiste without. The Canadian wandered thoughtfully about a moment, then approached a newly stacked pile of lumber and leaned against it.

"M'sieur Houston," he observed, "he will —what you say—fix the can on the sawyer."

"Why?"

"First," said Baptiste, "he waste a six-inch board on each slab-side he take off. Un'stand? The first cut—when the bark, eet is sliced off. He take too much. Eet is so easy. And then—look." He drew from some place of concealment a small ruler with his big thumb fixed upon it. "See? Eet is an inch and a quarter. Too thick."

"I know that much, at least. Lumber should be cut at the mill an inch and an eighth thick to allow for shrinkage to one inch—but not an inch and a quarter."

Baptiste grinned. "Eet make a difference on a big log. Eight cuts of the saw, and a good board, eet is gone."

"No wonder I never could make any money."

"There is much more. The trimmer and the edger, they take off too much. They make eight inch boards where there should be ten, and ten where there should be twelve. You shall have a new crew."

"And a new manager," Houston said it quietly. The necessity for his masquerade was fading swiftly now.

"And new men on the kilns. See!"

Far to one side a great mass of lumber reared itself against the sky, twisted and warped, the offal of the drying-kilns. Baptiste shrugged his shoulders.

"So! When the heat, eet is made too quick, the lumber twist. Eet is so easy—when one wants some one to be tired and quit!"

TO quit! It was all plain to Barry Houston now. Thayer had tried to buy the mill when the elder Houston was alive. He had failed. Now he was striving for something else—to make Houston, the newcomer, Houston, who was striving to succeed without the fundamentals of actual logging experience, disgusted with the business and his contract with the dead. The first year and a half of the fight had passed, a losing proposition; Barry could see why now, in warped lumber and thick-cut boards, in broken machinery and unfulfilled contracts. Thayer wanted him to quit; death had tied up the mill proper to such an extent that it could neither be leased nor sold. But the timber could be bought on a stumpage basis, the lake and flume leased, and with a new mill—

"I understand the whole thing now!" There was excitement in the tone. "They can't get this mill—on account of the way the will reads. I can't dispose of it. But they know that with the mill out of the way, and the whole thing a disappointment, that I should be willing to contract my timber to them and lease the flume. Then they can go ahead with their own plans and their own schemes. It's the lake and flume and timber that counts, anyway—this mill's the cheapest part of it all."

"Ah, *oui!*" The big man wagged his head in sage approval. "But it shall not be, eh?"

Houston's lips went into a line.

"Not until the last dog dies!"

CHAPTER VIII

"COME—we will go into the forest," said Baptiste presently. "Baptiste will show you things you should know."

And to the old wagon again they went, to trail their way up the narrow road along the bubbling wooden flume which led from the lake, to swerve off at the dam, and turn into the hills again. Below them the great expanse of water riffled and shimmered in the May sun; away off at the far end, a log slid down a skidway and with a booming splash struck the water, buried itself for a hundred feet, then bobbed up to join others of its kind, drifting with the current of the stream which formed the lake, toward the dam. In the smoother spaces trout splashed here and there; the reflections of the hills showed in the great expanse as the light wind lessened, allowing the surface to become glass-like—revealing also the twisted roots and dead branches of trees long inundated in forming the big basin of water.

Evidently only a few men were working in the hills; the descent of the logs came only at long intervals. Houston stared gloomily at the skid, at the lake and the small parcel of logs drifting there.

"All for nothing," he observed. "It takes about three logs to make one—the way they're working."

"*Oui!* But M'sieur Houston shall learn."

Barry did not answer. He had learned a great deal already. He knew enough to realize that his new effort must be a clean sweep—from the manager on down. Distrust had enveloped him completely—even to the last lumberjack must the camp be cleaned, and the start made anew with a crew upon whom he could at least depend for honesty. How the rest of the system was to work out he did not know. How he was to sell the lumber which he intended milling, how he was to look after both the manufacturing and the disposing of his product, was something beyond him just at this moment. But there would be a way—there must be. Besides, there was Baptiste, heavy-shouldered, giant Baptiste, leaning over the side of the wagon, whistling and chiding the faithful old Golemar, and somehow Houston felt that with him, there would be an ally always.

The wagon had turned into the deeper forest now, redolent with the heavy odor of the evergreens; and Baptiste

straightened. Soon he was talking and pointing—now to describe the spruce and its short, stubby, upturned needles, the lodgepole pines with their straighter, longer leaves and more brownish, scaly bark, the Engelmann spruce, the red fir and limber pine—each had its characteristic, to be pointed out in the simple words of the big Canadian, and to be catalogued by the man at his side. A moment before, they had been only pines, only so many trees. Now each was different, each had its place in the mind of the man who studied them with a new interest and a new enthusiasm —even though they might follow one after another into the maw of the saw, for the same purposes.

"They are like people, *oui!*" Old Baptiste was gesticulating. "They have their what-you-say, make-ups. The lodgepole, he is like the man who runs up and looks on when the crowd, eet gathers about some one who has been hurt. He waits until there has been a fire—and then he comes in and grows first, along with the aspens, so he can get all the room he wants. The spruce, he is like a woman, yes. He looks better than the rest—but he is not. Sometime he is not so good. Whoa!" The road had narrowed to a mere trail, and Baptiste tugged on the reins, and motioning to Barry, left the wagon, pulling forth an ax and heavy crosscut saw as he did so. A half-hour later, Golemar preceding them, they were deep in the forest. Baptiste stopped and motioned toward a tall spruce.

"See?" he ordered as he nicked it with his ax. "You cut heem as far above the ground as he is thick through. Now, first, the undercut."

"Looks like an overcut to me."

"So eet is! But eet is called the undercut. Eet makes the tree fall the way you want heem!"

The ax gleamed in blow after blow. A deep incision appeared in the trunk of the tree, and at the base of it, Baptiste started the saw, Barry working on the other end with his good arm. Ten minutes of work, and they switched to the other side. Here no "undercut" was made; the saw bit into the bark and deep toward the heart of the tree in a smooth, sharp line that progressed farther, farther—

"Look out!"

A CRACKLING sound had come from above. Baptiste abandoned the saw and with one great leap caught Houston, and scrambling, pulled him far to one side, as with a crackling roar, the spruce seemed veritably to disintegrate, its trunk spreading in great splintered slabs, and the tree proper crashing to the ground in the opposite direction to which it should have fallen, breaking as it came. A moment Baptiste stood with his arm still about the younger man, waiting for the dead branches, severed from other trees, to cease falling, and the disturbed needles and dust of the forest to settle. Then pulling his funny little knit cap far down over his straggly hair, he came forth, and stood in meditation upon the largest portion of the shattered tree.

"Eet break up like an ice-jam!" he explained. "That tree, he is not made of wood. He is of glass!"

Barry joined him, studying the splintered fragments of the spruce—suddenly to bend forward in wonderment.

"That's queer. Here's a railroad spike driven clear into the heart."

"Huh? What's that?" Baptiste bent beside him, examined the rusty spike, then hurried to a minute examination of the rest of the tree. "And another!" he exclaimed presently. "And more!"

Four heavy spikes had revealed themselves now, each jutting forth at a place where the tree had split. Baptiste straightened.

"Ah, *oui!* Eet is no wonder! See? The spike, they have been in the tree for mebbe, one, two, t'ree year. And the tree, he is not strong. When the winter come last year, he split inside from the frost, where the spike, he spread the grain. But the split, he does not show. When we try to cut heem down, and the strain come, blooey, he what-you-say, bust!"

"But why the spikes?"

"Wait!" Baptiste, suddenly serious, turned away into the woods, went slowly from tree to tree and dug at them with his knife—squinted and stared, shinned a few feet up a trunk now and then, examining every protuberance, every scar. At last he shouted, and Houston hurried to him, to find the giant digging excitedly at a lodgepole. "I have foun' another!"

The knife, deep in the tree, had scratched on metal. Five minutes more, and they discovered a third one, farther away. Then a fourth, a fifth—soon the number had run to a score, all within a small radius. Baptiste, more excited than ever, ranged off into the woods, leaving Barry to dig at the trees about him, and to discover even more

metal buried in the hearts of the standing lumber. For an hour he was gone, to return at last and stand staring about him.

"The spikes, they are all in this little section," he said finally. "I have cruise' all about here—there are no more."

"But why should trees grow spikes?"

"Ah, why? So that saws will break at the right time! Eet is easy for the iron-hunter at the mill to look the other way—eef he knows what the boss want. Eet is easy for the sawyer to step out of the way while the blade he hit a spike!"

A LONG whistle traveled over Houston's lips. This was the explanation of broken saws, just at the crucial moment!

"Simple, isn't it?" he asked caustically. "Whenever it's necessary for an 'accident' to happen, merely send out into the woods for a load of timber from a certain place."

"Then the iron-hunter, the man who look for metal in the wood—he look some other place. Beside,"—and Baptiste looked almost admiringly at a spike-filled tree,—"eet is a good job. The spike, they are driven deep in the wood, they are punch' away in, so the bark, eet will close over them. If the iron-hunter is not, what-you-say, full of pepper, and if he is lazy, then he not find heem, whether he want to or not. M'sieur Thayer, he have a head on him."

"Then Thayer—"

"Why not?"

"But why? He was the only man on the job out here. He didn't have to fill a whole section of a forest full of spikes when he wanted to break a saw or cause me trouble."

"Ah, no. But M'sieur—that is, whoever did eet—mebbe he figure on the time when you yourself try to run the mill. Eh?"

"Well, if he did, he's figured on this exact moment. I've seen enough, Baptiste. I'm going to Denver and contract myself an entirely new crew. Then I'm coming back to drop this masquerade I've been carrying on—and if you'll help me, run this place myself. Thayer's out—from the minute I can get a new outfit. I'm not going to take any chances. When he goes, the whole bunch goes with him!"

"Ah!" Baptiste grinned with enthusiasm. "You said a—what-you-say—large bite! Now,"—he walked toward the saw—"we shall fell a tree that shall not split."

"If you don't mind, I'd rather go back and look around the place. I want to get lined up on everything before I start to Denver."

"Eh, bien!" Together, led by the wolf-dog, they made their way to the wagon again, once more skirted the lake and started down the narrow roadway leading beside the flume. A half-hour more, and there came the sound of hammers and of saws. They stopped, and staring through the scraggly trees, made out the figures of a half-dozen men busily at work upon the erection of a low, rambling building. All about them were vast piles of lumber, two-by-fours, boardings, shingles—everything that possibly could be needed in the building of not one but many structures. Baptiste nodded.

"The new mill."

"Yes. Probably being built out of my lumber. It's a cinch they didn't transport it all the way from Tabernacle."

"Nor pay M'sieur Houston. Many things can happen when one is the manager."

Barry made no answer. For another mile they drove in silence, at last to come into the clearing of Barry's mill. Houston leaped from the wagon, to start a census and to begin his preparations for a cleaning out of the whole establishment. But at the door of the commissary, he whirled, staring. A buggy was just coming over the brow of the little hill which led to the mill property. Some one had called to him—a woman, whose voice had caused him to start, then, a second later, to go running forward.

She was beside Thayer in the buggy, leaning forth, one hand extended as Barry hurried toward her, her black eyes flashing eagerness, her full yet cold lips parted, her olive-skinned cheeks enlivened by a flush of excitement as Houston came to her, forgetful of the sneer of the man at her side, forgetful of the staring Baptiste in the background, forgetful of his masquerade, of everything.

"Agnes!" he gasped. "Why did you—"

"I thought"—and the drawling voice of Fred Thayer had a suddenly sobering effect on Houston—"that you weren't hurt very bad. Your memory came back awful quick, didn't it? I thought she'd bring you to your senses!"

The next of the three big installments into which we have divided this remarkable novel brings it to still more exciting situations. Be sure to read it—in the forthcoming February issue of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE.

The Uneventful Isles

A vividly exciting story of swift adventure in the Caribbean; you will be glad to see more of Mr. Minnigerode's work.

By MEADE MINNIGERODE

IT was an established custom down at the Hermes Line office that whenever something unusual occurred, you rang a buzzer for Billy Weston.

"Case of *what,* did you say? What do you think I am, a bootlegger? Oh, a case of barratry! Hold the wire a second. I'll see if Billy Weston's there—I don't know anything about barratry."

The Hermes Line thought nothing of operating some two hundred tramp steamers a day on time charter, in and out of every port in the world, to say nothing of its own not inconsiderable fleet of Herm-boats, as they called them—boats that carried the blue-and-red funnel, with the thin white stripe "one tenth the width of the red;" and it was natural that on the face of so many waters there should be a constant jetsam of strange happenings to sift out.

As for Billy Weston, he was a mild-mannered, deceptively youthful-appearing person, with a carefully concealed belief in the undying romance of ocean transportation, and a passion for long, narrow, black-hulled, wicked-looking power-boats.

"Two little funnels, and a torpedo-boat bow, and a whale of a siren—oh, baby!"

He was also possessed of an overwhelming ambition to become the husband of Miss Janet Moore. That Miss Janet Moore happened to be the niece of his employer, old Augustus Moore,—or the Admiral, as his office used to call him,—an orphan heiress of no mean magnitude, and an international beauty of the first water, seemed merely to increase Billy's determination to achieve his ambition.

He had come to the Hermes Line some eight years before, and met Janet at the launching of the *Hermantic* in Baltimore that same fall, in the midst of a throng of magnates and general freight-agents, in whose presence he found himself in his capacity of fifth assistant to the president.

When he first saw her, Billy had no idea who this dimpled, brown-haired young lady might be, and it was only when she stepped forward on the platform to break the beribboned champagne bottle that he realized her identity.

"Holy smoke!" he exclaimed. "I've been fussing the Admiral's niece. Oh, baby!"

It struck him as an altogether pleasantly romantic circumstance, not in the least

calculated to alter his relations with Janet during the remainder of the ceremony, or on the trip home to New York aboard the new liner. She herself had seemed somewhat oppressed by the surrounding magnates and general freight-agents, and had welcomed his smiling presence.

"How about inviting me to call?" he asked her at the end of the rather rough voyage.

"Do I know you as well as that, Mr. Weston?" she countered.

"Oh, why don't you call me Billy?" he suggested. "The Lieutenant at the Old Slip police-station always does!" As though that were a special inducement!

"Do I know you as well as that, Mr. Weston?" she repeated.

"Well, shucks," he laughed at her, "we've pretended not to be seasick together, and I guess that counts for something! Like going through a siege—always be friends after that."

NOW he sat at a big flat-topped desk in a small office tucked away in a corner, the walls of which were lined with charts filled with apparently meaningless curves in colored inks, having to do, it was understood, with statistics of operation. The approach to this office was guarded by a little outer vestibule presided over by that elderly and invariably silent Miss Bird, supported by that redheaded paragon of head office-boys, Mr. Michael O'Toole.

The whole constituting what was known as the Department of Special Investigation, whatever that might mean.

"Oh, Billy's the whole works on operation, and barratry and piracy and all the rest of it. He learned it all when he was with M. I. during the war."

Thus the office, speculatively, on any dull afternoon, but it was known that there were "special arrangements" governing the management of his affairs, and a safe in his office filled with "secret stuff," and an intriguing telephone-booth, which it was death to enter, popularly supposed to contain a private line to the Arlington wireless station.

It actually contained two, both to Washington—one to the Bureau of Navigation, and the other to the Department of Justice.

"Mr. Weston, the booth is calling," Michael O'Toole would announce across the floor, and Billy would drop everything and vanish for half an hour at a time into its secret fastness, and as likely as not emerge therefrom only to disappear into the unknown for three days, or a fortnight, or six months!

It was all very mysterious, including that dictograph in Billy's office, which could be turned on at will by a button under his desk, and led straight into the receptive ear of Miss Bird. But no one knew about that, not even the all-observant O'Toole.

And all these things were so because—well, because the Hermes Line was that kind of line. It had started during the war, when the Line had devoted itself exclusively, and practically overnight, to the Government's affairs, and now it had seemed wise and profitable to continue this feature of its organization, in coöperation with the authorities.

The largest American freight-line, on the Atlantic seaboard certainly, with ships sailing daily out of New York for practically every port in the world, its transactions were frequently not without interest to those in high Federal places, and the documents aboard its incoming steamers were not necessarily always confined to purely mercantile operations.

In other words, the packing-cases which the Hermes Line carried, that looked like grand pianos, did not always turn out to be grand pianos. And the supercargoes who went forth occasionally on the Hermes payroll sometimes wore little badges on the insides of their pockets.

THE sponsor for all these dark undertakings was "our Mr. Weston." Needless to say, his belief in the undying romance of ocean transportation remained unshaken—in spite of Janet's objections to it all.

"You care more for your mysteries, and for Miss Bird and Michael O'Toole, than you do for me," she informed him. "I wont be the wife of a man who is all the time disappearing on secret missions. The husband's place is in the home."

"Well, shucks," he protested, "I've got to earn my living, haven't I? That happens to be the job I'm best fitted for."

"Uncle Augustus will always find a job for you. The day you tell me you're ready to give up your secret stuff, I'll marry you, not before."

"I'll never do that," he announced.

"Then I'll never marry you," she retorted, her pride matching his own.

It was an endless argument, in the midst of which they remained the best of friends.

AND then one day Miss Janet Moore to all appearances became infatuated with the Marquis Escamillo de Segovia y Reál, and took him away to the Caribbean in her uncle's yacht, the *Foam,* along with her aunt and the usual set of Moore retainers, including the soft-footed Miguel, valet to the Marquis.

Billy Weston was furious, and spent the day sending off curt wireless messages to the captains of unoffending tramp steamers, asking them to explain this and that.

"Say, what's eating the boss?" inquired O'Toole, and as usual received no enlightenment whatever from the silent Miss Bird.

Escamillo de Segovia y Reál, huh!

"Sounds like a cigar!" Billy decided.

"Looks like a cigar—a bum cigar," he added.

The Marquis had turned up in New York some time before, armed with introductions to Augustus Moore, and had promptly become infatuated himself, to say the least, with the Señorita Moore. Whereupon he twirled his Castilian mustaches, and kissed her hand on all occasions, preferably in the presence of Señor Billy, to the latter's monumental annoyance.

"Little beeswaxed toreador!"

And now Janet had apparently fallen for him, and was off to the West Indies, with her aunt on one side and the Marquis on the other—with hardly a word for Billy —and Neptune only knew what might happen.

Whereupon—oh, baby—things began to happen about which Neptune himself could have known nothing in the beginning, or he would certainly have pinned them down with his trident, being on the whole a well-disposed personage.

Some three weeks after the *Foam* had left, the little red light on Billy's desk, under the caption *"President's Office,"* went flicker, flicker, flicker, and Billy betook himself into the Admiral's sanctum.

"Good morning, Mr. Weston! Take a seat," said Augustus, and Billy knew at once that there was something unusual afoot.

"What goes on now?" he thought.

For when Augustus called him Mr. Weston like that, it invariably signified that the Hand of God had descended unexpectedly somewhere, to the detriment of the Hermes Line. Whereupon "our Mr. Weston" would have to set about discovering to what extent, if any, the hand of man was implicated. And as often as not the "if any" assumed quite unexpected proportions!

Billy took the seat indicated, bowed vaguely to the caned and spatted figure occupying the farther corner of the room, whom he had not noticed at first, and waited for Augustus to open fire.

"Mr. Weston," he asked Billy, "how far is it from Port of Spain to Bridgetown, Barbados?"

"Oh, let me see—Port of Spain—about two hundred and fifty miles, roughly, I should say."

"Have you been advised of any unusual atmospheric disturbance in that region lately?"

"No sir—quite the contrary."

GOSH, Billy thought to himself, what could be the matter? When Augustus said "unusual atmospheric disturbance" instead of just plain "storm," things were all snarled up somewhere.

"Well, Mr. Weston," Augustus went on, "do you know where the *Foam* is?"

"The *Foam!"* Billy exclaimed. "They were going to Basse Terre, weren't they? Guadeloupe and Martinique?"

"Yes, but do you know where she is now?"

"Why, no sir, I don't. I haven't heard from—I mean, I have no reports on the *Foam.* Haven't you, sir?"

"No, Mr. Weston, I have not. Nobody has, as far as I can discover."

"Nobody!" Billy exclaimed again. "Why, what do you mean, sir?"

"I mean that the *Foam* has disappeared."

"Disappeared!"

"Yes, the *Foam* has disappeared, apparently without trace, with my wife and niece presumably aboard. I am not satisfied that they have met disaster from a natural cause. I wish you to apply all the resources of the Department of Special Investigation to solving the mystery."

"Yes sir, of course."

The Department of Special Investigation! That secret stuff on account of which Janet refused to marry him, and now it was all to be turned to the purpose of finding her, rescuing her perhaps from Heaven only knew what peril.

"Holy smoke!" he exclaimed. "If it's piracy, there's no telling where she may be. In the Testigos, or Orchilla, or up around Carriacou in the Grenadines, or for all we know, way over among the Serrana Keys or the Hobbies!"

The *Foam,* St. Vincent to Grenada, Grenada to Port of Spain, Port of Spain to where?

"And Mrs. Moore and Janet aboard! And the Marquis de Segovia y Reál."

"Ah, quite so," Augustus remarked. "The Marquis de Segovia y Reál—I was coming to that, Mr. Weston. As a matter of fact, the Marquis is *not* aboard the *Foam.*"

"He's gone ashore somewhere?"

"No, I hardly think so."

"But—what do you mean, sir? Not aboard—why, I saw him sail!"

"So did I," Augustus agreed. "But the Marquis de Segovia y Reál is not aboard, nevertheless. He never was aboard."

"Holy smoke!"

Augustus turned to the caned and spatted figure sitting so quietly in the corner.

"*This,* Mr. Weston," he said, "is the Marquis de Segovia y Reál!"

"Oh—oh, is that so—how do you do!" Billy managed to gasp. "Then who the devil is this other bird?"

"I do not know," said the Marquis. "He steals my name, and, *caspita,* now I think he steals your ship."

PERHAPS Miss Janet Moore was not really quite as deeply infatuated with the Marquis Escamillo de Segovia y Reál as it pleased her to have Billy Weston believe, but he was certainly a most accomplished man of the world, and excellent company. On a yacht, a steam yacht like the *Foam,* provided with sailing masters, and Filipino stewards, and Oscars and Olafs, there is really very little with which to pass the time between stops except conversation and bridge, and the Marquis excelled at both.

His bridge was impeccable, fit to outwit Mrs. Augustus Moore's own faultless game, and hers to command at any hour of the day.

"It is a constant pleasure to see you play, señora," he was all the while assuring her. "Every time I learn something."

No wonder, perhaps, Mrs. Augustus Moore found him charming.

His conversation, spiced with European gossip and seasoned with world-wide experience, was an unending source of delight, more especially reserved for the Señorita Moore. And all so utterly without condescension or pride! While in the realms of history and art and diplomacy there seemed to be no limit to his knowledge, on the other hand, there were subjects on which he professed himself entirely ignorant, and willingly sought instruction from his hostess.

About ships, for instance—the yacht in particular—its routine, its construction, its engine-room, its wireless-room.

"It is so very interesting, yes," he would smile. "And I, I know nothing at all of the ship—all my life in cafés I sit!"

"But you have crossed the Atlantic."

"Ah, yes, the Atlantique, I cross him, in a floating hotel, a café upon the ocean; that is all. From Liverpool we go for a few days in elevators and palm gardens, and, pouf, we are at Sandy Hook! Some parts of the steamer I do not see at all."

"A big liner is like that, of course."

"But here, señorita, at last I will learn. Always all my life I wish to know the insides of a ship! You will show me everything, yes? The room where they make the sparks, and talk with the Señor Uncle in New York—"

And the *Foam* went on into the Caribbean, through the Windward Passage to Port au Prince, and on through the Jamaica Channel, past Dame Marie, and Tiburon and Abacou, towards the Lesser Antilles, through brilliantly starry nights and immeasurably blue days, fringed with green.

"Ah, how beautiful," sighed the Marquis. "And how romantic! These mysterious islands, where so much has happened, and so much has been forgotten. Now there is nothing to remember, because nothing ever happens any more."

IT was on that afternoon that the Marquis received his first lesson in wireless telegraphy, fingering Tommy Renfrew's apparatus with all the delight of a boy at his first circus.

"And you talk to the land, and to ships, and they answer," he marveled. "With all your little tubes, and your knobs and your wires. I think there are a great many wires, yes, although you call it the wireless, Señor Renfrew!"

So they laughed, and puttered with the machinery, while Tommy Renfrew discoursed very learnedly of wave-lengths, and induction coils and oscillation detectors, and sent the crackling sparks leaping across the gap, to the utter bewilderment of the Marquis.

"*Caspita!* I have done many things,"

he said ruefully. "But this little machine I could not make to run."

"Oh, it's very simple, sir, really," Tommy assured him. "Try it—everything's slack now."

"You think I can make it go?" the Marquis demurred. "If I touch it, I do something wrong, and there is a big spark, and pouf, we blow up!"

"Oh, no sir," Tommy insisted. "No danger at all. Sit down here at the key."

"You are not afraid?" the Marquis asked Janet. "You think it is safe?"

"I think Mr. Renfrew will stop you from doing anything really disastrous," she laughed.

"Ah, I hope so, señorita, I hope so. Now I sit, yes, and I—what do you say?—I send. What do I send? The letter *S*, yes?"

"All right. Three shorts—"

Puh—puh—puh!

"I have done it!" chuckled the Marquis. "I enjoy myself like a child. I send another, yes? What shall it be—the letter *Y?*"

"Long, short, two longs—"

Pah—puh—pah—pah!

"*Caspita!* Now one more, perhaps, and then I stop, yes? What? The letter *R.*"

"Short, long, short—"

Puh—pah—puh!

"There!" the Marquis beamed at them. "*S-Y-R,* yes, *Segovia y Reál!* My autograph I make in the air. To you, Señor Renfrew, I am much indebted. You smoke a cigar, yes?"

And he had good cause to be indebted.

AT all events, the wireless operator on a nondescript vessel, just over the edge of the horizon of this uneventful sea, removed his receiver at that moment and turned to the man standing beside him.

"*S-Y-R,*" he said, and the two of them smiled at each other, after looking in a little book of phrases, bound in lead.

A few moments later the nondescript vessel changed her course and steamed away, far more rapidly than one would have supposed possible from her general appearance, due south.

And the *Foam* went on, past rocky Saba, rising abruptly to the clouds, with its town snuggling away a thousand feet up in the air at the top of its eight-hundred-stone-stepped "Ladder"—past the four-thousand-foot cone of Nevis, and neglected Charlestown.

"Ah, señorita, if you but knew! The Gorgeous Isle, they called her in the olden days. The great health-resort she was for all the flower of the Indies, and of America, and of Europe too!"

"Really! I had no idea anyone ever came to these places."

"*Siguro,* they came. Very fine things they did, and lived very elegantly. Your Alexander Hamilton, he was born there, and it is there that the Admiral Lord Nelson, yes, he was married."

"Dear me!" Janet remarked. "I didn't know they had any history. Join the Marines and see the world!"

"Ah, you should read of those days—and in Martinique, too, where the beautiful Josephine was born in Fort de France. Now nothing ever happens any more!"

No, nothing ever happened any more in these placid waters where once the corsairs had gone rollicking to their shelters among the Virgin Islands, to Tortola, and Virgin Gorda and St. Barts, and across which the guns of Rodney's fleets had come echoing against the cliffs of many a Dutch and French stronghold.

And yet that same night, as they were passing the lonely rock of Redonda, on the way to Montserrat, a light flashed out across the darkness, a breathless, flickering light, almost furtive in its manner.

"Oh, look!" Janet cried. "I saw a light. I didn't know anyone lived on Redonda."

"No doubt it is at the mines," the Marquis explained. "They bring laborers there, you know, when they are mining the phosphate rock."

No doubt, and the Marquis hardly glanced over his shoulder, while the light went on flickering—short, short, short—long, short, long, long—short, long short—*S-Y-R—S-Y-R.*

But down in the cabin set aside for the use of the Marquis de Segovia y Reál at the open port-hole, stood the soft-footed Miguel, looking out toward Redonda, reading the flickering message with complete satisfaction. And then after a while the flickering stopped—perhaps because down below, Miguel had just replied with his high-powered flashlight: R-D, R-D—"message read."

And the *Foam* went on, to Basse Terre and Pointe à Pitre, past Marie Galante and Dominica to Fort de France, and on to Kingstown and St. George's, leaving Baliceaux, and Cannouan and Carriacou astern, and so to Port of Spain in Trinidad.

And as the Marquis kept lamenting, of course nothing happened in any of these enchanted places, almost forgotten by the world.

OH, well, yes, something did happen in Port of Spain. They lost Tommy Renfrew there.

The *Foam* was just slipping away from her moorings out in the roadstead, heading into the muddy brown Orinoco-fed waters of the Gulf of Paria, Barbados bound, when a launch came *put-put* alongside, megaphoning for Mr. Renfrew. The *Foam* slowed down, and the messenger from the launch came aboard with a cable for Tommy.

"*Good night!*" he exclaimed when he had read it, and handed it to Captain Rudd. "It's from the Hermes office in New York. The *Hermona's* at Barcelona, Venezuela, and her wireless man's sick. I've got to substitute for him."

"We're to take you right over in the launch," said the messenger. "Here's the written order from the Hermes agent in Port of Spain."

"I'm ordered away, ma'm," Tommy told Mrs. Moore, as he went over the side. "Sorry to have to leave the *Foam* for the time being."

"Well, I'm sorry too," Mrs. Moore said. "But I expect they need you more on the *Hermona.*"

"Herm-boats and business first with us, you see, Marquis!" Janet laughed.

"How splendid that is, yes," he marveled. "How efficient, how American! I shall miss the Señor Renfrew; no more he shows me the wireless, alas! But the *Hermona,* she must not be kept waiting. *Caspita,* time is money, yes!"

Very true; but if the *Hermona* was waiting for Tommy Renfrew in Barcelona, she was in for demurrage, because after passing through the Dragon's Mouth in the wake of the *Foam,* the launch took him, suddenly overpowered and all trussed up in the cabin, to quite another destination.

Nor would it have been possible to find any record in the files of the Hermes agency in Port of Spain of any cable whatsoever concerning Mr. Renfrew from the New York office—and there was no item in the *Hermona* accounts covering medical attendance for wireless operator.

So it goes in those quite uneventful latitudes.

And *then,* as might perhaps have been expected by anyone conversant with all these preparatory circumstances, a great number of things happened all at once, and very suddenly to the *Foam.*

First of all, no sooner had she rounded Corozal Point and turned up to the eastward, with Chacachacare and the two Monos Islands behind her, than something went unaccountably wrong with the machinery, so that she drifted helplessly on an inky sea while the engine-room staff cursed and perspired, and crawled on their stomachs into unaccustomed cavities, whence oil dripped discouragingly into their upturned faces.

The knowledge, at that moment unavailable, of the unobserved passage through the engine-room some time previously of the soft-footed and apparently dexterous-fingered Miguel, would have done much to explain this unaccountable event.

THE Marquis became tremendously excited about it, and insisted on going down himself to view the disaster, as he styled it.

"I learn something about the ship, yes," he announced. "Now that the machinery has gone *pouf,* I will watch how they mend. It is all so interesting."

And not only did he go down himself, but he dragged Janet after him, and the mate, whom he swept into his train with voluble requests for information of every sort. He would doubtless have persuaded Mrs. Moore and the captain to follow him if they had not been otherwise engaged, the former with a headache in her cabin, and the latter at his post on the bridge.

At all events the only people on deck at the time, besides the captain, and the quartermaster at the wheel, were a lookout in the bows, and two or three Oscars doing nothing in particular, waiting stolidly for the end of their watch. The others were all in their quarters, or else down in the engine-room with the Marquis. All except Miguel, that is!

So when a score or more of sandaled men came swarming up over the stern by means of rope ladders thoughtfully provided for that purpose by the inconspicuous valet, the whole deck-force, including the captain, were overpowered before they had time to shift their quids.

It was done almost soundlessly, and the remainder of the *Foam's* company below went drifting serenely on, utterly oblivious of the fact that they had been boarded

and captured by a party come out of the night, whose long, black-painted craft was now bumping along the side, being made fast.

And then, having led them below to look at the damage, the Marquis must needs leave them in the engine-room while he darted above again to look at the drifting waters filled with reefs and keys and all manner of nocturnal dangers—to the deck, where he was received with every indication of respectful recognition by the leaders of the boarding-party who had been cleaning out the forecastle.

Captain Rudd, with his quartermaster and crew, had already been removed to the waiting vessel alongside, amid hastily silenced Scandinavian imprecations. Of her legitimate personal freight there remained aboard the *Foam,* besides the owners and the servants, only the mate and the engine-room force. The Marquis turned and nodded to Miguel.

"If you please, excuse me," said the latter at the engine-room door a moment later. "The captain, he says will you please to come up *pronto.* Very soon we go ashore upon the rocks—if you please, excuse me, there is no time to lose."

THEY went scrambling up the companionway; and of course, as they came out one by one on the deck,—Janet, the mate, the engineer, all of them,—strong hands grasped them on either side and led them, bewildered and almost unresisting, to the rail.

All but Miguel, of course, who, left alone in the engine-room, produced certain essential bolts and gadgets from his pockets and fitted them in to various places whence they should have never been removed.

And up on deck everything went like clockwork, or like a carefully rehearsed plan. Before any of them really knew what they were about, the mate and the engineers had joined their colleagues in the trailing boat, the lines were cast off, the pirate was disappearing into the night, and the *Foam,* her engines revived and a new crew aboard, was slowly making way again.

"Set them painting at once," the Marquis de Segovia y Real ordered in Spanish, and led the Señorita Moore into the saloon, where he bowed her courteously into a chair.

"A thousand pardons that you should have been detained on the deck by unworthy hands," he murmured.

"What—what has happened?" she gasped, but he had gone smiling into the corridor.

He returned in a moment with Mrs. Augustus Moore, somewhat flustered perhaps, but clothed in a vast dignity which amply made up for the opportunisms of her toilet, whom he bowed with equal courtesy into another chair.

"Auntie!" Janet exclaimed. "Something terrible has happened."

"I have been disturbed when I wished particularly to rest!" her aunt agreed, frowning on everyone and everything.

"The *Foam* has been seized, and the Marquis, here, seems to be at the bottom of it all—they all obey him."

"You don't tell me! Smuggling liquor, I suppose. You know you simply can't stop it since prohibition—"

"No, no, Auntie! We are all alone here with a lot of strange men—Mr. Rudd and all of them have been taken away."

"Merciful powers! Don't tell me Celeste went with them?" Mrs. Augustus Moore asked anxiously.

"No, the maid is here—but Auntie, don't you understand—"

"I don't understand *anything,*" the elder lady snapped. "But thank fortune, Celeste has not gone."

The Marquis smiled at her and bowed once more.

"The Señora is superb," he said. "A truly Castilian courage—I am all admiration. Now I explain. If the ladies will pardon, I have been obliged to, what shall I say, *borrow* the *Foam* for a little while. It is a great liberty—"

"Well, upon my soul, I should say so!" Mrs. Moore told him.

"But there is great necessity which I cannot explain now, and necessity knows no law."

"That's one of those idiotic proverbs, isn't it?" his one-time hostess chillingly observed.

"What are you going to do?" Janet put in. "How do you expect to run the ship?"

"Oh, señorita, you will forgive, yes? I have deceived you. The ship I run myself; for many years I have had experience. My valet, he is an excellent engineer. The crew you have seen!"

"Gracious me!"

"Señora," the Marquis went on, "and you, Señorita, you will not fear. No harm

shall come to you. I have given orders, no harm at all—unless you oblige me to take steps which would give me much pain."

"But where are we going?"

"That I cannot tell you—a little journey—what do you say?—a side-trip, yes?"

"Bless my soul!" Mrs. Moore exclaimed. "If I were not so angry, I think I should laugh!"

"I thought you said nothing ever happened in these islands any more!" Janet smiled in spite of herself. "And here we are, prisoners on our own yacht!"

"Oh, señorita, will you not say that you are my guests for a while, yes?"

"I suppose we can always play bridge!" Mrs. Augustus Moore remarked, looking dubiously from her niece to the Marquis de Segovia y Reál.

"I make a turn on deck, and then we play a rubber, yes?" smiled the latter.

BILLY WESTON spent three days in Port of Spain, at the end of which time several people had come to wish that he had never been born—including one Gonzales Romero, head clerk in the Hermes Line agency, caught with a copy of the Hermes code on his person, on the flyleaf of which was neatly inscribed "T. Renfrew, S. S. *Foam*," and now languishing in jail on a charge of theft.

It was a suit of clothes that did the trick for Gonzales Romero. He should not have worn Tommy Renfrew's new suit of whites, forcibly removed from him on the launch, in Port of Spain. Or if he had to do it, he should not have allowed the label to remain inside the pocket. Or if these things were all unavoidable—he should not have hung his coat—Tommy's coat, that is, on the peg next to Mr. Weston's for the latter to blunder into.

"Your coat, I think," Billy said to him.

"Si, señor."

"You've just come back from a trip, haven't you?"

"Si, señor, to Barcelona, account steamer *Hermona*."

Confirmation of these facts having been obtained from the agent, and all dates checked up, Billy turned once more to the unsuspecting Romero.

"Mr. Romero," he asked him, "how was my friend Mr. Renfrew when you left him? And incidentally, *where* did you leave him?"

Romero turned whiter than his stolen pants, called on all the angels of Heaven to bear witness to his innocence, and then, honor having been satisfied, confessed, volubly and tearfully.

"Holy smoke!" Billy thought to himself. "We'd never get anywhere in these investigations if crooks weren't such boobs usually. I wouldn't have had a thing on him if he'd chosen to insist he'd bought the suit from Tommy in Port of Spain."

The unfortunate thing was that Romero knew nothing of the *Foam's* whereabouts. His only share in the conspiracy consisted in helping to get rid of Tommy Renfrew, now reposing, it seemed, on an islet in the Testigos. As for the crew, they were at Carriacou. Beyond that, Romero's services had not been considered sufficiently valuable, and he knew nothing.

ON the strength of this, Billy Weston very carelessly allowed Mr. Romero to slip away for a day and a night, during which the shadows that trailed the latter's footsteps all bore a strong family resemblance to the Chief of the Department of Special Investigation—for, of course, Billy had long ago learned the lesson that a crook is never quite as much of a boob as he appears to be.

The result of all this was that some sixteen hours later Billy, lying flat on his stomach on the roof of a shack out near Corozal, overheard Mr. Romero tapping out a wireless message which puzzled him a good deal at first, until it occurred to him that it meant just what it said—with interpretations.

"William — City — no — time — for — ostriches."

Ostriches, ostriches!

Billy turned over on his back and grinned at the stars after he had pondered over it for a while. It was really rather clever, because taken as a commercial transaction, it simply meant that the steamer *William City* must not wait any longer for ostriches. And of course ostriches were one of the chief stocks in trade of the island of Curaçao. Quite so.

Only, as a matter of fact, *William City* was probably not the name of a steamer, because it was much more likely to be Willemstad, the port of Curaçao, and irrespective of ostriches, the chief stock in trade of Willemstad was the fostering of South American revolutions!

It was not impossible, therefore, that Mr. Romero's message was intended to warn

some one in Willemstad that he had no time in which to behave after the proverbial fashion of ostriches.

"Oh, baby!" Billy Weston exclaimed, and returned to Port of Spain.

EARLY the next morning Mr. Romero was removed to the jail, and that disturbing Señor Weston departed for points unknown, in his long two-funneled, black-hulled, wicked-looking power-boat. With him he carried a sloppily attired crew of some twelve nondescript huskies whose habit of chewing cigar-stumps was the only outward manifestation of the fact that each of them wore a shiny little badge under his left armpit—and one other, who on close inspection would have turned out to be the engaging Michael O'Toole.

Their first call was made at that isolated islet in the Testigos, from whose unfrequented, crab-infested beach they gathered in Mr. Thomas Renfrew, clad in a suit of blue cotton pajamas and swearing like a treeful of parrots.

"What the—who the—where the—why the—"

"Oh, all of that!" Billy laughed at him. "How's old Robinson Crusoe?"

"It's that little worm of a Marquis, I'll bet you," Tommy exclaimed after they had cleared up the situation for him. "Framed it up to get me off the yacht. And I let him send out a wireless right under my nose. Somebody shoot me, quick!"

"Maybe you'll have a crack at him first," Billy informed him.

"Why, where're we going?"

"We're going to Curaçao and take part in a revolution. At least, that's my guess."

"All right, let's go!"

THE *Foam* was not in Willemstad harbor when they arrived at Curaçao and passed in between the forts through the bridge of boats. But then, of course, they had not expected to find the *Foam*. On the other hand, what they had expected, what they were hoping for, at least, was there for all to see—to wit, a dirty, black-painted, unkempt vessel exhibiting her uninteresting wash along the deck.

"Cast your eye on the floating laundry," Billy remarked.

"That's her," Tommy announced in a moment. "She's all blacked up for a minstrel show, but that's the old *Foam*. I'll tell the world."

"They've phonied up her funnel too—pretty clever piece of camouflage. What's the name they've painted in—can you make out?"

"Wait a second—*Libertad*."

"*Libertad*, hey? Then it's a revolution, all right!"

They tied up to the Hermes pier, and Billy gathered his henchmen around him.

"Now we'll go ashore," he told them, "and get drunk—get me? Mike, you stay with me. All report back here."

So they scattered through the town and proceeded to get drunk; that is to say, they all remained scrupulously sober while achieving an appearance of considerable inebriety. This being accomplished in the society of boon companions, whose inebriate appearance was not offset by any such inward sobriety, the result was that each of them returned in due course to the pier with a budget of information.

"All right, shoot!"

Well, there was a revolution brewing, all right, in Darien, over on the mainland—the two hundred and sixty-first, chronologically, and since the independence of Darien the two hundred and sixtieth.

The leader of this unusually well organized movement was one Escamillo Lopez, now in Willemstad, ostensibly negotiating a trade in ostrich-feathers.

"No time for ostriches!" Billy laughed. "Go on—anything else?"

Yes, the watchword of the conspiracy was *Libertad*, and the "ostrich feathers" were being loaded aboard the ship of that name, due to sail now at any moment.

"Well, let's prance aboard and clap the bracelets on him," one of the badge-bearing ones suggested.

"Not so fast!" said Billy. "We've no jurisdiction, and they'll have proof to burn that we're bughouse."

"Well, aint the owners aboard?"

"That's it. The minute we lift a finger officially, there's no telling what they'll do with their hostages, don't you see?"

"Well, what *are* you going to do?"

"I don't know yet. I'm going to think."

HE thought for quite a long while, and then he gathered them all around him again in earnest conference.

"Do you get me? Follow along, and if it works, wait for the signal and then hop to it."

Whereupon he left them, in a small boat propelled by the goggle-eyed O'Toole, singing scraps of nautical ditties in a loud and

quite obviously intoxicated voice. Behind him in the dark came the long black shadow bearing Tommy Renfrew and the others.

Out there in the bay, Miss Janet Moore raised her head suddenly and listened.

Under the stern of the *Libertad,* O'Toole seemed to get into difficulties, and Billy cursed him long and loud.

"Michael O'Toole!" he roared. "You great, clumsy Michael O'Toole!" And then his voice trailed off into song.

"Oh! Hand me down my riding-cane.
For I'm off to see my darling *Jane,*
For darling Jane,
My darling *Jane*—"

Michael O'Toole deftly succeeded in losing an oar at that point, as per program, and a solitary white-clad figure at the rail above edged a little farther towards the stern, to hear this voice that had come floating to her across the bay. Billy chanted:

"Oh, what will you do with a drunken sailor?
What will *you* do with a drunken sailor?
Hoist him up by a hanging life-line,
Early in the evening!
Oh, aye, up he rises,
Oh, aye, *Billy rises,*
Oh, aye, up he rises
Early in the evening—"

"Billy!" a voice whispered suddenly above him. "Oh, *Billy!"*

He was apparently composing himself for sleep in the bottom of the boat, while his accomplice O'Toole floundered masterfully after his oar. Once more Billy raised his voice to the stars.

"What will *he* do with *twelve* drunken sailors?
What will he do with *twelve* drunken sailors?
Hoist them up by a hanging life-line,
Early in the evening."

A little while later the end of a rope came dangling down out of the air above Billy's nose.

"Good for her! All right!" he whispered to Michael, and the latter turned and flashed a winking signal into the darkness behind them.

Perhaps it is the fate of conspirators that they should never suspect their adversaries of duplicating their own schemings; but at all events, when Billy Weston climbed over the stern rail, the *Libertad* was as ill guarded in that quarter as had been the *Foam* on a similar occasion.

"Billy!" Miss Janet Moore began, but he silenced her at once.

"Don't make a noise," he told her. "Where's everybody?"

"Down below, stowing cargo. There are a few men up forward. The Marquis is with my aunt in the saloon. How did you ever—"

"Ssh! I'm bringing a gang aboard. Go below and stay there, and don't say a thing—see? Now beat it."

SHE obeyed him, without another word, and only just in time, for as Billy glanced over the rail at the long black shadow under the stern, one of the crew came sauntering down the deck.

"Holá! Que quiere usted?" the man cried, and Billy put his finger up to his lips.

"Ssh!" Billy said, while he beckoned him to come nearer. *"Libertad—"*

And then when the man had come near enough, Billy suddenly leaped at him with a hammer blow to the chin which nearly took the unfortunate sailor's head off. Billy dragged him over to one side as the vanguard of his party came over the rail.

"Not so loud!" Billy admonished them. "You're not raiding a bar."

When they were all there, except O'Toole and one man in the power-boat, Billy gathered them around him again.

"We'll all lose our jobs if this gets out," some one remarked cheerfully.

"Quite so," said Billy. "Now, you know what to do. Rush the birds up forward and close all the companionways. We'll clean out the bridge. Then be ready to follow Renfrew and me when we give you the word."

There was a shuffling of feet along the deck, a startled cry lost in the noise from the wharf, a sudden slamming of storm-doors. A little blood had been spilled from a broken head; some one was nursing a battered shin. Nothing to speak of.

"From the hatches *up*, she's ours!" Billy heard one of them say.

Down in the saloon the Marquis de Segovia y Reál looked up from the card-table, and seemed to listen for a moment.

Tramp—tramp—tramp—tramp—

"Your deal, Marquis," said Janet, and upset the heavy ash-tray onto the floor. "Oh, how clumsy! Thank you, Marquis. I think if you had led your hearts—"

"Ah, but no, señorita—the queen of hearts I did not have—"

"No post-mortems," insisted Mrs. Au-

gustus Moore. "Now, what I should have done—"

"No post-mortems, Auntie," Janet laughed at her. "Mercy, what a hand! Pass."

"You do not bid," smiled the Marquis. "But the señora, she will bid, yes? Always she bids."

Mrs. Augustus Moore yawned intermittently into her hand, drummed her fingers on the table, and scowled at her cards.

IT was a superb exhibition of self-control, considering that from where she sat she could see the door of the saloon, and was consequently quite aware of the fact that Mr. William Weston's head had come suddenly looming in around the corner, like a rising moon, closely followed by Mr. Thomas Renfrew's.

"Ho—ho—hum!" she observed. "Well, one heart, just to start things going."

"One heart, you say, señora," mused the Marquis.

Billy and Tommy were well inside the door now, in spite of the fact that Miss Janet Moore was registering only interest on that end of the room.

"Yes, one little heart," Mrs. Augustus Moore murmured, and suddenly pushed the card-table violently into the Marquis' middle section.

At the same moment the other two fell on his back.

"*Caspita!*" he gasped. "The Señor Renfrew! The cats are out of all the bags!" Escamillo de Segovia y Reál, or Escamillo Lopez, or whatever his name may have been, never had a chance.

"Sorry to have to break up your game," said Billy.

"I would have bid one no trump, yes," the Marquis observed, and Mrs. Augustus Moore smiled.

"All right," Billy called up to the deck. "Pile in and clean them out. We don't want any of the small fry—tell them to hop it while the hopping is good. They will fast enough, now we've got the main guy!"

The gang came clattering down the companionway and into the corridors, and Billy turned again to his captive, calmly blowing smoke-rings at the muzzle of Tommy's revolver.

"Well," he asked him. "What shall we do with you?"

The Marquis shrugged his shoulders, and a twinkle came into his eyes.

"I do not know, Señor," he said at last. "While you make up your mind, perhaps we finish the bridge game, yes?"

"Say, you're a pretty good scout!" Billy exclaimed.

"The señor should be able to judge," the other bowed.

From all sides came a great uproar of running feet, and hysterical voices, punctuated by splashings. The *Libertad* was rapidly becoming the *Foam* again.

"Give me that gun," Billy said to Tommy Renfrew. "Go down and tell them to take their ostrich feathers with them if they want them."

And then the four of them sat and looked at each other. Of them all the Marquis, perhaps, was the least embarrassed.

"Come, señor," he suggested after a while. "The ship you have; the beautiful señorita you find, and the señora who plays so well the bridge—"

"I've got Mr. Romero too!"

"Ah, I regret! He was a patriot."

"He was a thief—he stole a suit of clothes from Mr. Renfrew!"

"Ah, then I do not regret."

"Holy smoke! What about you?"

"Oh, señor, must you have me, too, because I gamble too high? I do not steal a suit of clothes; I borrow a name and a ship. There is a difference!"

"The law—" Billy began impressively.

"Pouf!" smiled the Marquis. "The law does not climb over the stern of ships! In Darien, señor, they need me. Come—we leave it to the ladies, yes."

A LITTLE later Tommy Renfrew appeared at the door again.

"The Marquis has escaped," Billy informed him blandly.

"Yes, I thought so," the other replied dryly. "Michael and the man from the power-boat are aboard."

"What's the big idea?" Billy asked. "Why didn't they stay on the boat?"

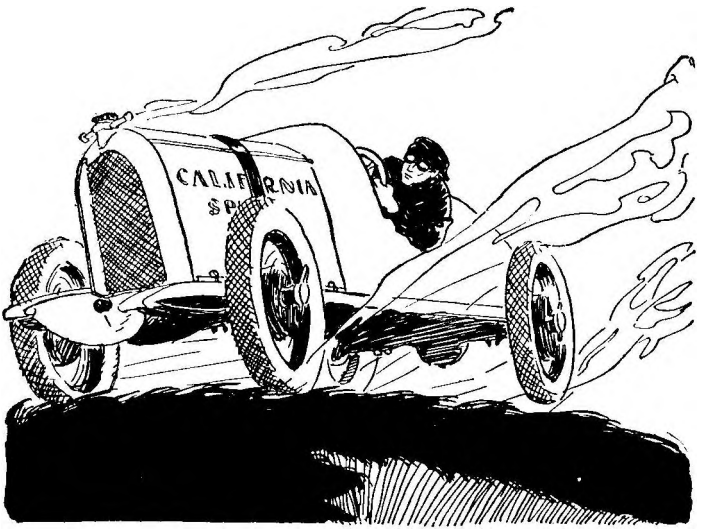
"Well, they had to leave, you see. Somebody went off with the boat."

"Went off with the boat?" Billy exclaimed. "Who went off with the boat?"

"Why, the Marquis!" smiled Tommy.

"Well, bless my soul," Mrs. Augustus Moore remarked. "You know, I *like* that man!"

There will be another fine story of the sea by Meade Minnigerode in the next, the February, issue. Be sure to read it.



Sammy Gets Experience

The high-speed story of an auto race and of a rivalry that was fierce indeed.

By William F. Sturm

BEING racing manager of the Midwest Automobile Company, it was only natural that I'd be talking race-dope with Bill Baxter, back in the racing shed. Bill and me had been working together for a good many years, and we understood the workings of each other's minds pretty well. I don't mind saying, either, that when it comes to driving a race-car, Bill don't generally give the road to no one. Bill was good, and Bill didn't have no doubts of that fact himself.

"I think me and Dixon and Whitey can clean anything on four wheels this year," Bill was saying, when in walks Sammy Simpson. Sammy's only claim to distinction, as far as I could see, was that he was some bear on the billing machine. He was pretty cocky about himself, too—which was only natural, I guess, seeing that he was only eighteen years old.

"Mr. Jones," he says, this "Mr." meaning me, though I could of understood him better if he had said "Buck." "Mr. Jones, I want to get a job on the racing team and learn to be a race driver."

I laughed right out loud. About all Sammy knew about cars was their price to the distributor.

And Bill, he roared like a Midwest coming by the grandstand on the last lap. Then he let the echo chase itself, and then he laughed again. Bill's laugh seemed to peeve Sammy some.

"What *you* laughing at, you big stiff? Didn't you have to learn to drive once?"

Talking that way to Bill Baxter, the go-gittin'-est race driver in America! I looked for Bill to swallow him whole, and at that I don't think I was half as surprised as Bill was.

"It takes a man to be a race driver, you fresh kid," Bill sneered. "You gotta have hair on your chest. This factory aint no correspondence school!"

"No. If it was," the kid comes right back, "you'd have more brains than you got now!"

All the time I was trying to puzzle out

the kid. I hadn't made up my mind whether he was affected by the heat or just plumb had nerve. Any way you take it, he was crazy. He couldn't gain anything by picking a fuss with Bill, and if he was really serious about wanting a job, he made a poor start getting Bill down on him.

But that aint there nor here, as they say.

WE had the same old thing with the Midwest that year that we had before—the racing team was getting a salary and all expenses and all the prize-money. And I don't need to tell the universe that I, being the manager of the team, was getting a nice piece of change every week, and twenty per cent of the prize-money, the rest going to the boys. It don't take a shark to know that I was interested in getting the best drivers in the country. And when I tell you that Bill Baxter was the best, I don't put no strings to it.

Bill was a natural driver, to begin with; and on top of that, Bill believed in taking advantage of everything that came his way. He scared half the drivers to death when they got in a race with him. If it was a road-race, and Bill and another driver was coming down to the same corner, Bill tore down there like it was the thing for the other driver to slow up and let him into the turn first. Well, you don't have to have a diagram to know that Bill picked up a lot of distance, bluffing fellows like that. If there was a narrow place in the road, Bill, he just went after the narrow place like he was supposed to go first. And Bill could do the best job you ever seen of taking up the whole road when the judges couldn't see him. And when a driver comes up behind him, he has to wait until Bill gets ready to let him get by—that is, again, when the judges aint around. There's tricks that's got to be learned. I never believed in no low-down, dirty driving; but as a fellow says, you got to look out for A-1, because the other fellow aint interested enough in you to do it for you.

But that's getting away from the subject. When we had the factory picnic, I thought I begin to see why this Simpson kid wanted to be a race driver. Our factory aint so large but what we know about all that's going on. And I knew Simpson was soft on Mary Waite, who worked in the same department he did. Mary was a mighty fine girl, one that I would like to have had for a daughter, she was that sensible. In the light of what happened, I think now that she was always telling Sammy not to be a billing clerk all his life.

Sammy and Mary were in a crowd at this picnic, as I said, when up comes Bill Baxter. Now, a racing driver is as popular with young ladies as the last drop of molasses in the world would be with a bunch of bees.

"Miss Waite," Bill says, "wont you come over and have some ice cream and let me take you for a little spin afterward?"

Well, if looks could have killed Bill, he would have had his hands folded on his chest and a lily in them right then.

"Why, sure, Mr. Baxter," Mary says. "I'll be glad to go with you. I do so love anyone who does things like you do!"

Sammy just stands there kinda stunned, while they walks away. And from that I gathered that Sammy had a serious case. But I am a busy man and don't have no time to check up on all the love-affairs in the factory.

The next morning Sammy comes around pestering me again for a job on the racing team. Well, I finally told him to resign as the driver of the billing machine and take off his white collar and buy some working clothes and go to work. Everybody knows there's no poetry about working around in dirt and grease up to your ears, being bossed all the time by the salt of the earth in the shape of three hard-boiled race drivers, not to mention me. And Baxter sure did make life hard for Simpson. But he stuck. And he didn't yelp none when he knew Baxter and the rest was riding him.

Sammy was nothing brilliant, but he was a hard-working kid. We can draw the curtain, as they say; and when we jerk it back again a little over two years after Bill took Sammy's girl away from him, there was the billing clerk riding in the mechanician's seat with Dixon. Not with Baxter. Not him! Sammy likes Baxter like a bull likes a red flag.

WE went to the Elgin road-race that year, all set to make a cleaning. We had lots of soup. The old boats had so much pep that when you gave 'em the gun, you had to brace yourself to keep 'em from jumping out from under you.

Three days before the race, we had everything ready for the starter's flag. Whitey goes out that morning to give his boat a little warming up. A cow walks out onto the course sudden-like, without getting a permit from the watchers to cross.

Well, it aint necessary for me to make any remarks about what happens when you meet up with a cow and the old wagon is hitting her up over eighty per. You always kill the cow, and sometimes you don't kill yourself. But when a car turns over on a bird, you pretty near got to have another driver, if that car can be got ready to get into the race. The only thing left to do was to put Simpson in. I aint saying that I wouldn't of got some one else if I could. But I couldn't, and Sammy was qualified under the Three-A rules to take the steering-wheel.

I'll say the Midwests didn't cover themselves with no glory. Baxter broke a steering knuckle before he had gone ten miles. Dixon put a con'-rod through the crankcase—and the world knows you can't win races unless connecting rods stay where they belong. If Sammy hadn't of broke his gas-line and caught fire, he might of got tenth place at the rate he was driving, but he wouldn't have done any better unless some one had towed him around.

"You better go crawl away some place and die," Bill told Sammy that night when we was rehashing the race. "You might make a good lady's driver. You might even make a hit drivin' in the bushes, but you aint no good with anything that moves over sixty miles an hour. Go and git some experience. You sure need a lot."

"I don't see no victory wreaths on you —you big hunk o' cheese!" the kid yells.

As I said, I never mix in no drivers' arguments. It don't do no good. Bill was manhandling the kid, but he'd hear a lot worse if he stuck around a racing camp.

One word led to another, and I went over to the Turkish bath to forget my troubles. When I got back, Dixon told me the argument got so warm between Sammy and Baxter—both insisting that there wasn't a rottener driver in the U. S. than the other —that it ended in a fight. And after Sammy had been beat raw, Bill told him to fly his kite, that he was through with the Midwest racing team. Well, as you might know, I'm the bird that tells a driver when he's canned from the team, and I got up early the next morning and went into Simpson's room to tell him to stick around. I used to be a driver, and I know you can't win all the time. But Sammy had took Bill at his word and had gone to get experience, I guess. Anyway, I never saw him again until two years later we was on the course practicing for the Marion County Trophy race. A couple of days before the race I almost had a hemorrhage when I went out to the course, for there was Sammy, big as life, in a race-car that was sure some good looker. Sammy had filled out some and carried himself like a regular driver. He didn't hold no grudge against me, and he told me he was driving for some rich Californian who owned a couple of orange groves, six oil-wells and a motion-picture company, not to mention the race-car, the California Special.

You can bet that Baxter never lost a chance to let Sammy know what he thought of him as a driver.

"I saw a want ad in the *News* yesterday, where they are askin' for truck-drivers to haul gravel," Bill said to the kid as the drivers were hanging around waiting to get the word that the course was open for practice. "I wrote and told the party that wants these drivers that one can be got if they will address you, Simpson, in care of the Marion County Trophy."

The driver of the California Special just looks at Baxter kinda funny, and I thought I saw his mouth quiver a little, like a kid's does before he starts to cry. But then again, that quiver might of been because it was hard for Sammy to keep from smiling. You never can tell.

THE California Special didn't show much in practice, and I was glad Sammy didn't belong to us and that he was happy with his Californian. You know, I make my living by having cars and drivers that don't cuckoo and that come across the finish tape ahead of the rest of them.

"This owner of yours—the bird that owns an orange grove—he must have raised a lemon in it too, didn't he?" Baxter asks Sammy when he caught a crowd of newspaper men around.

Sammy acted like he hadn't heard what Bill said.

"I been noticin' you in practice," Bill says, "and I don't see that you got any of that experience I sent you after a couple of years ago, when I canned you from the Midwest team. This is a rough course, and if you don't keep out of my way, I'm liable to run over you."

Sammy went on fastening his hood-strap.

"These corners on this course is narrow," Bill kept on, "and when me and you get down to a corner about the same time, you drop back and let me in first. If you don't,

you're liable to hit some of that baled hay they has down on the turns to keep ignorant drivers from gittin' off the course and turnin' over. They is only room for one car on these turns."

Sammy lighted a fresh cigarette, took a deep inhale, blew it out his mouth, up through his nose and out his mouth again, like he was on the vaudeville stage and no one was talking to him at all. Then he reached over and shot a couple of pumps of oil into his motor, and as far as Bill was concerned, he might have been in Guinea.

THE day of the race comes. Bands playing, grandstands filled with people—lots of noise and lots of color! And everywhere was the smell of burned castor oil. Some folks says it makes 'em sick, but it always smelled just like incense to me. Did you ever stop to think that a crowd is what makes the boys drive so hard? I looked at the grandstand blazing like all the colors of the rainbow. Seven or eight miles of rough going around the course is paid for when the boys get a big hand in passing the stands filled with people.

I don't need to tell you that a road-race aint a track-race. Starter Clark sent the cars away two at a time, ten seconds apart. Baxter in his yellow Midwest, and Sammy in his blue California Special, was paired. Away they went. And what comes later is what I seen and what I heard from them that seen what I didn't.

The Marion course is eight miles around, and the race was forty laps, or three hundred and twenty miles. And of all the mean, man-killing courses, you got to hand it to Marion. The home-stretch was wide enough to start two cars at a time, as I said. And it gives the spectators some excitement, too, to watch the brushes down the straightaway during the race. The rest of the course is only wide enough for one car to pass another if you use a shoe-horn to slip 'em by and put two wheels in the grass to do it, but two cars couldn't go around the turns at the same time, even if you used a shoe-horn. That's not hard to understand, either, when you know how they tear down to the turns, jam on the brakes, skid, slam her into second, step on her and come out of the turn with the rear end at right angles to the roadway sometimes.

When Baxter and Sammy gets the starting-flag, Baxter gives her the gun, and Sammy steps on her kinda lively too. Away they fly for the first turn, a mile away. Baxter races Sammy bang up to the curve, and Sammy has to lift his foot to keep from going through the pile of baled hay they had there. And when they flashed by the grandstand on the first lap, Baxter was leading the California Special by a nice margin.

"Say, Buck," Harry Trantor, the referee, says to me, "you know what that Simpson kid did? Asks to be put in the same flight with Baxter on the start. What's his idea? He didn't give no reason, and since this is a time race, anyhow, I didn't see no special reason for not giving him his wish."

"I don't know," I says, "unless it was because he wanted to find out just how far Baxter was going to beat him in this race. You see, if they start at the same time, Sammy can always tell how far behind he is."

Trantor laughed. "Where's this kid been for two years?" he asks. "I remember when he drove over at Elgin for you and didn't seem to want to hit better than seventy-five miles. He's filled out considerable since then. Told me he had been out on the Coast. But I never get out there, and don't know much about him."

"Search me," I tells Trantor. "So far as I know, he's never been heard of since he left us."

The cars was coming in by regular order, led by the big Florio, which had started away first. It wasn't long until the junk cars begin to fall through the hopper. The Talbot limps into the pits with a broken oil-line, and the mech' crawls under her and cooks his hand well done repairing it. You know, oil gets rather warm in a racing motor. Then the Ajax blows a right rear into strings. In fifteen seconds another wheel is slipped on and the Ajax is gone. Winsard, in his Iroquois, lost control on the hairpin turn, shoots off the course, tears two telegraph poles to splinters, turns over and burns up.

Motors was sure turning over fast. They goes past the grandstand like they was being shot out of them seventy-fives they had over in France. I watched Baxter going down Shugart's Hill. He was going so fast that his front wheels didn't have time to settle to the ground when he comes over the top of it, and if he was going a mile a minute, he was doing one hundred and fifteen an hour. But I never saw the California Special displaying any special amount of speed.

When the race had gone about one hundred and fifty miles, which was less than half over, it had settled down to a grind, and of the six cars well up to the front, there wasn't any of them could say they had a strangle hold on that fifteen thousand dollars first prize. The Florio was leading, followed in order by the Ajax, the Talbot, Baxter, Dixon and Simpson. It didn't look to me like Simpson had the nerve to try to pass any of the fast boats.

Then things began to happen. Simpson was running a half-mile or so behind Baxter. Coming into the grandstand stretch, I saw Simpson twist her tail, and the way that blue car flew by made me sit up.

"Simpson sure has the hop in that motor of his," Tom Noland, of the *News*, says to me as the California Special roars by.

"Yes," I says, "he has the hop in her; but you got to have something else to win a race besides hopping up your motor. Speed aint the whole thing. You got to be able to keep her front end first. It aint enough to be able to wind her up on the straightaways and let her ramble. You got to know how to handle her in a pinch. You got to know when to lift your foot, sometimes, as well as when to hold it down. Look at that road. Wide enough here in front of the grandstand, but on the other places on the course it takes something besides speed to pass a car."

"Well, maybe this kid has these other things," Noland says.

"Maybe he has," I remarks; "but if he has, I don't know why he aint using 'em. Showing off with a little spurt in front of the grandstand don't get you nowheres."

ABOUT that time Sammy stops for a tire. He fills up with oil and gas and water at the same time, and I knew he was fixing not to stop any more. When he got away again, there was several other cars ahead of him. And Bill must have had a good two-mile lead, which didn't hurt me any.

The Florio and the Ajax had been showing the way to the rest of the field ever since the first of the race. But they was getting reckless, and you can't get reckless on a road course and not pay for it. They come together when the Ajax was trying to pass the Florio at the foot of Shugart's Hill. Baxter was about a mile ahead of them when the accident happened —they had picked up almost a lap on Bill. But about ten seconds after they smashed, Sammy comes roaring over the hill. You know, he couldn't of seen 'em until he was right on 'em. When that kid saw that scrap-pile of what was two perfectly good race-cars a few seconds before, he had to think fast.

The road was blocked. He could of run into the wreck or he could turn down into the ditch and miss it. He turned into the ditch. You'd have thought he would have slowed down and got back on the course. But slowing down wouldn't have done him no good. Right ahead of him the course ran across a creek. The bed was almost dry, but the banks were rather steep and there was a mud hole there too. Sammy was too close to get back on to the road to go over the bridge, so he plowed down parallel with the course, and they tell me instead of his slowing up, he stepped on her. Well, he had to if he wanted to get kick enough to go down into that creek bed and up the other side of the bank. And if the California Special could keep right side up during that wild ride, it would be a wonder.

THAT'S what Noland was telling me afterward. He was over there at the time. He said Sammy hit that mud, and you'd have thought there was a volcano there. That mud shot up like old Vesuvius on his busy day. Noland said that one man in a thousand could have held that car right side up and kept her on four wheels bumping over that rough going, and he reckoned that one man in a thousand was holding the wheel. The crowd was yelling; women was fainting; and before I can tell it, hardly, Sammy was across that creek and roaring down the course. And when the mud-splattered California Special comes by the grandstand, I'll say they was some ovation. You see, the press boys had got the dope from the field telephones.

Then Sammy begins to pass the rest of the cars like they was going backwards. If they didn't give him enough room, he went down into the ditch and around them and back on the road.

"This boy Simpson aint no simp when it comes to driving," Allen, of the *Examiner*, was saying to me. "Seems like running across that creek gives him a big idea about how to get past these birds," he says.

"Well," I says, "you can't travel as fast in the ditch all the time as you can if you stay on the road—and Baxter is staying on the road."

Simpson was getting wilder than ever. Into the turns he shot, and the rear end was doing its best to come out first. But I was beginning to see that the boy had the stuff in him. And I sure was getting some pointers on how little he cared about drifting into heaven quick. But he couldn't catch Baxter, not with only twenty-four miles to go.

When the announcer yells that there is only one more lap to go, Baxter was tearing by the grandstand with everything he had. But right behind him was Simpson and his blue California Special. The crowd roars, and I heard some one holler to Baxter, just like he could of heard: "Let that blue car by, you dirty driver!" But Bill whirls on. He was taking up the whole road, same as I told you he did sometimes, and got away with it. Sammy was hugging Bill's rear wheels all the way. And Bill gives his mech' the sign to watch Sammy. Bill is sitting on the top of the world. He knows he's got the race sewed up.

Into the home-stretch they come, on the last lap, Baxter leading, Sammy hugging his rear wheel. When they got almost to the tape, Simpson brings that nerve of his into use again. I could see Baxter's first-place smile. But looking beyond that smile, I saw Sammy put his two outside wheels into the grass. You see, Bill was riding the center of the road.

"Watch him, Bill!" I yelled, just as if Bill could of heard me. Well, he must have felt something. He stepped on her. But not soon enough!

Sammy jams his foot down, and I'll swear that blue car jumped twenty feet. Still in the grass, he came on, roaring like a flock of machine-guns, tore up the timing wire and the scoring benches in front of the judges' stand—and flashed across where the tape ought of been—a bare two feet ahead of Baxter!

Did the crowd get up on its hind legs and yell? I'll say it did. Why, for a minute—but only a minute—I even forgot that the kid had cheated us out of first place and that we had to be satisfied with second place and ten thousand dollars.

BAXTER was telling me in the hotel that evening that I ought to protest Sammy's dirty driving. Baxter ought to have been watching for just what happened at the last minute. A race driver oughtn't believe a race is won until the checkered flag drops. Believe me, I wasn't in no humor to listen to his alibis. "Baxter," I says, "when it comes to dirty driving, it seems to me you got no room to talk. You was flopping all over that road like some woman taking her first driving lesson. You—"

Sammy walks in just then, and of course we all stopped and looked at him.

"Say, you imitation race driver, who told you that you could drive?" He was talking to Baxter, and not to me. "After this, you remember that trucks and all other slow-moving traffic is expected to keep to the right, so other people can get past. You thought I was afraid of you, huh? Well, I wasn't. I could of got you on that first turn. But I thought I'd let you kid yourself clear up to the end of the race. I went and got that experience you was telling me to get. And besides, I think you got a yellow streak up your back as broad as White River in the springtime."

Bill jumps out of his chair. "That'll do for you, you fresh kid!"

THAT "kid" part was kinda muffled, because Sammy's fist interfered with it coming out. And they went to it. As I said, I never interfere with no drivers' affairs. Let 'em start what they want to, and finish it, if they can. Bill might of been beat in the race, but he was a tough bird in a rough-house fight. But the racing season was over, and I knew that if Sammy could fight as well as he could drive, it wouldn't make any difference if he did lick Bill, for he'd have all winter to get over it.

I'm not saying that Sammy cleaned Bill without so much as an effort or ruffling his hair none. He worked hard. But when he finally got through with my star driver, Bill looked like he had had a losing argument with a corn shredder. Sammy walks over and washes his face without saying a word. Then he comes over to where I am sitting.

"Buck," he says, "what are the chances of getting hooked up with the Midwest for next year?"

"Chances are good," I says, "but if there's any fighting to be done, I'll do it myself, hereafter."

"They wont be any more fighting for me, Buck," Sammy says. "I'm going to marry Mary Waite, and she likes handsome race drivers, she says." And his mouth quivered the way it did when I thought he was going to cry that time.

The Better Man

Can a man go down to the depths for a woman, and then return? This is the story of how one man "came back."

By WILLIAM P. DUDLEY

IT began one warm spring night back in 1906. The place was a small manufacturing town in Massachusetts. Behind the shadowy woodbine of a friend's piazza I had spent the evening discussing a business proposition, my part in which would shortly take me abroad. The time had passed quickly. We had manufactured much pipe-smoke.

It must have been eleven o'clock when I finally bade my friend good night, eleven-thirty when I had crossed the town and approached my own house, a mile or two distant. I was deeply engrossed in the possibilities of my coming world trip, and I paid little attention to those I passed. I recollect, however, that as I approached my own home I was suddenly puzzled and disturbed by its darkness.

This was strange. As I mounted the steps I was startled by two figures in white arising from the veranda wicker chairs.

"Billy!" came my wife's voice.

"Yes," I answered. "What's happened?"

My wife was dressed in a muslin frock. The other white figure was that of a man, a bareheaded young fellow.

"Tom's here to see you, Billy. He's been waiting since half-past ten."

Both in my wife's tone and behavior I sensed something unwittingly dramatic. Tom? Tom *who?* I knew a half-dozen Toms. For a time the situation was awkward. I said:

"I was startled to find the house completely dark. Usually the hall-light—"

"I'd forgotten it, Billy," my wife confessed. "I went over to Mrs. Wright's the first of the evening. It was dark by the time I returned and I found Tom here. I've been talking with him ever since."

"I'll turn it on," I volunteered, meaning the light. I hoped the illumination would shine out upon the veranda and divulge the identity of the chap who had upset my lady so apparently.

"I wish, Bill," came the man's hollow voice "that you wouldn't. I'd just as lief talk to you—say what I've got to say —to *ask*—in the dark."

Still puzzled, I assented. I solved the dilemma by drawing a cigar from my pocket, biting off the tip hurriedly, finding my match-box and striking a match. For an instant I held it unshielded in front of my Havana. Then I glanced up.

The tiny flame lighted not a man's face so much as his eyes!

THEY were big, round, glazed, unblinking eyes. Across the white forehead above them I saw a freshly-healed scar. The features made me shudder. But I had recognized my man—Tom Sanborn. "Smiling Tom" the townfolk called him, because of a proverbially optimistic disposition and pleasant manner. He was a bookkeeper in one of the town's chair factories. Prior to getting the place he had held a similar position on the local newspaper of which I was part owner.

"Smiling Tom" Sanborn in such a condition! Truly something grave must have happened. I offered him a cigar and was refused.

"I'll go to bed," said my wife, "so you two can talk." But at the screen-door she hesitated. "Do you mind stepping in here a moment, first, Billy?" she asked.

"He isn't quite right in his head, Billy," she whispered to me hurriedly as we stood inside the door. "He's had a terrific shock tonight and Grace Kennedy ought to be horsewhipped. So humor him, Billy. I haven't dared leave him—not for a minute!"

"What's Grace done?"

"He'll tell you. Be careful! Billy, I'm afraid for him!"

I went back to Sanborn.

"What's the matter, Tom?" I asked. "Let's sit down and talk it over."

I was relieved when he followed me. I chose a couple of chairs in the corner of the big veranda beside the railing.

"Out with it, Tom! What's worrying you?" I prompted. "You seemed all right when I met you on Main Street at five o'clock."

"When you met me at five o'clock—yes. That was seven hours ago. A lot can happen in seven hours. It's happened to me!"

"What's happened to you? Why all this mystery?"

"Bill, I want some money. I'm quitting my job and need some money—a lot of it—right off—tonight!"

"You're quitting your job! But I thought you were marrying the Kennedy girl next week!"

He interrupted me with a curse, a strange thing for Tom Sanborn.

"That's it exactly, Bill. I *thought* I was getting married next week. But I'm not! It's off!"

"You two young folks 'busted up?'"

"It's off; all off!"

"Tell me about it. Maybe if it's only a quarrel I can help—"

"Nobody can help in this, excepting to loan me some money to get away, to get as far from this town as I can buy a ticket. Grace—well, she's married already!"

A queer, tragic silence followed. A cricket cheeped somewhere down under the piazza. Out across the head of the avenue a belated trolley-car ground past on its final trip to the carbarns.

"Married!" I said finally. "Married to whom?"

"Ned Farrell! To spite me."

"No!"

"Yes!"

I SUDDENLY agreed with my wife. Gracia Kennedy should be horsewhipped—if she hadn't gone crazy. For the invitations were mailed for the Sanborn-Kennedy wedding, many gifts had already been sent to the bride-to-be, the two had purchased one of the Osbourne cottages on Pine Street and during the past few months had spent their evenings and Sundays—and Tom's savings—turning it into a home.

"Impossible!" I echoed blankly.

Young Sanborn returned no answer. It was too real and tragic to make into an argument.

"But why the devil did she go and marry Ned Farrell when the date was all set for her marriage to you?"

"If you can answer that, you can answer what makes woman the thing she is!" The man's voice was grisly with its bitterness.

"Did you quarrel with her?"

"Yes, I quarreled with her—a little bit. I didn't mean to do it. That is, I never dreamed where it would lead. Laugh if you want, but it started over such a silly thing as the height she wanted to hang a parlor picture, a wedding gift from her sis-

ter. You know the old saw about 'divorces that come from broken tea-cups.' Well, one thing led to another and—and she married Ned Farrell, I say, tonight!"

"How do you know?"

"I got a letter from her, about half-past eight. She and *him* took the eight o'clock train down the valley."

"Let me see the letter."

"I haven't got it."

"Where is it?'

"I don't know. I lost it somewhere. Little Timmy Larkin met me on the street and gave it to me. I was so dazed for a minute I didn't look where I was going. I ran head-on into a telephone-pole on Depot Street and got a smash in the forehead. Hours and hours afterward, it seems, I found myself in Dr. Miller's parsonage over on Union Street, begging him for a loan because, except for you, he was about the only confidant I had in the place. But he wouldn't give me a penny, damn him! He can get up and preach fine sermons about doing good to others and all that sort of rot. But when it comes to a little practical application, he's not there! That settled me on ministers. So I came to you. What time is it?"

"About midnight. Tom, this is bad—horribly bad!"

He did not respond. Response was superfluous.

I realized my cigar had gone out. Mechanically I lighted it. How could the Kennedy girl have brought herself to do such a thing?

I knew, everybody did, that she had been keeping company with Ned Farrell before Tom came to town. But all of us assumed that Tom had proved the better man and beaten his rival in a fair-and-square game of hearts. And yet—

Perhaps the Kennedy girl had simply "changed her mind." It was a contemptible time, however, in which to do it.

I stared for several minutes at the silhouette of the young man beside me in the semi-dark. I liked him. I had always liked him. Everybody did. Hale and hearty, optimistic, friendly, eager to make new acquaintances and skillful at holding them, the first big shadow had now fallen across his life. I had not then come to appreciate that the supreme assay of a man can be taken only when he is dropped into the slough of terrible trouble.

It was Chinese cruelty, this thing the Kennedy girl had done. In the ensuing hour I gradually sensed how much so. The only solution was, that Tom had won the girl away from Ned against her will. She didn't want Sanborn; she really wanted Ned. So she had taken the pique of the quarrel to force the issue and break away from the alliance with Tom before it was too late. But I couldn't tell that to the lad before me.

POOR Tom! Colloquially speaking, he was a mess. Mentally, spiritually and physically, he was a mess. The prospects developed rapidly, too, that he would continue a mess for quite some time to come.

"Son," said I, "it's plain that you've got to buck up and show the stuff you're made of. You've got to drink the wormwood, endure the gall, play the man. I know it's rotten comfort—this stuff about 'playing the man.' All the same, it's the thing you appear to need most.

"Grace has given you a raw deal," I went on. "No one would argue with you there, never mind what kind of an altercation you had with her to start it off. Yet you've got the consolation of finding out in time the stuff she was made of. A woman who'd pull that sort of thing before marriage wouldn't show herself much of an asset after marriage. It's raw, but — there's only one way to get back at a woman like that, — turn the tables on her,—show her it doesn't matter in the least."

"Show her it doesn't matter? Do you think I'm made of iron?"

"She's left town with Farrell, you say, because of the quarrel with you. She's married Farrell, then, not because she especially loves him but to work out her spite on Tom Sanborn. She wanted to hurt you—hurt you as effectively as she could contrive. Well, if I know anything about feminine human nature, if you let it show she's stabbed you to the quick she's going to be grimly satisfied—for a time at least. But if you show it doesn't make a tinker's dam of difference, the joke's going to be on her."

"I can't! My God, I can't!"

"It's up to you," I contended.

"Billy," he begged piteously, as though I had not spoken, "will you lend me the money to go away—as far away as I can get? For I haven't a cent just now. I've spent it all on the house and stuff and what I had in cash is deposited to Grace's credit in the savings bank."

I sighed.

"Where do you aim to go?"

"Off over the rim of the world. Off as far as I can get."

"Then you haven't got the stamina in you to stay and give the girl the laugh!"

"I'm raw and bleeding inside, Bill. Seems as if I ought to shut my teeth together tight, to keep the blood from trickling through. It's just my luck, anyhow. I know what this town calls me; it's 'Smiling Tom.' That's where I've fooled you all. I've smiled—yes. But all the time it was to hide the heartache I've carried all my life through. Grace hasn't been the first woman to go back on me, Bill. She's been the third girl I've almost married, to meet some kind of break-up before the engagement was ended. Now I'm done. I've almost lost my faith in human nature, Bill, at least in women. And all I want to do is get away somewhere that I wont find women—off in a man's world where I'll be given a square deal."

"Tom," I said in slight disgust, more at his tone than his words. "Cut out the self-pity."

"I see," he cried a bit hysterically. "So you wont help me, either? Oh, well! I might have known. For four years I've lived here under the delusion that you were one of the best friends I had in the place—"

"I *am* one of the best friends you've got in the place; but I want to feel I'm a friend to a *man* and not a whining, sniveling, self-pitying worm!"

"No you're not! If you were, you'd give me the loan quickly—to go away. You know I'd pay it back."

"If you had the price, specifically, where would you go?"

"There's places! Places where I can just find men—strange out-of-the-way places. I'd go tonight! Out of sight, out of mind. Maybe I'd be able to forget."

"Yes, but *where?*"

"Well, the Orient."

"You'd be running away from a weakness, Tom. You'd be giving Grace exactly the satisfaction she hopes to get."

"I don't care, Bill. I present it to her gratis, that satisfaction, the same as I present her the house and the furniture, even the bank account I put in her name when I was ninny enough to trust her!"

"You wouldn't go away tonight and leave your property and affairs in any such haphazard state—?"

"Right now—tonight!" His voice rose, shrill and hostile. "And if you wont give me the money, you can go to hell—along with the woman and that pious hypocrite Miller!"

"If you talked to Miller the way you're talking to me, I don't wonder he wouldn't make you a loan," I said, and was immediately sorry. But I kept still when he began cursing me, the girl, the town, every man whose hand he assumed was against him.

"It's not necessary for you to stay here forever, Tom," I argued. "But stay long enough at least to be able to look at your own face in a mirror and tell yourself you were made of harder stuff than one woman could spoil."

BUT I might as well have tried to talk the surf at Atlantic City into quiet. That night Tom Sanborn disappointed me grievously. If one had wagered with me on the fellow's stamina before this tragic thing happened, I would have placed far more money than he wanted to borrow to go to the Orient, that he was exactly the opposite of what was now revealed.

"Give me some money, Bill," he begged like a mendicant. "The house, the furnishings, the bank account—you can have everything. Only give me a loan to get off somewhere away from people who don't understand me, and let me live my life after my own fashion!"

"No," I replied. "Even if I had that much handy in currency tonight—which I haven't—I wouldn't loan you a penny to indulge a weakness. Straighten up and be a man!"

He rose up and for a moment I threw myself into an attitude of self-defense. I thought he was going to hit me. But before I could stir, he gave me a guttural curse, leaped the veranda rail, ran across the lawn and disappeared.

He left so quickly that for a moment I was taken aback. Then I was worried. Suppose he undertook to destroy himself—I would have to count myself responsible. It was a beastly unpleasant realization. I hurried upstairs and found my wife.

"I wish you'd loaned him the money," she decided. "I don't really believe he's lost faith in human nature. In a couple of weeks he'd have realized how foolish he'd acted and been back here with the loan and an apology."

"Well, he's gone now. What shall I do?"

"It's hard to decide," she answered. "I don't know as there's anything. If he's deadly intent on suicide, you couldn't permanently stop him."

I did take a turn or two through the town, however, hoping I would find the fellow. My brief search was unsuccessful. On going to the office the following day I was not reassured. The news of the Kennedy girl's elopement with Farrell had spread through the town and added to that, as night wore on, was the disturbing rumor that Tom himself had disappeared.

Not a soul had seen him after he vaulted the railing of my veranda and vanished across the lawn. He had not returned to the place where he boarded. If he had left the town he had carried no baggage, no clothing, not even a coat or hat.

By the end of that hectic week it was popularly assumed that young Sanborn had made away with himself. The following Sunday and for several Sundays thereafter, searching parties went out and tried to find his body or traces of him. Nothing resulted from these gruesome errands, however. Tom had gone. And then, in so far as I was conversant with the home-town end, the mystery for me remained just that—a mystery. Within one week my business deal had developed, my interest in the newspaper had been sold, my home closed and my wife and I were on our way toward San Francisco, all before Ned Farrell and his bride returned from their honeymoon and I had a chance to talk with Grace and learn the true reason for her conduct.

As for Tom, during the two succeeding years of world-wandering in my capacity as foreign agent of an export business, I forgot him. If in idle hours, thinking back to the old home town, I recalled him at all, it was to catalog him as The Weakling.

During the third year, the memory of his escapade was brought to mind vividly because of a strange case I encountered while on my third trip across the Pacific. I wasn't yet done with Tom Sanborn. The most extraordinary part of the whole Sanborn-Kennedy episode lay ahead.

WE were three days out of Honolulu when I met Jim Henson. It was on the upper after-deck about one o'clock in the morning. There had been dancing but it had stopped with the music at midnight. My wife had gone to our stateroom. I had remained behind to finish my cigar. Henson strolled over and sank into one of the folding chairs strung helter-skelter along the rail.

Several times I had noticed him about the boat but this was my first opportunity to engage him in conversation. He was a big-bodied, athletic fellow—hard of jaw and eye, with a philosophic reserve about him which indicated at once that here was a man who at some time or other had faced tragedy, fought a lone fight, stuck to slight odds till the bitter end and then won out in spite of everything.

We discussed the beauty of the tropical night for a time, then conventionalities about the voyage. Next we made the discovery that we were engaged in the same line of business. That drew us together.

By the end of the week Henson and I were very good friends indeed. Hour after hour we paced the decks side by side for exercise, or lay in our adjoining steamer-chairs during the lazy afternoons and sent our dream cargoes off across the desolate reaches of the blue Pacific. Two men may come to understand and appreciate one another minutely through two weeks of such association. Yet such was Henson's natural poise and reserve that I doubt if I should ever have known the detail of his love affair which had left him the man I found him, if it had not been for the suicide of the little Hungarian banker bound for Shanghai.

Now the suicide of the Hungarian banker has nothing to do with this chronicle excepting that it had been caused by the faithlessness of a woman—which quickly became boat property because of the note the man left behind—and that when the heavy tropical night closed down, apart from the others, Henson and I smoked our pipes and fell to discussing the unfair sex, using the Hungarian's rashness as motif.

"The man who will let one woman wreck his life is a pitiable fool," declared Henson with a sad little laugh. "The world is too wide and holds too many women—the right sort of women."

"Your tone indicates that possibly you speak from experience," I teased him.

"I do," he responded gravely. "I've been through that mill exactly, and I hope I am grounded now in my fundamentals."

I was surprised that he should talk about it. Yet perhaps on second thought, it

wasn't so very extraordinary nor out-of-character after all. He had conquered himself, grown big and broad enough so he could consider the episode in the light of a joke—a joke on himself, to be sure, but still an excellent joke. Besides, from days of business confidences, it was perhaps only natural for us to shift to personal confidences.

JIM HENSON spun me a yarn that night which I have never forgotten. No need to insert it here. But when he was finished I found my pipe gone out and myself staring at him in admiration.

"I have known only one other man who has gone through such an experience," I told him. "But where you have apparently been strong and come off victor, he was a weakling and allowed himself to slouch down into either suicide or flight." And in turn I narrated Tom Sanborn's story without, however, giving Tom's name or the name of the town in which it had happened.

"God pity the fellow who has to go through such an ordeal," returned Henson sympathetically when I was finished. "Yet after all, bitter medicine though it is at the time, it's good medicine. In my own case it's given me an understanding of women that's going to be invaluable when I finally find my really big romance. That's the way I look at it now—in the light of a lesson—an experience that I had coming to me. I'm content to let it go as such, and keep my mind fixed and my eyes open for the real girl when she finally comes."

"Then you think she will come?" I asked him.

"Absolutely! I can't conceive why the first experience should have befallen me if she wasn't. Nothing happens by chance in this world; there's some good reason for everything. So I'm waiting."

The fellow's confidence, his optimism, his healthy attitude on an extremely unhealthy subject, was refreshing. He was one man in a thousand—the kind it is good to have around. No whining, no self-pity, no mewling for sympathy from him! He was all man, master of himself. And somehow I felt that the gods were going to be kind to Jim Henson. I was not surprised when their favor finally descended upon him.

But I had another jolt coming to make that voyage memorable.

About two o'clock of the last day at sea, the dim, conical outline of Fujiyama appeared in the western sky. By three o'clock we had sighted land. At six we would be secure at the Yokohama dock. Henson and I leaned over the deck-rail together as our ship veered and made the turn up Tokio Bay. As we watched the sampans between ourselves and the low-lying shore, I said:

"The Orient is a big place, Jim. America looks small when viewed from a perspective of five thousand miles."

"Big in one way," he responded. "Small in another. In so far as white people are concerned, I've often thought of the Orient as a sizeable country village where everybody knows everybody else. I suppose the English-language newspapers that report Anglo-Saxon activities all over the Far East are mostly responsible. And then when one gets acclimated, there's really so little of interest to talk about that it's only natural people should discuss one another. When I think of all the benighted souls back home who hold the idea they can lose themselves out here in the Orient, I'm minded of the wise man who declared it was easier to lose one's self in the by-streets of New York than in the remotest country village."

SOMEHOW the association of ideas recalled Tom Sanborn again. Henson and I were parting in a few hours. I risked an inquiry.

"There was a chap named Sanborn back home who once declared something of the sort—said he wanted to hide away from a weakness out here in the Orient. Ever hear of him, Jim?" It was a long shot—a very long shot. I don't really know why I took it. But after all, this is a small world and I make no claim toward originality for the statement.

"Sanborn? Sanborn? What was his first name?"

"Tom," I answered.

"I know a Tom Sanborn—slightly," my friend returned in his calm, unruffled manner. If Mars had suddenly started for a head-on collision with the earth I am persuaded Jim Henson would have employed exactly the same tone of voice.

"You know a Tom Sanborn!" I gasped, astounded that my thousand-to-one shot had made a target. Then my surprise passed. After all, Thomas Sanborn wasn't an uncommon name. There were undoubtedly hundreds of Tom Sanborns, somewhere.

"He's resident agent for Meyer and Meyer up in Tokio," Henson continued. "Came out a couple of years ago and I understand hasn't been making out very successfully."

A couple of years ago! That would make the time about right.

"Describe him, Jim," I begged avidly.

Henson gave me the detail.

A few minutes later I rushed below and found my wife putting the finishing touches on her packing.

"Mary," I cried, "I'll bet a doughnut I've stumbled on the trail of the fellow Grace Kennedy gave the Chinese turn-down! By a thousand-to-one shot Jim Henson knows him. By his description Tom has changed a lot, and yet somehow I feel it's the same fellow. Anyhow, we're going up to Tokio together tomorrow and Jim's going to arrange an introduction!"

NOW up and down the middle of the great central island which comprises the major portion of the empire of Nippon runs a range of lofty volcanic mountains little known to the conventional globe-trotter and colloquially called the Japanese Alps.

Leaving Tokio from Ueno station on the north side of the city, the train moves northwestward through miles of lowland country cultivated with broad fields of rice and mulberry. In a narrow-gauge train on a toy railroad the traveler is whirled through exotic country villages—clusters of straw-thatched huts, candle-lighted if it be night—steadily upward into the hills.

It was three o'clock of a summer afternoon when I started on that journey with Henson into the Japanese Alps on a search for Sanborn. For what I had learned at the Tokio office of his firm had convinced me that he was that same Tom Sanborn of Massachusetts. To escape the Tokio heat of that summer, like many other "Westerners" he had gone up into the mountains. I had been in Japan before but never had an excuse for penetrating far inland. Mostly for pleasure, therefore, I started to find the man who had vaulted my veranda rail and disappeared so mysteriously, thirty months before. Henson accompanied me because he found he had business with another member of that mountain summer-colony.

The prolonged hot-spell promised imminent rainstorms and other barometric disturbances. Once a year in Japan comes a great rain and wind, natively known as the *hari-hari*. It breaks the annual drought and "sweeps the world clean" of the accumulated summer dust and filth. It was time for the *hari-hari* now. For several evenings past, long feathery typhoon clouds had hung weird across the northern stars. Earthquakes had been felt in various parts of the island. Asama volcano had been muttering and smoking ominously. Intuitively we felt that some sort of extraordinary thing lay ahead of us.

We rose higher into the hills as the day died with a blue-red sunset. Gradually the air that blew down from the higher altitudes grew cooler, but it was a treacherous coolness that penetrated to the bone. The congested, jabbering, shuffling, tinkling villages grew farther and farther apart. We changed our steam locomotive for an electric engine and at last, through interminable tunnels, we began to mount the grades.

We had a first-class coach with no other first-class passengers. It was a tiny box affair, six-by-twelve, carpeted and upholstered in blue plush, like a gypsies' wagon towed on rails. Early in the ride we had opened the windows. As the mystic dark came on, the clean, sharp wash of mountain water falling in cascades far under the bridged tracks, arose to us. Japanese country is ghastly quiet at night. Beyond the splosh of intermittent streams and the jolting click of the toy car-wheels, there was no other sound.

About half-past eight Jim looked out of the window.

"It's foggy outside," he declared. "An hour ago I could see some stars. They've gone completely."

We were due at the mountain town at eleven o'clock. At nine-thirty we pulled alongside the station platform at Hammachio and the electric lamps outside glimmered on boards and rails that were shining wet. Diminutive station porters, trainmen and milkboys were grotesque in garments of water-proof straw.

"Raining!" exclaimed Jim. "And the wind is coming up!"

WE reached Kamagowa, the mountain town, in a washing rain. The wind was lashing the eucalyptus and cryptomeria trees, and the roads a short distance from the station platform were a slime of mud.

In the yard in front, the *kuruma*-men had the tops raised over their high-wheeled little rickshas, with boots and galoshes ready to protect the traveler from rain but nothing to protect him if the riksha runners slipped in the muck or skidded on the corners. Jim made a wry face. Two miles yet to go to reach the bungalow up on the mountain side where Sanborn was stopping. We got our information from a guard in bedraggled white who could speak a little English. Neither of us relished the ordeal ahead.

From among the persistent, gesticulating, zealous *kuruma*-men we finally chose two vehicles, were buttoned in, felt the shafts lifted by our human draysters and were rolled away, Jim's *kuruma* in the lead. The lamps of the station were quickly left behind. The night—what we could see of it—was inky black. Far off to the northeast a sullen volcano glare hung weird against the low-lying clouds.

The speed of our vehicles slowed and we knew our men had reached the grades again. Frequently the lashing foliage brushed the oil-cloth tops of our two-wheeled carriages. Once my man slipped and my *kuruma* careened dangerously. But it bounded back again and my man toiled on. I grew interested in watching the bobbing rays of his paper lantern, candle-lighted, as they fell on the oily roadway muck from the lantern, low-hung on the right-hand shaft.

A WILD night, a half real elfin ride—but emphatically incomparable with the experience which lay ahead.

Our men knew the road perfectly but the twists and turns they made in the utter blackness and the rain, were spookish. Now and then they called to one another; between lulls in the wind and wet they carried on conversation in their queerly bitten-off language, jerky, intermittent. We rumbled over foot bridges. We struck stones that skewed our course. Then—almost midnight—I twisted down so as to look out of the transparent celluloid window, and far ahead I saw a light that was stationary.

The wind and rain were so heavy when we reached the bungalow steps that when our men finally lowered their shafts they had to hold on grimly for fear of their vehicles—passenger laden—being blown away. We conducted negotiations as to payment of fares in howls. I looked up and saw the dim silhouette of some sort of wooden cottage rearing above me, choked about with crazily waving trees.

UP on the veranda beside the door was fastened a quaint lantern whose light I had seen from the distance. Our *kuruma*-men crunched away into Stygian dark. We were alone before the strange place and we stumbled up the uneven steps.

Jim had claimed he knew Sanborn but I was not absolutely positive it was the Sanborn of my Massachusetts experience. So my companion, it was, who knocked. Knocked? He pounded a summons on the frail panels above the noise of the storm, that should have awakened the dead.

No response!

Had we made this hectic trip only to be disappointed?

Again Jim pounded—once, twice, three times.

Close to my ear he shouted:

"We can't go back; we don't know the way. I'm going to try to get in!"

He laid hands on the door and to the surprise of us both, its wooden latch yielded without effort. But the wind caught the door and yanked it from Henson's grasp. Against the housewall it banged, then swung the other way and nearly knocked us sprawling. Through the interior of the place the gale made a vast sweep. We got it closed with difficulty, and I managed to find matches in my rain-soaked clothing.

It was a shell of a house made in European fashion by Japanese methods. There were no inner walls or sheathing. The boards were planed smooth but unpainted. We seemed to be in the front living-room.

Standing in the center of the apartment I held my tiny match-flame high and peered around. Tables and chairs of smooth pine finished *au naturel*, were scattered about. On the side opposite from the door a high stone fireplace arose, with a mantel. There was no fire. Strewn about the floor were sheets of newspapers and periodicals, blown from the table-top when we had unfastened the wooden latch. And then, as we stood there with the wind rocking and straining the flimsy structure about us, in the musty, mildewed odor that permeates dwellings in Nippon everywhere, the match stung my fingers and I dropped it with a little cry. I had seen the figure of a man!

He was lying almost full-length in a sort of steamer chair pulled up on the opposite side the unpainted pine table. His

face was turned away. He was motionless.

I struck a fresh match with trembling fingers. On the table-top near the man's left shoulder I saw a candle in a candlestick. It was the work of a few seconds to fire the wick. The flame climbed brighter, though the drafts darting through the eery, cavernous place gave it a hard battle. Both of us had dropped our bags at the door. Now we moved around where we could discover whether the prostrate man was unconscious or dead.

He was a bit of both—he was drunk!

And it *was* Tom Sanborn—the man I had last seen standing before me, hysterically begging money! But how changed!

The half-filled *sake* bottle and cup near the carved candlestick told the story, even the story of the change in his features.

I shook him roughly by the shoulders. He must have been there several hours because my treatment aroused him and when he straightened his brain was sufficiently clear of alcohol to permit him to recognize us—at least myself. It was Henson who had to be introduced.

"Bill!" he croaked. "You!"

Wildly I saw his bloodshot eyes travel around the long-shadowed room as though placing himself, striving to ascertain if he were still out there in the Orient in a wind-racked bungalow. The haggard, lack-luster eyes finally came back and rested on my face.

"Well, Tom," I declared, striving to hide my disgust and pity, "we meet again!"

"How did *you* get here?" was his natural question.

I told him and he sat there staring at me blankly.

He was dressed in soiled and rumpled pongee; his white linen shirt was torn open at the throat; he needed a shave and a hair-cut. But I noted these things afterward. What held me transfixed was his face. Loneliness, remorse, self-pity, self-indulgence—these had eaten into it like acid. He was still under thirty. He looked forty-five.

When he had recovered from his pardonable stupefaction he was almost childish in his efforts at hospitality. He lurched unsteadily about the room, striving to bring us chairs we did not need, to light a fire from materials too soggy and damp to burn, to persuade us to fortify ourselves from the *sake* in the bottle. Then his brain cleared and he realized the shameful state in which I had found him. He dropped into whining, doglike apology for which I could have kicked him. Henson caught my eye once and shook his head.

Jim finally succeeded in getting some dry newspapers alight and a fire started. I threw the *sake* bottle through an open window and then closed it. We put the room in some sort of order and then turned to Tom was a most natural question: had he no servant? If so, why was the man missing?

"The damn fool wouldn't stay here tonight on account of the *hari-hari,*" Tom mumbled. "Said I'd never be alive in the morning—tee-hee! But I wasn't afraid. I aint afraid o' nothin' in this country. No siree! It's pretty near mornin', aint it? And I'm still alive, aint I?"

Jim and I listened to the wind—an abandoned roar now—and we shuddered. Get out of the place? Where would we go?

Suddenly Tom hobbled along the floor, pulling the chair he was sitting on with him, until he faced me directly.

"Bill!—Bill!— Tell me all about home! Tell me all about *her,*" he begged.

"That can wait," I said roughly. "I'm thinking of this storm that's on us; I'm wondering just how safe it is to stay here."

"This place seems to be built in a sort of grove," returned Henson. "Maybe that'll save us. But to go outside now is a plain case of out of the frying-pan into the fire!"

"Fire?" I cried. "That's a rotten metaphor, Jim; it's more like leaping from a water-logged boat into the ocean to escape a drowning."

We left our fate to the god of luck and voted to stay.

BUT the wind blew out the blaze we had started—what the chimney torrent didn't smother—and the candle-flame had to be regularly relighted every five minutes. It was then about one o'clock with seven or eight hours remaining before morning, and a night-storm howling outside that would try the nerves of the strongest. A pretty predicament. Tom was the only one who did not appear to care. Once I had a suspicion that he had deliberately numbed himself with *sake* the first of the evening in order to be impervious to the catastrophe which might destroy him when it came. Our arrival had spoiled that; still, the man was in such a state that what impended bothered him little. We found

chairs in front of the clammy fireplace and we sat there tense, listening to the hurricane.

Tom's drink-whipped temper would not permit of much patience in the matter of hearing from home. Petulantly he turned on me and demanded I recount all the home news, particularly about *her*. It was a pathetic obsession, his desire for news about Grace Kennedy. But I stood him off. What right had I to allow Jim to know that my narrative of the boat concerned none other than this derelict we had found? After all, Tom's story was his own. If I had dreamed that both Henson and I were going to find the chap, of course, I would not have told the experience in the beginning. I was thankful I had divulged neither the name or address of the weakling whose history had nearly paralleled Jim's. I merely said to Tom:

"I know nothing of *her*. I left home before she returned from her honeymoon."

"What in hell are you here for, then?" snarled Sanborn.

"Why," I cried, taken aback by his ferocity, "I heard you were out here in Japan and thought I'd run up and visit with you—"

"And it never occurred to you that perhaps you might not be welcome!"

It was Henson who smoothed out what promised to develop into a serious quarrel. But Sanborn's nerves were on edge with the after-effects of too much *sake*. As those nerve-racking hours dragged by toward morning and the storm increased instead of abating, Tom settled into that grouch where he wanted to fight something. He berated me for not making him that loan the night of his disappearance. He taunted me with the fact that he had left America, in spite of my selfishness, or the cussedness of a State Department which refused him a passport. The bedlam of the storm too, played its part in exciting him. He wanted vengeance on the whole human race, it seemed, and finally proposed taking it out on me.

And that was the state of affairs when Peter MacGregor stepped into the room!

I say "stepped" into the room. I might better describe it as "falling into" the room, or being blown in.

Jim was trying to play the rôle of peacemaker without much success and I was considering the possibilities for leaving the place in spite of the storm, when during a lull in the roar of the wind, we heard a strange sound outside. On the hollow wooden steps it sounded, as though a heavy bough had broken from a tree and fallen across the entrance. But the next moment the door-latch was raised and a man fought his way inside.

THE candle was promptly extinguished by the great gust of wind and wet which drove in with him before the door was successfully closed. Tom swore, abusing the stranger roundly even while he struggled to get the thing shut. The stranger managed it after a time and I relit the candle, expecting to see a Japanese. But I did not see a Japanese. I saw one of the most conspicuous and extraordinary white men I have ever beheld in my life.

He stood with his back against the door until the light burned up—a huge-bodied man fully six feet three or four in height and with the most fiery shock of hair that Nature ever inflicted on a human being. His face consisted principally of a great hooked nose and a pair of deep-set eyes of steely blue. His huge bulk was poorly protected by a light black overcoat with silk lapels, the collar of which was turned up against the storm. He had lost his hat and his reddish features reeked with water which he smeared away from the point of his chin with the back of a hairy hand.

Tom was on his feet glowering at this visitor from the Abaddonic darkness.

"And who the devil might *you* be?" he demanded in a guttural, inhospitable voice. "Am I running a hotel here for all the scum washed up on the shores of Japan?"

The stranger checked him by raising one of his great hands. But at the moment he offered no explanation. Moving toward us, he started deliberately shedding the sopping overcoat. Dropping it in a wet puddle on the bare floor-boards, he found a big white handkerchief and started wiping his features. Then, without so much as a "by your leave" he took one of the superfluous chairs that Tom had pulled out crazily when Jim and I first arrived.

"Can't you make a fire?" were the man's first words. He meant them innocently enough, in the nature of a conventional inquiry. But Tom chose to take them as a complaint. Before he started the quarrel which immediately ensued, however, I knew why the stranger had not spoken at first. Despite the powerful physique, the labor of fighting his way through the storm had almost finished him.

"None of your damned business whether or not we can make a fire," retorted the irascible Tom. "What's your name, how did you get here and what do you want?"

The stranger took Tom's measure, grasping also that the man was half mad or intoxicated.

"MacGregor's my name," he replied as evenly as he could. "I'm a missionary bound for Hokaido and in the storm I lost my way. I've been three hours getting up as far as this from the Pass."

A missionary!

I happened to glance at Tom where he was still standing, swaying slightly, a great ugly vein down the center of his forehead starting to throb.

"So you're a missionary!"

"Yes."

AT the tone in which Tom had put the question, the stranger sent a keen glance up into the other's face in surprise. Tom was spoiling for a fight. Now he had a *missionary* to heckle. How I wished the storm would stop so that despite the night we could go and leave the derelict to his career. But the house was straining and creaking dangerously. From somewhere in the neighborhood was growing a roar that was not of the wind. Only once before had I heard a similar roar—during floodtime on the lower Missouri.

"Well," bellowed Tom Sanborn, suddenly giving the leash to all his passions. "You can't stay here and the sooner you get out the less there'll be to answer for!"

"Tom!" I cried. "Be reasonable!"

He turned on me.

"Whose house is this?—yours or mine!" he snapped. "Be thankful I'm letting you stay here yourself!"

MacGregor began rocking back and forth in his chair, seemingly unperturbed.

"You can't have been long in the Orient," he observed in that same unruffled voice, "or you'd be better versed in Eastern hospitality."

"I've got no use for ministers or missionaries!" Tom snarled. "Missionaries, understand? And that means you!" Thereupon, before we could check or dissuade him, Sanborn began pouring out the nastiest flood of invectives and abuse that the twisted soul of an alcoholic could originate. Again the fellow turned on me for my interference.

"You can tell him why!" he declared. "It was that damned Miller back home that first— I've lost my faith in human nature —I tell you missionaries are the curse of this Orient. Before they came butting in, teaching these heathen they *were* somebody, they'd get off the sidewalk when they saw you coming; now you have to knock 'em off!"

"But it's their country, isn't it?" commented MacGregor, apparently being willing to settle the quarrel by peaceful argument.

But that only made Tom worse. I glanced at Jim. On his face was only loathing and disgust.

"I wouldn't turn a dog out into this storm," roared Tom, "but I would turn a missionary out! *Get out!*"

"Tom!" I cried.

"Shut up or you'll follow, too!"

MacGregor looked at me. In his eye was a hard, humorous gleam. Tom was waiting for obedience. What should be done? I exercised the prerogative of prior acquaintance.

"Tom," said I, my own anger mounting, "we'll ask you to behave yourself and act like a white man and a gentleman or I personally will crack you on the point of the jaw and put you to sleep so we can remain in this shelter until the storm passes. Believe me, it wont be a moment longer!"

"Punch me in the jaw, will you?" Tom stumbled over. I saw him coming and had my fist ready. As he lurched at me, it was MacGregor who intervened.

"Gentlemen!—*gentlemen!*" he cried above the boom of the storm. "Don't let's have this trouble on my account. *Please!*" Deftly he caught Tom, spun him around with his supple strength and sent him crashing into a corner. It was so neatly and quickly done that I was stupefied.

"I'll get you for that!" warned the obsessed man wildly.

MACGREGOR arose with a half-sigh from the chair in which he had seated himself.

"I appear to be *persona non grata* here," he mused whimsically. "I take it, gentlemen, that your friend is in trade out here. The resentment is not extraordinary, although I do plead guilty to the charge of showing the brown and yellow man there is no especial reason why they should stand for being knocked off their own sidewalks while a white man passes."

"Where are you going?" demanded Jim when he could make himself heard.

"Doubtless there is another shelter hereabout more congenial, if not quite so dry," MacGregor returned, still with temper unruffled.

"Don't be foolish, man," I argued as Tom pulled himself up unsteadily from the boards. "You can't go out in this storm, and as for this derelict—"

"Who's a derelict!" bellowed Tom Sanborn. And he was upon me.

Down on the floor his hurled weight bore me, knocking against the table, toppling over the long-suffering candle and again putting it out. Henson tried to interfere and received a bad face-kick in the darkness. The fight which Tom carried on was pathetic—pathetic in that he was subdued so quickly. I struck at him blindly with one hand, defending my own face as best I could with the other. A lucky hit knocked him senseless. As I arose from my barked knees, I was conscious of a great wave of wind and rain straining through the house, dousing me unmercifully. It had gained entrance through the door which again had been opened.

Jim and I both fought to get the door shut. Despite an alarming nosebleed, this time it was Jim who managed to fire a match.

The candle had broken off at the edge of the candlestick but we found the broken piece and again had illumination. The flame burned up, showed Jim's face a smear of blood and Tom stretched prostrate on the boards.

Peter MacGregor was gone!

ASHEN-FACED ourselves, believing every moment now that the bungalow was going to leave its foundations, or collapse, we got some semblance of order in the place and lifted Tom to the length of the lounging-chair. There we left him until we had attended to ourselves.

"That's a contemptible shame, turning a man out in such an uproar as this," cried Henson. "I feel like wringing your friend's neck!"

"He didn't have to go," I argued. "Still, it was rather embarrassing."

A groan from Tom's chair made us turn. The fellow was recovering—and sobbing. A great bump on his forehead was welling up like a flower-bulb. He bent over the arm of the chair, supported his head on his wrists and wept convulsively—wept until my disgust changed to pity and pity to compassion. After all, he was little more than a boy, dragged down to the depths by weakness and drink. Moreover, either the fall or the blow had now fully cleared his brain. He appeared entirely sane—and emphatically remorseful.

"Where's he gone—the missionary?" he demanded.

"He took your invitation and went to find better hospitality," I reminded Sanborn.

"I'm sorry," Tom choked. "O Gracia! Gracia! Gracia!"

In that moment I understood the real ganglion gnawing at the man's heart which was responsible for his predicament and condition.

He had started into a mass of mummery and self-pity at the bottom of which we recognized his great heartache and longing for the girl who had played him false, when the cataclysm broke. A juggernaut of wind and rain hit the tormented house and at last it gave. I heard a snapping of timbers, a bedlam of dull boomings. I felt a rocking sensation which at once made me dizzy. For the last time the candle toppled and went out—and was never relighted. The floor-boards heaved beneath me. I heard a hoarse shout—whether from Tom or Henson I could not tell. I seemed lifted and thrown into a swirl of water.

I was conscious that the stars showed, then. This was ludicrous. Yet there they were, shining very far and clean above me and the free air of great open spaces was beating in my face. I was lying on my back. My limbs were stiff and sore. One of my legs was numb. I tried to move and felt a jab of pain across my hips.

WHEN I next opened my eyes it was broad daylight and a smoky thatched roof was above me. I was undressed and lying between *futons,* the heavy coverlets of a Japanese bed. Near-by an elderly woman was watching me solicitously—a queer, motherly old soul whose broad immobile face was not unlike that of a Buddha, and yet who rocked backward and forward as she watched me and made crooning noises in her throat. When I tried to rise, the little old lady jabbered at me, but she had no need to dissuade me. There was no feeling in my right leg whatever.

A native medical student over from Sindai arrived that afternoon and set the broken member. There are no more clever surgeons on earth than the Japanese. He

did as good a job as any white doctor I might have summoned up from Tokio. Only I wish I could have made him understand that I could have enjoyed a bit more anesthetic.

My wire was forwarded and the following afternoon found my wife at my bedside.

"Hunt an interpreter," I demanded as soon as she was assured I was not injured as much as I might have been, "and find out what's become of Jim Henson and Sanborn."

She was absent two hours. It seemed two months.

"Mr. Henson was found three miles down the valley, badly hurt," she told me. "They've rushed him down to the Navy Hospital at Yokohama."

"And Sanborn?"

"No traces of him whatever. There were many dead but only one white man among them. He was pulled ashore at dawn by some natives at the same time they rescued Mr. Henson."

"Drowned?"

"No, shock and exposure. He died in the same hut where he and Mr. Henson had been brought to. Mr. Henson had been trying to hold him and support the two of them by clinging to the trunk of an old tree when dawn disclosed them."

"Who is he?"

"Big red-headed man. My interpreter gathered he was a missionary."

ELEVEN years ago, it was, that my leg was broken in that cloudburst up in the Japanese Alps. Eleven years can seem a long, long time. But the longer I live and the older I grow, the more I'm impressed with the fact that there's more to this business of facing trouble squarely and beating it, than appears on the surface of an optimist's axiom.

One soft Sunday morning, a year ago this past April, I was strolling along the San Francisco waterfront, luxuriating in the pleasant sunshine under California's flawless turquoise heavens. At one o'clock I was taking the Oakland ferry on the first lap of the transcontinental journey to New England again. Ahead of me strolled a well-dressed man in a carefully pressed gray suit, gray spats, a hat of gray velour, carrying a malacca cane. There was something vaguely familiar in the set of his shoulders and his stride. I hurried forward to pass him and catch a glimpse of his features as I passed, on the chance that I might know him. I certainly did. It was Tom Sanborn!

We stopped and stared at one another in amazement.

And I was the more astounded of the two.

Tom had changed again; happily this time for the better. His hair was almost white now, but it gave him a distinguished appearance. On his features were still traces of the indulgence and self-pity which had eaten there once upon a time like acid. Yet I also saw a hardness around his jaw which had not been there before, and there was a strength in the grip of his hand which indicated that from some source or other he had acquired the stamina to make the fight, to come back. And he had come back. His flawless attire and careful grooming bespoke self-respect and worldly prosperity. Unwittingly I employed the same phrase to greet him as I had that eventful night over a decade bygone, in Japan.

"Well, Tom," I said, "we meet again!"

"Bill!" he cried huskily.

Voluntarily a moment later we moved over toward a pile of freshly sawed planking along the edge of the wharf. And I stayed with him so long that I almost missed my train.

"I never expected to see you alive again," I told him. "I thought you lost your life in that mountain flood, eleven years ago."

"You never heard from me, did you? Well, I never intended you should. I came through that ordeal with nothing worse than a mental fever. I wandered around for days. Then I came to myself in a missionary's home over toward the west coast. I'd always hated missionaries. I remember I treated one of them shamefully the night the cottage was destroyed."

"Yes," I interrupted. "He quit your place, went wandering around looking for shelter, was swept downstream and killed."

"No!" He made me tell what I knew of the story. He was grave as he continued:

"The care the missionary and his wife gave me, made me realize what a contemptible, no-account, low-down bum I was getting to be. I was particularly chagrined by my condition the night you and Henson found me. I had plenty of time to think things over as I lay convalescent. I concluded, Bill, to quit pity-

ing myself and *come back*, just to prove it could be done. And one of these days, Bill, I'm going home. But I've been waiting for something. I've been waiting until I could go back in a condition where Gracia would also be rebuked for the raw deal I still claim she gave me—running off and marrying Farrell."

"You could have rebuked her sufficiently if you'd stayed in town precisely as I advised at the time."

"I know, Bill, I know! But it's too late to cry over that."

"And when is this spectacular return going to take place?"

"When I'm certain, Bill, that I can go back and not feel unduly sorry for myself if I find myself in Gracia's company again."

"Still thinking about that girl, eh?"

"I've never forgotten her, Bill, because of the influence she's had on my life. Maybe I'm what's called a one-woman man, Bill. It's been difficult to think of Gracia as the wife of another—she came so near to marrying me. Eleven years I've been fighting to come back—to really be somebody and amount to something. They've been hard years, Bill. Nobody will ever know what they've cost. There wasn't a day at the start but what one word from Gracia, one little letter saying that she was sorry, asking me to forgive her, admitting she was responsible for my condition and predicament, would have brought me back in a moment. I had to do without anything of the sort. Deliberately I had to rebuild myself in spite of everything — admitting there was really nobody to blame for my condition but myself. That was the hardest. But after a measure, I've won. At least I'm winning out at present. And—one of these days —when the cure is complete, I'm going back."

"That's bully, Tom," I said sincerely. "For the first time I'm proud of you. I think I can appreciate how hard it's been."

"I'm cured of women now. The past eleven years' fighting alone has cured me. But I wish—God how I wish!—I could have had Grace, nevertheless."

THERE is a fascination in returning to a community where one has spent better, brighter, happier days—a fascination as well as a disillusionment and pathos. The streets, the fronts of the buildings, the landmarks—many of them will have changed. Scenes which have haunted us in dreams will have been so altered as to have to remain dream pictures. The well-known landmarks that are left only serve to tease and taunt—to trace outlines in bogus realism of those pictures we have saved in the memory book.

Last night Tom Sanborn and I walked up from the depot to the business section of the little Massachusetts town where we first met one another, eighteen years ago. We had corresponded intermittently during the past year. The trip was by appointment.

It had seemed a longer way, fourteen years bygone. It was very short last night and traveled in a handful of minutes. The old courthouse was as dusty and familiar as ever. The hotel had not changed a bit—not even to wash its musty windows or paint its weather-beaten veranda. Some of the stores, too, looked like old friends, although new names greeted us on many of the signs.

We commented with grim laughter at first, on some of these changes. Then gradually we lapsed into silence. The levity was out of place. Somehow it hurt.

"Let's walk over through Pine Street," said Tom. "I'd like to see if the place is still there where Grace and I started housekeeping—or meant to."

"Think you can stand it if it is?" I asked him. "The memories—"

"The memories can't hurt me any more than they have already." He was silent for a time. Then he said: "Think of where I've wandered, Bill, since last I turned this Pine Street corner."

"I know, Tom!"

"Fourteen years! Fifty thousand miles! It's a big world, Bill, as big as in another way it's small. *My God!*"

His exclamation was not profanity. It was stunned amazement. We had rounded the bend in Pine Street just beyond the grades school. And the cottage where Tom had almost started housekeeping with the Kennedy girl, stood before us—without a single change in any way—exactly as it had been the night when he sought out my home to borrow funds to flee the place.

It was extraordinary. It was uncanny. Not a fence-picket, not a clapboard, not a front-yard shrub, had been altered. If time had caused any dilapidation, the restoration had been perfect. If new coats of paint had been applied, the same colors,

tints and trimmings had been chosen. Half a dozen homes in the vicinity were only recognizable from their outlines. Others had long since given way to new. Vacant lots of yesterday now held new bungalows. But Tom's house was exactly the same in every particular.

We stood transfixed. Then I thought Tom made a sound like a sob.

But something happened before we could speak, something that caused him to grip my arm so tightly it stopped the circulation of my blood. No need for him to suggest my looking. I saw!

Grace, with a light shawl over her shoulders, came from the rear of the house. She strolled slowly toward the front.

She was a slenderly built, middle-aged woman now, with shoulders slightly bowed. The first traces of gray were beginning to show in her chestnut hair.

My friend drew a long breath. I felt him trying to convince himself it wasn't a dream—all a dream. The woman was intent on examining and watering the border of pansies and geraniums along the walk.

TOM took a step forward and I knew it cost him an effort. When he reached the gate, he stopped, staring. He couldn't help it. It must have been his manner of stopping and staring that attracted the woman's attention.

The first indication of recognition on the woman's part came when she moved forward a step, dropping the small sprinkling can and pressing her hand against her heart.

"Tom!" her thin lips whispered. *"Tom Sanborn!"* She swallowed with difficulty. "Where did you come from now?"

"I came—back up here—just on a lark—to see how the old town looked. I walked down Pine Street here to see if the place was still standing—"

Tom had entered the gate by this time and stood awkwardly before her. He surveyed her. For this woman had he let himself sag down into the depths, then pulled himself up by superhuman effort. The woman extended her hand until she touched him, as though to convince herself that he was real. Her frail fingers closed about his forearm. The hand trembled. Thus she steadied herself.

Such was their reunion after fourteen years. No more dramatic than this—no more romantic. Yet that's the way it usually happens in life—the thunderbolt of meeting again, coming at a time when the woman in the case waters flowers in the hushed peace of a closing summer's day!

THEY moved toward the steps and sank down—the girl rendered temporarily speechless. As for Tom, I knew that he was turning over and over in his mind the question: was it worth it? The woman was still pretty, though a faded beauty, and on her features were lines of loneliness, remorse and longing also.

"Tom," she finally whispered huskily, "where have you been?"

"The Orient," said the man briefly.

"The Orient? Then you *did* go to the Orient."

"Yes. I beat my way across to Frisco and worked on a tramp schooner. In Yokohama I deserted, got ashore, got a job—"

"And you've been out there ever since?"

"No, I was only out there the first three years. I beat my way back in 1909. I've been living in California where I've built up a business."

"Tom! Tom! Why didn't you write? Why didn't you let me know?"

"Why should I, Gracia? You'd made it plain you wanted the other fellow."

"I did, Tom. And I've paid the penalty. Ten hours after I left you, I learned my mistake. And every moment since, I've been heart-hungry for you, hoping, praying that you'd come back."

"Why didn't you write and let me know?"

"Write? How could I? No one knew where you'd gone. And now—now you've come back, *now!*

Tom Sanborn frowned. Why did she place emphasis on the word "now?"

"What do you mean, Gracia?"

"I've been heart-hungry for you such a long, long time. Life hardly seemed worth living. Every moment was a rebuke for my thoughtlessness. I felt I deserved no happiness. Then finally—I gave you up as dead. And I—I—accepted Jim last night!"

"Accepted Jim last night?"

"He's been wonderfully good to me these last few years—very tender, very patient. If only I could have forgotten you, Tom, what a wonderful romance would have come to us both. And now you've come back—you!"

TOM was frankly puzzled. His face showed his interrogation.

"You asked me why I didn't write and tell you I was sorry, when I realized I could never marry Ned Farrell—"

"You mean to say you *didn't* marry Ned Farrell?"

"No, Tom. I went away with him, yes. We were to be married in New Haven. But I didn't go through with it. I couldn't. I left him and traveled for two weeks, alone. When I came back, you were gone. No one knew where. Some thought you dead. Others said you'd told somebody about going to the Orient. Anyway, I came back here and opened the house—our house—and started living alone. You see, I felt if you were alive, some day you must come back. And then, when Uncle Peter—I guess you'd never met Uncle Peter—he lived down in Springfield—when Uncle Peter gave up his church and went as a missionary to the Orient, I told him all about it, described you, asked him if he ever heard of you, or got trace of you, to tell you I was sorry, that I hadn't married Ned Farrell, that I wanted you back and was waiting. Then Jim came back after Uncle Peter died—Jim was with him when he died, I think — commissioned by Uncle Peter to deliver his effects to me because Uncle Peter had no other living relatives—well, Jim fell in love with me and wanted me. And so, for upwards of eleven years we've been corresponding and he comes up here from New York once a month—"

"Jim! Jim *who?*"

"Jim Henson! You knew him out in the Orient, didn't you? Jim says you did. But he claimed you were killed in a flood so he didn't feel any dishonor in asking me to marry him."

"And that big, red-headed six-footer was your uncle and knew about you wanting me to come back?"

"Yes, but Jim doesn't believe Uncle Peter realized you were the man at the time. And, of course, Jim didn't know until he'd returned to this country a year afterward with Uncle Peter's things, and I told him."

"And you're engaged now to this man Henson?" Tom demanded when he could speak at last.

"Yes, Tom. But now that you've come back—"

Tom suddenly bowed his head in his hands. The world was reeling.

"And you've been holding him off eleven years, thinking some day I might come back?"

"Yes," very faintly.

Tom was overwhelmed. For a long time he could not suffer himself to speak. Then he straightened.

"I know Jim Henson's story," he said in a hollow voice. "A friend of mine told it to me one Sunday morning a year ago while seated along the San Francisco docks. He faced the same kind of a dilemma once with another girl and didn't run away. He didn't go until he had conquered himself." Tom seemed debating. I know he was wondering which was the harder fight—to conquer oneself as Jim Henson had done, or pull himself up from the slough of despair as he had done himself long afterward.

The harder fight? The man who had won the harder fight would be the better man and deserve the girl—provided he wanted her. And Tom knew as he sat beside the girl again at last, that his invulnerability to sentiment had been all bosh and mummery. He could still love Gracia very easily; after all she had not married Ned Farrell for love of him—Tom Sanborn. Eleven years she had waited!

"The—better—man—wins!" he cried hoarsely at last.

"Tom, what do you mean?" the woman demanded.

"Just that! The better man wins!"

"I don't understand."

"You will, very shortly. For I think the better man is going to marry you, Gracia."

THAT was last night, I say.

I met Tom on the street a few moments before I started penning this narrative.

"The better man has won," he told me oracle-fashion.

"Which one?" I demanded.

"I'll give you two guesses," my friend answered.

I guessed—correctly—the first time, as you, the reader, must also.

Free Lances in Diplomacy

"A Daring Impersonation" describes one of the most important, venturesome and cleverly executed of all the Free Lances' exploits.

By Clarence Herbert New

ON a certain evening in October, 1921, there were gathered in the drawing-room of the famous little mansion maintained by the Earl of Dyvnaint on the Avenue de Neuilly, a French Deputy from one of the southern departments, an American Senator who was an influential member of the Ways and Means Committee, a former American diplomat now living in Paris as a retired man of wealth, two young relatives of the Dyvnaints, Australian and Canadian respectively—and the Earl himself, with Countess Nan, known to their intimates as the Free Lances in Diplomacy. The conversation had turned upon present conditions in the various world-states—the Deputy taking the ground that it would be impossible to bring about international harmony or successful reconstruction until the chaos into which the various governments had fallen in consequence of the war should be succeeded by cabinets and rulers who had more definite power to conduct negotiations.

"The immediate result of the war, messieurs and madame, has been the general abolition of monarchical government—which we, of the larger democracies, believe to be a long step in world-progress. But also it has had the effect of so decentralizing, disintegrating supreme authority that not only is it almost impossible to establish definite international understanding, but in each of the various nations, it is becoming increasingly difficult for the government to handle its own people without arbitrary action which infringes upon the liberty of the citizens. In all constitutional democracies, the majority is supposed to rule—but the great trouble today, in the four great nations, is that the actual rule, the passage of drastic, liberty-infringing laws, is in the hands of powerfully intrenched minorities who do not reflect the will of the whole people but satisfy their own selfish interests at the expense of the majority. And I regard this condition as largely a result of there being at present no political leaders in any country who wield real power—influence enough to win and hold the backing of any effective majority among the people."

"What would be your idea, Deschamps," inquired the Earl, "as to what constitutes

real power in a man, the sort of power which gets things done?"

"Why—Your Lordship has practically answered your own question, I think: *the power to get things done,* the quality which gets and holds the unquestioning approval of a large number among the people."

"Aye. And your contention is, if I follow you correctly, that there are practically no such men before the public, today—that is, with any widespread influence. Eh?"

"Well, that is approximately what I had in mind. France has had two or three different governments within the past two years. So has Italy. Your British premier is still at the head, but his cabinet has been reorganized in the same time, and some of the policies, which appeared to promise benefit to your country, he has been unable to carry out against radical opposition. Taking him as a fair example of the others, it is a question as to whether he has the power at this moment—or has had any time since the Armistice—to put through a Government measure which originates and is sponsored by him alone at the start. Even the Mikado, supposed to be the most absolute monarch in the world, is really controlled by the 'elder statesmen' of the old Samurai aristocracy, none of which has power enough to control the rest. The President of the United States is supposed to be one of the three most powerful rulers, just now, because he has a majority of his own party in Congress—yet until the last day or two it has been a question as to whether he could get a treaty of peace with Germany passed, much as he has desired it."

THE discussion had gradually caught the attention of others in the smoking-room until all had stopped talking to listen. And the more they considered the position taken by M. Deschamps, the more several of them were inclined to agree with him. But His Lordship was lighting a fresh cigar with the deliberation which those who best knew him took as an indication that he had something to say upon the subject—which was, as usual, the result of careful consideration and would throw an interesting sidelight upon the question under discussion.

"I fancy I'm rather inclined to differ with you, *mon ami*—though I grant the force of what you've been saying about the men prominently before the public just now. Take Schminnez, for example, in Germany. There is a man, slovenly in his personal appearance, rough and unpleasant in manner, who, as far as real power goes, is a colossus! He practically controls Germany today. The other men I have in mind as holding real power at present are much less in the public eye—men of so little prominence, politically, that you'll be rather amazed when you realize the amount of influence they have. Suppose we make a little test—an interesting one, I fancy. Eh?"

"Your Lordship has aroused our interest and curiosity very thoroughly! Please go on—explain your test."

"Very good. Doubtless most of you recall the fact that a conference was held in Paris some months ago in reference to the establishing of business credits throughout the various European states. Remember it?"

"Of course! It cleared a way for the reëstablishment of business relations upon the present basis. It might have accomplished considerably more had it not been for the impractical, radical demands of one or two delegates and the necessity for effecting a compromise with their ideas."

"Precisely! That's the point in regard to this conference which I wish you to keep in mind. Let us go on to another one—the Labor Conference at Birmingham two months ago, to which delegates came from Germany, Italy, France, Belgium, Hungary and Spain. Remember the general results obtained at that conference?"

"Why, in the main the delegates were pretty well agreed upon demanding nationalization of all public utilities and raw materials—but there was enough opposition to obtain a compromise for the present, was there not?"

"Aye—but it was a close vote. Remember that also. Then there was a conference of premiers and statesmen from six or eight of the larger nations—another of manufacturers and bankers—another of socialists—a meeting of the League of Nations in Geneva—and now the approaching conference upon disarmament in Washington, delegates to which already have been named by most of the participating governments. I fancy that, between you, it will not be difficult to write down upon a slip of paper the names of the delegates to each one of those conferences—or at least those of the more prominent men—eh? Those whom some of you forget will be recalled by others. Here are sheets of pa-

per and pencils. Get busy—and see how complete you can make the lists."

ASIDE from Countess Nan and Mr. Raymond Carter, formerly chargé d'affaires at the American Embassy, it is probable that none of the others comprehended what the Earl was driving at or what he expected to show by the lists when they were written out. But as all of them were thorough readers of the daily newspapers and keenly interested in world-politics besides, they managed to get the lists fairly complete. Without even glancing at them, His Lordship said:

"Now put a little check-mark against the name of each man for every time it appears in the other lists—and see what you get?"

This took but a few moments—after which His Lordship proceeded:

"Of course, such names as Lloyd-George, Briand, Balfour, Vanderlip and Hoover appear in more than one list. But—and here's where you'll get a bit of surprise, I fancy—do you find any name with six of the check-marks against it, indicating that the man was actually a delegate to all of those conferences?"

"Why—eh? By Jove! There is one name with six marks against it! Chap whom I'd not have said was really prominent, as the others are! One sees his name in the news-sheets, to be sure, but not obtrusively as a rule, and he's never made anything of a stir in Parliament—never addressed the House that I can recall! Rudolph Powless, M. P."

"Exactly! And he serves as the case in point. You'll find on those lists three other men whose names appear upon at least four or five of those conferences, yet who are nowhere near as prominently before the public as the men whose names I mentioned. Now consider—what entirely different fields of human activity those conferences have reference to! And try to realize the fact that in each one of those fields, this Rudolph Powless has built up a reputation for knowledge and judgment upon each subject which has impressed men imbued with those beliefs or ideas as being more trustworthy than their individual own—enough so to make him their duly authorized representative at those conferences. It is that sort of thing which I define as power—influence. When you consider that widely varying interests which Powless represents, it is logically clear that he wields, today, more actual power than any of our foremost statesmen or financiers. Do you begin to grasp the force of his position?"

"Why, it appears that a certain body of business men sent him as their delegate to that conference on business-relations in Paris, even though other delegates were sent from London, Liverpool and Glasgow."

"Precisely! A body of business men with radical ideas that forced a harmful compromise over the better judgment of others at that conference! For it was Powless who kept raising the objections."

"Then—he seems to have had a large enough following among the labor element to be sent to Birmingham for them. And his name appears in the conference of premiers and statesmen—well, a member of Parliament might be considered a statesman, I suppose, even if not a prominent one. His representing the socialists, one might infer from his labor backing—but manufacturers and bankers? Where does he come in with that class?"

"He's a multimillionaire ironmonger—inherited millions from his father in Newcastle, and has more than doubled them. The chap was sent as a lad to get a job in the great Vulcan Works at Stettin, married a Berlin woman while there, lived in Stettin, Berlin, Hamburg, for several years; his three children were born and raised in Germany, went to German schools and are crammed full of German ideas to this day, as he himself is. Then—Powless returned to England and resumed business with his father, where his knowledge of German smelting was put to very good use. He has known Schminnez for upward of twenty years—is associated with him in many enterprises.

"So that in addition to the influence we have already demonstrated in his case, we may add—for practical and political calculation, that of Schminnez and his following. We may even go farther—because so many of these influences dovetail with each other. Of the three or four men whose names appear as delegates to a majority of those conferences, at least half are using their influence in the same direction as Powless and Schminnez. Doubtless, if we could know with any certainty just how widely their collective influence extends, we should find it the greatest power in world-politics and commercial affairs at present—making the efforts of our leading statesmen negligible in a great number of cases where constructive legislation is so badly needed."

"YOU believe, then, Trevor," observed Deschamps, "that the power and influence of these men in the background may be something of a world-menace instead of a stabilizing force?"

"Faith, there's little doubt of it! They aim both at political and commercial control through the more ignorant masses. Their ideas, on the one hand, are frankly communistic—in spite of the ruinous, chaotic demonstration in Russia—and in the other direction, consolidated handling of all industry by syndicates with government backing—playing both ends against the middle. Either way, they stifle normal competition in business, fasten a despotic government upon the necks of the people which, if carried far enough, they cannot change or throw off in a hundred years. In short, gentlemen, as I see it, this is the undercurrent which our business and political leaders are finding it so desperately hard to fight against in restoring anything like normal conditions."

"H-m-m—has anything in the way of a remedy suggested itself to you?"

"Well, if one might take out the brain of Rudolph Powless, M. P., put it somewhere in cold-storage, and substitute for it an equally clever one with a saner, more practical view of world-problems, it might be used to throw confusion into the plans they are now so persistently organizing. Short of that, I can see no effective way of combating their influence just now. It is too powerful—too deeply intrenched."

"But there must be some way of curbing or defeating this influence! Widespread publicity in the press, showing up just what they're trying to do—"

"Hmph! They'd pay you a cold million to do just that—particularly, in the radical papers! The bulk of their backing, you know, is made up of ignorant masses who have never been taught to think, who have no capacity for thinking, who simply can't be made to see that bleeding their so-called capitalistic employers out of business automatically puts an end to their own employment, leaves no source from which to draw wages but the Government, which is simply their fellow-men, —their friends and neighbors, themselves, —all of whom must be taxed unbearably to supply those same wages. What the world is struggling to accomplish, now, is a campaign of education in the costs of producing everything—a demonstration that there can be no production without full-time intensive work, and that there is a limit in the cost of such work beyond which its product cannot be sold. What these men under discussion are trying to accomplish is a consolidation of all business, labor and government—regardless of the daily example Lenine is giving them in Russia along similar lines."

THERE was considerable more threshing out of the subject before their two guests went home and the others retired—without evolving any practical way of handling a situation which the Earl seemed to have proved unquestionably real. But the discussion at least had aroused their apprehension to a point where it was certain to spread and bring the real struggle more or less into the light. When they were in their own suite, however, Countess Nan came into her husband's room with an anxious expression upon her handsome face—and perched herself upon the arm of his chair.

"George, none of the others, except possibly Carlton Tremaine, our young cousin, appeared to catch the possibility you were suggesting, at all—and I fancy he was far from grasping it fully. But I could read the thought in your mind, dear—and—it worries me! Surely we have done enough in secret diplomacy, you and I, have earned the right to drop the game and let others take the risks. I'm tired of it all! I want to rest—go home to Trevor Hall in good old Devon, and forget world-politics altogether. If everything is drifting into chaos —well, let it drift. If there is to be a general destruction of property-rights by the masses, and it becomes impossible to live unmolested at the Hall, let us go aboard the *Rance Sylvia* and sail for one of the lovely islands we know of in the South Seas or the Eastern Archipelago. There are places where we'll not be interfered with during the remainder of our lives. Can't we drop the whole thing, now—and keep out of it?"

"Aye—if we're quitters, Nan. Are you a quitter? I'll confess that I feel much as you do—that I'm deadly tired of it all. But suppose that we are among the few clear-sighted ones who see a way in which the world may be helped back to normalcy —eh? For example, this man Powless, M. P.; let me show you something!"

The Earl got out of his chair and took from the drawer of a desk in the corner two cabinet photographs made in one of

the London studios which specialize in celebrities. "Here are recent photos of Powless, taken with and without a hat. That mustache, which he has worn for several years, would mislead almost anyone looking for a close resemblance—but imagine it off for the moment? Observe the shape of his face, the appearance of eyes, nose, chin, mouth and hair—the general build of the man? While apprenticed at Stettin in the Vulcan Works he would, of course, have joined a *Turnverein* and done gymnastic work—which accounts for his athletic figure. While you're examining these, noting how amazingly close the resemblance really is, I'll just try a bit of an experiment."

GOING into his dressing-room, he unlocked one drawer of a cabinet and began looking over a systematically arranged collection of false mustaches in every possible shape and color—finally selecting one which seemed about right to him, and carefully gumming it to his upper lip. These false beards, wigs and mustaches were specially made for him by the chief hairdresser in one of the most famous London theaters, at prices ranging from ten to fifty guineas—supposedly for use in amateur theatricals. Inasmuch as they were so perfectly mounted upon invisible silk-gauze, hair by hair, that those along the outer edges seemed to be growing directly out of the skin, they defied even fairly close inspection. When the mustache was finally adjusted to his liking, Trevor went back to Countess Nan in the living-room of their private suite. At the first glance, a startled expression came over her face for an instant.

"My word! I've been discovering from these photos how amazingly close the resemblance really is, but I'd no idea it was practically duplication! It was these pictures which put the idea in your head, was it?"

"Aye—but after the narrow escape we had from that impersonation of the two premiers. The clever scoundrels who almost got away with that had nowhere near any such advantage as this to build upon. It required in their case practical remodeling of their faces, figures and unconscious motions. I had noticed Powless, several times—after his repeated selection as a conference delegate set me to considering him seriously—and was struck with the great similarity in our appearance. This prompted me to hunt through the photograph studios of London and Paris until I picked up several portraits of the man. I've a dozen or more, altogether. Well? You admit that it's a good deal of a temptation, do you not? Eh?"

"Hmph! I almost believe you could get away with it, George! Of course, the personal risk is a serious one. The public would universally condemn such an attempt without listening to any justification—say it served you right if you were killed. But if you *should* carry it off successfully, there's no question as to the very great influence you could exert right in the camp of men who are obstructing for their own selfish ends the rehabilitation of the world! Oh, if I looked as much like the man as you do, I fancy that nothing would stop me from trying the experiment. But it requires a deal of preliminary study, I should think—and there is one feature you'll have to guard against very carefully. I've seen this Powless several times in London houses at public gatherings. For all the close resemblances in features and build, the man is not a gentleman. He lacks breeding in a hundred little ways that may not show in these photographs but are quite evident when he speaks or sits at the same dinner-table with one. It is not so much accidental bad manners as willful, deliberate ignoring of little things a gentleman does or does not do—the sort of thing which curries favor with a mob and is overlooked by decent people as one overlooks things in a person who is capable of being nasty when antagonized. How would you go about familiarizing yourself with the thousand little details concerning such a person which you must know before taking any definite action?"

"Why—the idea I had vaguely in mind was taking service of one sort or another under him—in the same house. In fact, that little detail is somewhat blocked out. Fancy I'd not require above a month's time to study the fellow sufficiently—eh?"

AS the Countess had herself spent weeks at a time during her girlhood disguised as a Hindu boy in the bazaars of Delhi, Lahore, Benares and other Indian cities,—when her father was one of the most efficient officers of the Indian Secret Service—the subject was of absorbing interest to both of them, and the discussion continued half the night. Forty-eight hours afterward Earl Trevor left Paris, letting it be

understood by his household guests and other friends in Paris that he had been called away to certain Mediterranean ports by some of his commercial interests and might even go as far as India or the Straits before returning. Upon the following night, however, a well-dressed bearded man who suggested the labor-leader in his appearance called at the London residence of Mr. Rudolph Powless, M. P., and presented a letter of introduction from the secretary of a commercial association in Manchester.

Powless had no reason to doubt the genuineness of the letter or suspect that his visitor was other than what he claimed to be—a labor-leader who was in touch with some of the employers' committees and negotiating with them on behalf of certain unions. As both men were thoroughly conversant with labor and business conditions throughout Europe, it took but a few moments to establish thorough understanding as to where each of them stood upon many questions—or where they might be willing to stand if it were made sufficiently for their interest. There was a suggestion of cynical frankness in the conversation, though each knew that the other was holding several things in reserve. But Powless allowed the supposed John Fogarty to infer a good deal more of his real aims and scheming than he would have, for instance, with a representative banker or business man. After they had threshed over many subjects of mutual interest, Fogarty said, as if he had just thought of it:

"Oh—I'm reminded, Mr. Powless, of something I thought to ask ye about. 'Tis a chap of thirty-eight or thereabouts who is related to me—did well, some years ago, in the Board Schools an' the City College, here. He has a good bit of speed as a typist, can write his pothooks in the book as fast as a man will talk, keeps a close mouth on what he hears or knows, an' is by way of bein' a good mechanic as well. Drives any sort of motor—repairs it at a pinch. It's my wish to get him some sort of a berth where he can see the inside workin' of the labor an' employment question—with a man that's active in many lines. For—d'ye see—there's the makin' in him of somethin' valuable in our line, somethin' better than what I am, me lackin' the education he has. Do ye know of any openin' to his advantage?"

"H-m-m—City College, you said—not? That would give him one or two languages, I suppose—or a smattering of them, eh?"

"He has German an' French, I know—an' mebbe a bit of Italian as well—can talk right along with them people same as he does in English, for I've heard him, many's the time."

"From your description, he ought to make a dev'lish good assistant to some man in public life! In fact, such a person might be disposed to take him on as a secretary in reserve, even if he already had a fairly good one. Er—is he—could he drop in and see me for ten minutes or so, tomorrow morning?"

"I could have him here by ten if ye care to be troublin' yourself, lookin' him over. Fetch him down from Manchester this night. Would I best come with him, d'ye think? Or be givin' him a letter an' leave him stand on his own feet before ye?"

EVERY word of these suggestions, the whole proposition in regard to this supposed relative, had been studied out before the man Fogarty presented himself to Powless, with thorough consideration of the member of Parliament's character. And the result was a tribute to Earl Trevor's knowledge of human nature, for Powless was not only interested in his description of this cousin's qualifications, seeing where such an employee might be useful to him, but nodded approvingly at the final suggestion of having him call with a letter of introduction in order that there might be none to give a hint or a nudge while he was being questioned—which, of course, relieved the supposed Fogarty of any necessity for bringing a dummy whom he must afterward impersonate.

After leaving Powless' house, he took a cab at the next corner and was driven through the West End until certain that no other cab or motorcar was following him. Then he made his way on foot to a house in Park Street owned by an Afghan prince, Sir Abdool Mohammed Khan, and went through an underground passage to a larger mansion in Park Lane which has become famous as the Earl and Countess of Dyvnaint's home. Whispering an Urdu word in the ear of the *khansamah* who stopped the supposed stranger in the lower hall, he went up to the Earl's apartments on the second floor and in a few moments, so altered his appearance as to be unrecognizable as the same man.

Fogarty had now the problem of working out a personality which should attract

Powless at first sight. It was no part of his plan to have the M. P. find a berth for him with some friend or acquaintance—though this had been all that Fogarty apparently had in mind, knowing that he would be risking too much if he asked for a berth with Powless himself. After thinking over one type of man after another, however, he finally decided upon one which gave a first impression of being methodically dull—capable, but not brilliant, yet showing capacity for keen observation and keeping his mouth shut.

Knowing much more of Powless' various activities than the Member would have believed possible, Fogarty's calculations proved amazingly shrewd, for when the supposed Cunningham presented himself with the letter next morning, he produced so favorable an impression in the first ten minutes that Powless considered him a valuable find—introducing him to Wayne, his private secretary, as an assistant who might sometimes be also used as a chauffeur when it was desirable to keep the movements of his car from being known. To clinch the impression of his being exactly what he claimed, Cunningham said that he could scarcely throw up his present job without some notice—but that, returning to Manchester by the next train, he thought he could arrange to report for the new position by the following Sunday—which he did.

ONCE installed in the M. P.'s residence, "Cunningham" found that his opportunities for a close study of the man were excellent—even better than he hoped. In the first place, he was frequently present when Powless was dictating to Wayne—taking many of the foreign letters himself—and this gave him the chance to observe his employer's manner with his chief secretary—the little unconscious movements of his head, limbs and body—and also a great deal of inside information as to the various activities in which the M. P. was engaged. Beyond this, when notes making secret appointments with men and women were given to Wayne alone, Cunningham frequently pieced together the whole story by acting as confidential chauffeur and noticing the places to which his employer was taken.

One possible complication was eliminated by the fact that Powless had been a widower for two years, but Cunningham soon decided that he would presently become engaged to a Miss Forbes-Yelverton, a handsome woman of thirty or more whose family included several members of the aristocracy. Upon several occasions he had the chance to overhear bits of talk between them while acting as chauffeur—also to observe, through the driver's little mirror, something of his manner with her. This phase of the Powless' life called for the most careful study of all, inasmuch as the eyes of a woman who contemplates marrying a certain man are much keener than those of his less deeply interested acquaintances.

In his capacity as junior secretary—though Wayne was much the junior in years—Cunningham had ample opportunity for observing Powless' manner with his house-servants, his valet and many associates who came to the house at irregular hours upon business or political affairs. Inside of a month he knew every phase of the M. P.'s unconscious manner and movements—the appearance of every suit he possessed, even to spots and wrinkles. He had twice accompanied Powless to Hamburg and other Continental cities because of his fluency in German and Italian—Wayne managed French very well but couldn't take accurate shorthand notes in the other languages. At the end of the fifth week, Trevor decided that his knowledge of the man was sufficient to risk the audacious experiment—but thought it advisable to stir up a bit of misunderstanding between the widower and his probable fiancée in order to blind the lady somewhat by a feeling of pique and wounded affection.

There was a ball in Park Lane, one evening, at which Powless had booked a dance or two with Miss Forbes-Yelverton—whose experience with him had shown that he was a rather awkward dancer with very little sense of rhythm. He had told her that he might be somewhat late—but Trevor knew that because of an earlier political conference it would be midnight before he appeared, and that his fiancée, being a dinner-guest, would be in the house during the whole evening. So, when the rooms were fairly crowded, he appeared in his first impersonation of Powless, which was so amazingly perfect that everyone who saw the man would have sworn to his identity. Carefully avoiding Miss Forbes-Yelverton in the crowd, he got his name down for a couple of dances with other ladies equally handsome—and her first glimpse

of him was on the dancing-floor, oblivious to everything but his fair partner, dancing with a grace and smoothness which drew comment from the onlookers. Once she fairly caught his eye as she thought, but the monocle he affected in society glanced through and beyond her as if she had no substance. She was amazed—indignant—puzzled. When the real Powless finally came to her at midnight, she suggested an explanation and was dumfounded when he protested that he had not been in the house until ten minutes before. He knew he could prove his alibi conclusively—but when others complimented him upon his dancing, he thought they must be crazy.

AMONG other features of the man's personality which Trevor had banked upon was that of excessive irritability when under more or less strain or suffering from indigestion. There had been fits of this during the junior secretary's first week in the house, though scarcely more than a mild display of it. Wayne, being questioned, admitted that their employer was pretty bad when a number of things went wrong at once. So one of Trevor's problems was to see about how far the M. P. would go in this direction. First he sent a box of cigars to Powless with the card of a fellow M. P.—who was only too glad to oblige the Earl of Dynnaint, confidentially. These cigars were apparently mild—of a quality far superior to anything Powless had ever smoked—but so full of the nicotine principle that they gave anyone save a hardened smoker a twenty-four-hour attack of nerves after consuming about three of them. And on the morning when they got in their fine work, "Cunningham" purposely made a rather serious break, after a fortnight of more than satisfactory service—with the result that for an hour or so his employer went clear up in the air. He said things to Wayne that even the faithful secretary found pretty hard to swallow. He dismissed "Cunningham" twice—but finally accepted his profuse apologies for the blunder. The fit of temper he had at breakfast cost him his butler and made his valet so thoroughly sore that he determined to quit if the thing happened again. All of which gradually put the household in exactly the atmosphere most likely to favor Trevor's plans—and spread, through underground gossip, until several of the M. P.'s acquaintances began to wonder if he were not breaking down, trying to do too much.

Conditions being finally as favorable as he could expect, "Cunningham" selected an evening when the Member of Parliament was scheduled to meet a committee from some of the longshoremen's and railway-goods-handlers' unions in a fourth-rate hotel down near the Victoria and Albert Docks, and had requested him to drive the car. Just before dinner, while taking some German letters, he asked Powless in Wayne's hearing if he might take a week off, beginning with the following morning, to visit a very sick relative in Scotland. Powless had found the man so valuable that he saw considerable inconvenience in his being away, but could scarcely refuse in the circumstances—so that Wayne and the rest of the household didn't expect to see the junior secretary next day.

It didn't seem likely that Powless would bring anybody from the meeting back to the West End with him in his car, but to forestall such a possibility, "Cunningham" told him as they were starting for the Dock section that a lady had telephoned to ask if he would call and see her a few moments when he returned—saying she would not retire before midnight. No name was given, but the M. P. naturally inferred that but one woman could have sent such a message. As their relations were still a bit strained over the occurrence at the ball, he was delighted to receive it. Hence, when he left the meeting, he got into his car alone.

WITH many things on his mind, Powless didn't notice the streets or the district through which he was being driven home until the car was stopped in a lonely bit of open ground near a gas-works on the River Lea, and two masked men opened the doors of his limousine with pistols in their hands. One of them got in to sit by him while another sprang up beside "Cunningham" in front and let down the glass window to say: "I've got my gun against the chauffeur's ribs—he'll drive just where I want him to!"—pure camouflage to clear the chauffeur in his employer's mind.

Running back East through Canning Town, down the road between the two great docks, the car eventually came to the Thames Pier at North Woolwich near the Royal Victoria Gardens. Here Powless was taken out and put aboard a big deep-sea yacht which he thought must be a well-known craft by daylight, from its size—and taken below to a suite amidships fitted

up with every luxury that a person could require. But coming on deck next morning, with no land in sight, he failed to see the yacht's name upon any buoy, cap, boat or jersey—on the stern or the bows. The breakfast silver and crockery were handsomely decorated in a special design, but one which gave no clue as to ownership. And when he began questioning the mess-steward, the man smilingly informed him that the yacht had been chartered with her crew for three months, by an American—the owner, of course, knowing nothing of what was being done with her. The craft was usually laid up for overhaul about that time of year, and he had been glad to charter her instead—with the understanding that the charterers would have her docked and painted before returning her to him.

Powless knew he was being taken down past Suez by the houseflags on the steamers they sighted, and because he was confined to his room while the yacht quite evidently passed through one of the great canals; but after that he saw no land or anything but cargo-boats, and hadn't the faintest idea where they were. Knowing nothing about navigation or seamanship, he failed to realize that the craft was now doing, in fine weather, upwards of thirty knots instead of the sixteen or eighteen he supposed—not having been permitted to enter the wheel-house or engine-room; so, when he thought they must be somewhere in the Red Sea, the boat was actually well down into the Indian Ocean. Eventually he was put ashore with two companions upon a picturesque but uninhabited island, where a galvanized-iron bungalow was run up for them in a few days, and stocked with provisions. Then—the yacht left them there. The other men proved fairly good company and found enough to keep all three occupied—but they seemed to know no more than he when they were likely to be taken off the island. No steamers were sighted. No casual visitors appeared.

MEANWHILE, "Cunningham" had returned to the West End, let the car stand in Park Lane for an hour while he was changing his appearance in the Jacobean mansion—had then gone on to Powless' residence, where he put the car in the garage without being seen by anyone and, letting himself in with a latchkey by a side door, went quietly upstairs to the M. P.'s private suite. As was his custom when he expected to be out late, Powless had told his valet not to wait up for him, so that Trevor had ample opportunity not only to undress alone at his leisure, but to familiarize himself with everything about the sleeping apartment, bath and dressing-room. When the valet came in to draw the bath in the morning, his supposed employer was apparently asleep with his face to the wall. With a vivid recollection of recent irritability, the valet thought best to let him sleep, knowing that he had been out until long after midnight—which was exactly what Trevor had played for. He had had no means of finding out whether Powless had any birthmarks or other peculiarities upon limbs or body which the valet would probably have seen—and the man's failure to waken him at the usual time gave a pretext for cursing him beyond endurance.

Forty-five minutes after the man had come in to draw the bath, his supposed employer—in pajamas and dressing gown—flung open the sleeping-room door and shouted for him. He had carefully examined his face, hair and general appearance in a cheval-glass, so that the impersonation was perfect. When the valet came running, his employer bawled out:

"Curse you! I've overslept myself nearly an hour! Means I'll be rushed all day to catch up! Why the devil didn't you wake me at the regular time? Never mind the excuses—you didn't do it, *did* you! When it comes to responsibility, you aren't worth a damn! I can't be annoyed with that sort of thing! Go to Wayne and get whatever I owe you—then get out of the house! I don't want to see you again!"

The man was quite satisfied to go without another word—passing on the information to butler and secretary that the master was in a 'orrid temper an' they'd best watch out or they'd catch it 'ot. When the supposed Powless came into the breakfast room, he had nothing to complain of in the service—which was silent, quick and perfect. He nodded to Wayne, snapped open the morning paper and skimmed through it while waiting for his tea and toast—muttering, occasionally, under his mustache about "unnecessary annoyances—enough to drive a man crazy!"

IT just happened that Wayne was half sick that morning and had forgotten to bring with him to the breakfast-table a certain document which "Cunningham" had heard the M. P. asking for during the previous afternoon and had taken pains to

mislay when alone in the library. When Powless recalled this, presently,—and Wayne ran into the library to make an unsuccessful search for it,—the M. P. sat back in his chair with an expression of helpless exasperation. He didn't blow up or curse his secretary as he had the valet, because he thought Wayne probably too loyal and valuable a man to accept a discharge given in temper. Instead he apparently controlled himself with an effort and said—more kindly than he had ever spoken before:

"Wayne, I've thought for a month past that I was overworking you like the devil! I'm pretty near the breaking-point myself—going to get all the rest I can for a month or so, cut out most of the appointments—possibly run down to some quiet little place in Cornwall for a bit. I'm going to raise your screw—give you two days in which to find a substitute whom you think can be trusted to do the work passably until you return—and then give you a couple of months' vacation. Mind, I've got to have a man I can trust as I do you, because he'll have to be given full memoranda of everything I have on hand during that time, the private confidential matters as well as the business and political. I've simply got to pull up a bit or I'll not last! Two or three times lately, I've found myself forgetting what I'd on hand for the day. Getting so I'm afraid to trust my memory. In fact, until you find a substitute and get away, I fancy you'd best give me a detailed list each morning. What?"

Wayne had more than once found it so difficult to get along with his employer that he had been upon the point of leaving, but had finally gotten used to him and was now genuinely concerned about the M. P.'s condition. He was about to refuse the offered vacation when, upon reflection, he saw that Powless wouldn't be able to do his full amount of work with any substitute he might obtain and would be himself more inclined to relax and take the rest he spoke about. During the day he was unable to find anybody whom he thought sufficiently trustworthy for the berth, but at dinner, Powless told him of a young man who had been recommended by the manager of a great shipping combine. This possible substitute would call within the hour, and Wayne was requested to question him closely as to qualifications.

The applicant, a young fellow of twenty-eight or thirty with a very attractive manner, arriving in due time, seemed rather a lucky find to Wayne, who took him into the library and left him to be questioned by their employer. When sure that they were alone in the room, the supposed Powless indicated a chair close to his. Then, leaning forward, he whispered three passwords known only to attachés of the Foreign Office and King's Messengers—adding:

"You're Tommy Fairholme—remember perfectly when you were in knickerbockers. You prob'ly don't recognize me—not necessary that you should. All this is on His Majesty's Service—the most delicate and confidential sort. You'll not even discuss it at the F. O. You're to act as my secretary in all respects as Wayne instructs you—carry out my orders implicitly—give no possible clue as to who or what we really are, particularly to Wayne or the servants, who know nothing about it. I shall also require one of the subordinate F. O. men as valet—but he must be one who has been tested over a period of several years. He should be here tonight if possible—I sacked the other poor devil this morning, but will see that he gets a better berth within a day or two."

BEFORE leaving the house, Powless stepped into the little room his secretary used as a private office and suggested to Wayne—as if something he'd been thinking over carefully—that he have a beautiful assortment of roses put in a box and take them to Miss Forbes-Yelverton with his compliments, explaining to her that his employer had been scarcely himself, lately, from the strain of overwork, but hoped to call and see her very soon. The pseudo-Powless knew enough of feminine psychology to be sure that Wayne would be questioned very closely and that his alibi on the night of the ball was very likely to be corroborated during the conversation. It would have been safer, of course, to let the affair cause a final break with the lady. On the other hand, if he succeeded in really deceiving her, it made his position almost impregnable as the well-known Member of Parliament. With Foreign Office men for his secretary and valet, his attention would be instantly called to any little detail of disguise which might have slipped out of place—instead of being suspected and closely watched as would have been the case with Wayne and the other man.

As for Wayne, he would have considered

anyone crazy who suggested that he might be working under an impostor. The missing document, which he afterward discovered among other papers, where "Cunningham" put it, had confused him a good deal. It was the sort of a break which he very rarely made. And it was exactly the kind of annoyance to keep his mind off from Powless or anything odd in his appearance for several days at least. When he started upon his vacation, he not only would have sworn to his employer's identity but actually felt a more personal liking than ever before—due to the innate kindness in the substitute's manner. He took most scrupulous pains to give Tommy Fairholme every possible detail of the M. P.'s various appointments and affairs for months ahead. After his departure, the impersonation was strengthened to a point where the real Powless would have been arrested as an impostor had he unexpectedly turned up—but the man who was leading his life had had far too much and too varied experience to believe that he was ever entirely secure against unforseen mischance.

Upon the following afternoon Powless the Second called upon Miss Forbes-Yelverton at tea-time, banking upon the probability that there would be other people with her. Nor was he disappointed in this. Four of the men and at least half a dozen of the women, he knew very well when in his own proper person without disguise so that it was a simple matter to speak with them of the many previous incidents and affairs.

The impersonation proved a success and the visit, of course, was about all that Miss Forbes-Yelverton required to explain his actions upon the night of the ball and reinstate him in her good graces. In a pretty thorough grilling of Wayne, when he came with the roses, she had gotten enough to make it seem both natural and excusable that Powless should do odd things occasionally—and arouse in her the protective instinct which, naturally, blinded her to what keen observation might otherwise have detected. When the M. P. left the house, he felt that his impersonation had been subjected to about the most severe test it was likely to get—with at least thirty or forty different people.

APPEARING in the House, next afternoon,—as "Cunningham," he had been in the visitors' gallery and spotted Powless' seat in the second tier, also obtaining one of the sixpenny diagrams which give the name and place of each member,—he suggested to the party whip that he be called up for a brief speech upon financial conditions. When the Speaker recognized him, he talked for half an hour in so masterly a way that he was afterward warmly congratulated both by Radicals and Liberal-Unionists for a presentation of facts which seemed to permit of compromise legislation more or less acceptable to all parties, and obviously a step in the right direction.

As the pseudo-Powless expected, this speech started something. It was his maiden effort upon the floor of the House—and to three or four of the political leaders who had closely followed his various activities with a good deal of uneasiness, it was immensely reassuring, if it could be taken at face value. The man had been quite openly radical at every conference to which he had been sent, representing, apparently, radical interests both in labor, financial and commercial affairs. Yet in this speech he not only permitted an inference that his real object in politics was to harmonize many of the conflicting interests in a sane and practical way, but impressed the whole of his radical following that he had the keenest insight of any man among them and would be able to secure from capitalists more in the way of advantageous compromise than those of their leaders who were more stubbornly unyielding. Of course the secret explanation—which nobody dreamed of—was that the thinking apparatus of Powless had been supplanted for the time being by a far keener, more brilliant intellect, even though it previously had had little or no experience in actual legislation.

If a copy of the *Times* had reached the abducted Member on that lonely island miles away from any lane of ocean traffic—and he grasped the full enormity of what had happened to him—he might have taken a header into the everlasting surf, never to reappear. But the only other person who appeared to see any logical discrepancy between the man's present and former activities was the eminent surgeon and mind-specialist, Sir Templeton Bland—who occasionally studied over a mass of news-clippings relating to him, in one of his scrapbooks, and muttered to himself:

"If there is ever a direct relation established between the brain-cells and a man's conscious activities, I'd give a thousand pounds to dissect and analyze the brain of Rudolph Powless, M. P."

Double Double Cross

A spirited story of baseball in the bushes with a little big-league stuff thrown in.

By Jonathan Brooks

"COME on, boys, get the big one!" he'd yell, or, "Let's get two!" That's the way Cross learned his nickname. When he first joined the club, they called him Red, because of his hair and because that fit well with Cross. He paid no attention to them, not being touchy about his mop, and so they switched names on him and called him Monte. Some of the boys had seen old Monte himself when he was in his prime, and they thought this boy looked like him. The kid was tall and thin, with long hands and arms. He covered a lot of ground because of his long arms and legs, and a lot more because he could move around as fast as anybody.

But after he'd been out there on third base for about two weeks, the boys dropped all the other nicknames they'd plastered on him, and began calling him "Double." That's the name he still goes by.

"Let's get two," he'd yell every time a ball was hit to the infield with a man or two on base. "Try for both of 'em," was his motto. He just naturally hated to throw a ball to the first baseman when there was a runner heading for second. If he had the ghost of a chance to nail the big one at second, he'd shoot the ball so fast the man playing the bag wished he'd borrowed the catcher's mitt. Before he had been with the club a month, he had started more double plays than all the other third-sackers in the league put together. He had a good whip, and he always got the ball away fast, no matter whether it came on the grass or on the hop, over the bag or out at his left in front of the shortstop.

"Say, Boss," said Shorty Dirks, the second baseman, one day, "let's put the ketcher down here on the bag after this, whenever there's a man on first."

"What's the big idea, Shorty?"

"Well, I'm a good game guy, but some things are too much. I've been wearin' a pad in my glove, and even so, this Double

Cross has got my left hand lookin' like a piece of raw meat. It's all I can do to hold a bat."

"Give him as good as he sends," said the Boss.

"Yeah, and throw the ball over the grandstand?"

"Well, I'm not goin' to ask him to pull his throws or cut out tryin' for double plays."

THAT was the end of that. Double Cross went ahead shootin' for the big one, and makin' the whole infield fight for a double play every time there was a chance. No safety stuff for Double Cross. He was not a great player when he came to the club, although his fielding and throwing were remarkable, and he had as much to do with making the club a pennant-contender as any other one factor. A good fielding third baseman, with a whip, can hide a lot of holes in a club that looks like a sieve. Cross covered so much ground that he made the shortstop look like a fair player, in spite of this shortstop's being a football star who kicked everything that came his way. Cross cut off all kinds of grounders and hoppers headed for short. He went up to the plate for butts and pop-ups that would have made the pitchers and catchers look bad. Besides all that, he was so tall he pulled down any number of liners that the left fielder could easily have turned into three-base errors.

All these things Double Cross did, but he was not a great player by any means. He had two weaknesses. He could not hit, which everybody found out the first time he went to bat. His average would not be over .204 if all his foul tips, fielder's choices and strike-outs were counted as hits. He couldn't hit as hard as Wilhelm tried to prevent war. We all knew it, from the time he picked up a stick. The other weakness was slower coming out. He covered it up a long time by his habit of shooting for double plays and making everybody else on the infield try the same stuff. But in baseball a weakness is just like a bad penny and the toes of mortals. It is sure to turn up, sooner or later.

Dirks discovered this other weakness of Double Cross, but he didn't say anything about it until he had noticed it two or three times. Then he hopped on Cross and rode him like the hay fever in August.

"I got the answer to this double-play stuff," he said to Cross one day on the bench between innings, where the boss could hear him. "I'm wise, now. You'd rather tear my hand off shootin' the ball down to me to get the big one, than have him get around to third, wouldn't yuh, hay?"

Cross didn't say a word.

"Just naturally don't like to see a runner and his spikes comin' into the bag, do yuh?" Dirks sneered.

"Can that stuff," the Boss spoke up. "It's good baseball to try for the man on the bases, Shorty, and you know it. If you don't want to play the bag, say so. That's your job, and unless you can pitch or go behind the bat, you're welcome to see if anybody else wants a second-sacker."

SHORTY shut up then, but he watched his chance and rode Cross whenever he could. Double didn't pay a great deal of attention to him. The more completely he ignored Shorty, the worse Dirks treated him. Whenever Cross happened to throw a little low, which wasn't often, Shorty would cuff the ball down instead of catching it, kick it around on the ground long enough for the runner to start for third, and then he'd pick it up and throw low to Cross. His idea was to make Double look bad, every way he could. He was smart enough not to get caught, and he got away with it. Every time Cross failed to make a clean pick-up and nail the man on a throw from Dirks, Shorty would yell his head off, partly for the sake of making life miserable for Double, and partly to shift the error to Double's fielding average.

All the sympathy there was in the club belonged to Double Cross as against Shorty. The second baseman had been with the team three or four years and had never made any difference in a habitual tail-ender. Everybody knew, on the other hand, that Double's fielding and general pepper had put the team in the running and brought out the crowds. By the middle of the season the team was up in third place and the rest of the league was paying some attention. There was where the trouble began.

As long as Vincennes stayed down around the bottom of the percentage column, where she had been ever since Hub Perdue left for the big leagues, none of the other clubs worried about the club. They simply took the Alices over every time they felt like it, by main strength and awkwardness. Now, with the club up among the leaders,

the rest of the league began watching for signals and trying to ball up team-play. The Paducah bunch tipped the Boss' hand ninety per cent of the time, and in a month everybody in the league was taking a crack at the club. The Boss switched signals once a week, on the average, but it did no good. He tried every system he had ever heard of, but it made no difference. One was as bad as another, and the club started down again.

"Boys, we've got to do something," said the Boss, calling the club together one morning at home. "If we don't, it's the cellar for us, again."

"Might get a few hitters," said Shorty, looking at Double Cross.

"It's the signals," the Boss explained. "They're stealing everything I can dope out. We can afford a hitless wonder."

"Yeah," Shorty scoffed. "He's hitless, and I wonder how he holds his job. Hitless wonder is good."

"Drop it, drop it," the Boss ordered.

"I've got an idea," Double Cross spoke up, ignoring Shorty's remark.

"Shoot," said the Boss.

"I used to be a telegraph operator," Cross began, but Shorty interrupted:

"Mean to say you had a trade? 'Nother good man gone wrong!" And the gang laughed with him.

"What I mean to say is, why wouldn't it be a good idea to use the telegraph code?"

"Send the hitter a telegram when yuh want him to lay down a bunt, hay?" Shorty yelled in derision. "'At's good."

"It would be all right unless you were up there," the Boss said. "But you couldn't read."

THE second baseman shut up for a while. Cross insisted his idea ought to work out, and volunteered to frame up a set of signals with dots and dashes so that the boys could understand them. The Boss told him to go to it. A couple days later he reported he had a system in working order. He showed it to the Boss and explained how it operated, with the result that the Boss fell for it, hard.

"But how will I get these dots and dashes to the guys up there to hit or on the bases?" he asked. That stumped him, and it baffled Double Cross as well. They both put their minds on it, while the Alices lost two more games with wide-open signals, and then the Boss had an inspiration.

"I've got it," he exclaimed to Cross one morning. "I'll buy a little tin whistle, like a policeman's, and blow these dots and dashes on it!"

"Great stuff," replied Cross. "But did anybody every try a whistle?"

"It does sound kinda silly, I'll admit. But Jack Hendricks was telling me one day last winter about a guy runnin' a team out in the Dakota League. This bird blowed his signals on a whistle. He used to be a pitcher up there with Detroit, and he'd oughta know whether he could get away with anything like it. And anyway you look at it, this whistle couldn't be any worse that the other stuff we've tried."

The upshot of it was that the Boss bought a whistle, and with Double Cross coaching him, put in a week practicing with the telegraph code. When he got to the point where he felt sure of it, he called some more morning meetings and put the whole club through a course of sprouts on the Morse system. In a week he had it working and the boys knew what it was all about. Meanwhile they were lucky to win one game out of four. They tumbled to fifth place while the other clubs were stealing their signals, and were quarreling among themselves most of the time. Bad feeling centered around Shorty's grouch at Double Cross, and Shorty gathered up a little support by talking to the shortstop and making him jealous of Double's fielding. One day when Hopkinsville was playing at Vincennes, the trouble came to a head.

WITH a man on first, one of the Hoppers hit a hard one at Double. He grabbed it right off the grass, and yelled, "Let's get two, boys," and whirled to shoot the ball to Shorty. The man from first was coming fast enough to make it close, so Shorty decided to try another of his old tricks. Double's throw was fast, but just a little low, so Shorty batted it down on the ground, let it roll and then ran after it. The Hopper jumped up out of the dust and fanned for third. Shorty recovered the ball and threw high to Cross. Double snagged the ball out of the air, by jumping high and reaching a long arm in the direction of the sun, but couldn't pull it down in time to put it on the runner.

"Why don't yuh put it on him?" Shorty yelled, running over toward third. "This aint no force-out."

Double paid no attention to him, but

the Boss decided this was too raw. He yelled at Shorty and motioned him to come into the bench. At the same time he sent a pitcher down there to play second base.

"Purty rough stuff, I call it," he said to Shorty.

"Yeah, that guy'd oughta field the ball and put it on his man," Shorty replied. "If he wasn't afraid of some spikes—"

"Cross worries you a lot," said the Boss, "so I'm going to relieve your feelings. We're going to Paducah tonight, and I'll see if I can swap you for another second-sacker."

If there's anything worse, and hotter, than playing baseball on the Wabash, it's playing the same game on the Ohio River. Ask the Reds or the Louisville Colonels. They know. Shorty did not like the idea a little bit, partly because he preferred to stay in Vincennes, and partly because he hated to be shifted off the club on account of another man. He knew, or he should have known, that he had nobody but himself to blame, but he overlooked that fact. Cross was responsible for the whole affair in Shorty's eyes. He swore he would get even with Double. After the game that afternoon Shorty was busier than anybody ever saw him on the diamond. He hunted up every friend he had made since he joined the Alices two years before, and told how he was getting a raw deal. If his friends went to the manager, Shorty said, maybe the Boss would change his mind and keep him on the club.

That explains my connection with this story. I knew nothing about the earlier developments, and was rather inclined to sympathize with Shorty when he came to me and asked me whether I would speak to the Boss. Anything I would do, he said, might help keep him in Vincennes and out of Paducah. I used to write sports in Indianapolis and New York, and have been something of a fan all my life. When I came out here to Vincennes and bought a paper, I kept up an interest in the game. I borrowed five hundred dollars at the bank and put it up, along with some other men in town, to keep the Alices in the Kitty League. The Boss of the club is a friend of mine.

I WENT down to the depot that night and found that Shorty had stirred up a dozen other men. You would have thought it was a delegation of prominent citizens to meet the Congressman, or the uncle of the Crown Prince of Japan, or somebody.

"Nice send-off, you men are giving us," the Boss said, laughing. "What do you want us to do, bring the pennant back with us?"

"Well, here's where you get a surprise," I said. "If I'm not mistaken, this delegation *did* come down here to see you off. We've been talking about Shorty Dirks, who says you're going to trade him to Paducah."

The Boss nodded, without saying anything, so I went ahead:

"We don't know why you want to trade him, but he's asked us to say a word for him. Shorty's not a bad fellow, and he lives over here in the oil country, so that we get some support on account of him, Saturdays and Sundays. You know how hard it is to get a crowd out nowadays, when everybody around here owns some kind of a machine and would rather get out on the country roads than go to a ball-game?"

"That's right," the Boss agreed. "I don't mind telling you men why I figure on trading Shorty. He's makin' trouble. Been ridin' Double Cross about a month, now, and got a couple of the other boys sidin' with him. It's a question of choosin' between Shorty and Double. I can get any number of second basemen, but findin' a good third sacker is next to impossible. Cross is good. If I can get a fair second baseman who will mind his business, I think we'll have a chance to lead the league."

The explanation put things in a new light, and all of us kicked ourselves for listening to Shorty. He had said nothing of trouble between him and Cross.

"Oh, well," I said, "if that's the case, we're for you. There's no argument about your man Cross. He's a bear in the field, and if he could only hit—"

"Don't worry about that," the Boss replied. "I'm going to work with him on his hittin'. I think you'll see a change one of these days."

JUST then a train came rolling in from the east over the B. and O., and several people got off. Among others was a young woman with a big suitcase. The taxi men and hotel porters got all the other strangers. As the crowd thinned out, she was left alone, looking around her as if undecided what to do. Finally she went into the

station and asked the ticket-agent a question. He came to the door with her, and pointed out the Boss.

"I don't know where Cross is," he said, "but there's the manager of the ball team. Mebbe he can tell you where to find Cross."

She put down her suitcase and came up to the group talking to the Boss. He had heard the ticket-seller, and so he stepped out of the group to meet her.

"Are you the manager of the baseball team?" she asked.

"Yes ma'am," he said, taking off his hat and ducking his head.

"I'm looking for Mr. Cross. Could you tell me where he is?"

"Well, miss, he'd oughta be here most any minute now. We're just leavin' town, and the train from the north is due down purty soon. If you'll just wait here a minute, you'll see him."

"Are you going away?"

"Why, yes, we're on the road for Paducah and Hopkinsville. Be gone a week."

"Oh," she said, "that's too bad."

"Yes, it is, I mean, what's the trouble?"

"Why, you see," she explained, somewhat embarrassed, "I'm his—that is, we are going to be married, but I'm on my way to Arizona, and I wanted to—but please, can't I talk to you a minute?"

THEY walked off down the depot platform a little way and stood talking together about five minutes. We heard the train from the north whistling, and people coming at the last minute to get aboard swarmed down the platform. Among them was Double Cross. He walked right past the Boss and this girl before he noticed who she was. Then he dropped his suitcase and ball-bat and walked right up before the whole crowd and took her in his arms. The Boss coughed and looked the other way.

"Boss," said Double. "Would it be all right if I came down to Paducah on the next train? I'd like to see that she gets away all right for the West."

"Sure, sure," the Boss replied, fishing in his pockets for tickets. He gave one to Cross. "Take all the time you want," he said. "Mebbe one of the other boys could play third tomorrow in a pinch. That's all right, and don't worry. Well, I gotta get the gang aboard. Good-by, Miss—ah, miss, I'm glad I metcha, and I hope everything turns out all right."

The train pulled out and left Double and the girl still standing on the platform looking at each other. She was fine and neat appearing, but she didn't seem to be very strong. Her color was none too good, I thought, as I passed them starting for home. Fifteen minutes after I had got there, Double and the girl came up on the porch.

"I want to ask a favor," he said. "I need some help, and I don't know anybody to go to. This is my—meet Miss Mary Wilson. Excuse me for not introducing you, Mary. We—uh—we want to get married right away. She has to take the next train for St. Louis, and I've got to go on to Paducah at midnight."

"But the clerk's office is closed," I said.

"Yes, but you owning the newspaper, I thought maybe you could get him to go down with us and make out the license."

She smiled at him, and then blushed as she saw me looking at her.

"Wait till I find my hat," I told them. I got out my little four-lettered automobile, and we drove around to the clerk's house, roused him, went down to the courthouse and got the license. Then the clerk and I stood up with them as witnesses at the J. P.'s house. We bought them some ice cream at the Greek's, and then took them out to the depot, where we left them. They were trying hard to be happy, but the thought of separation again, after a few hours, was too much for them.

I asked no questions, on the theory that Double would tell me whatever he wanted me to know. He was too busy talking with the girl to tell me anything, and I let it go at that.

WHEN the club came back home a week afterward, it had a new second baseman named McGee, from Paducah, and a record of five games won out of seven played with Paducah and Hopkinsville on their own diamonds. We had quite a crowd out for the first game of a series at home with Mattoon, which came on a Saturday, and we won the game. I sat down on the bench because the press box don't amount to anything, and I got the surprise of my life when the Boss produced a little policeman's whistle at the start of the game.

"Studying to be a traffic-cop?" I asked.

"Nix," he said. "This is the way I run the team nowadays. Use this for signals."

"Don't kid me."

"Fact," he said. "We won at Hopkinsville because they couldn't swipe our stuff. We'll go on winning, too."

You never saw anything as crazy in your life as the whistling signals that Double Cross and the Boss had worked out. Nobody could make head or tail of the noises he was blowing through that piece of tin, except the Alices themselves. The code was simple enough, the Boss said, but I put in the whole afternoon trying to figure it out, and then gave it up as a bad job. So did the boys from Mattoon, after guessing wrong for eight of the nine innings. When they finally quit worrying about the signals, it was too late for them to win the game.

The next day a big crowd came over from the oil-country across the river, some of them with the idea of seeing a ball-game, but most of them to start a row because Shorty Dirks had been traded. They got into the stands and on the grass back of third base. Shorty had in some way spread the word around that Double had beaten him out of his job and caused him to be shifted to Paducah.

"Shorty, Shorty," they yelled. "Give us Shorty Dirks!"

"O-o-o-h-h-h-h, Shorty!"

When they were tired of yelling and found that they could not get a rise out of the Boss, they began kidding Double Cross. Every time a ball was hit down to him in fielding practice, they groaned. When he went up to hit a couple in batting practice, they all laughed. Double paid no attention to them, no matter what they did. The louder they yelled or laughed, the cooler he became. When the game began, they were still riding him, but by the fifth inning they had switched around and were pulling for him as hard as his best friends. He put up a beautiful game that afternoon, grabbing everything that came his way and throwing it, machine-gun style, wherever it would do the most good. He started two double plays that looked to be impossible, and they went through. McGee, the new second baseman, ate up his throws and yelled for more. The Alices acted like a new ball-club with the idea that nobody else in the league had a chance for the pennant.

THE oil men, unable to bother Cross, began pulling for him, but kidding Boss for his new signals. They heard the whistle every time the Boss blew it, because our bench was back of the third base line. After each signal they whistled an imitation of it. The result was a near riot. Mattoon couldn't stand it, and along about the seventh inning blew up with a loud crash. The Mattoon pitcher walked two or three men, and half a dozen Alices hit safely. We scored eight runs and sewed up the game. The terrific whistling drove the Mattoon men crazy, or nearly so, and the Boss' signals worked twice as well as he had any reason to expect. The oil men, forgetting all about Shorty Dirks, went home happy, and that was the last we heard from him for several weeks.

AFTER a sensational spurt on the home grounds, the Alices landed in second place, only a few games behind Paducah, which was in the lead. They went on the road, at the end of three weeks, to be gone until the first of September, when they were to come home for ten days and wind up the season. They won seventeen out of twenty games at home, and the Boss had it figured that if he could take two-thirds of the games on the road, the club would have a good chance to win the pennant. We had a big crowd at the depot to give them a send-off, for the town was baseball crazy. Every man, woman and child in Vincennes had turned into a redhot fan because of the team's showing.

"Too bad you can't take this crowd with you," I said to the Boss on the depot platform. "If they could go along and whistle those fool signals with you, this club would never lose another game."

"Guess the old tin whistle is not so bad, after all." And he laughed. "And say, have you noticed that Cross is hitting a little better?"

"Everybody is," I said. "The crowd gets opposition pitchers so excited they can't put anything on the ball but direction—and not much of that. Anybody could hit with these fans back of him."

"Oh, I don't know about that," he argued. "Anyway, this baby's hittin' better. He aint the worst batter in this league, not by a long shot."

It would have been a good thing for the Boss if he could have taken the crowd along to bolster up his signal system, because the teams the Alices visited got wise to his stuff. They found out in a hurry that the whistle was not a piece of foolishness, but was really intended to direct the team's play. As soon as they learned

that much, they began trying to dope out the meaning of each whistled signal. Nobody was able to do that, so they all tried other tactics. In one town, the Boss told me afterward, somebody was hired to break into his room at the boarding house where the team put up, and steal his whistle. He bought another, and it was stolen.

"Why didn't you whistle with your lips?" I asked him, when he was telling me about it.

"Ever try to whistle with a chew in your face?" was all he said.

IN another town the manager of the home club bought a hundred whistles and gave them to small boys who were taken in free and seated back of the Boss in the stands. Every time he blew his whistle, the boys got busy and raised such a din that the Alices could not tell what the signals were. In still another place, where the grounds are near a glass factory, the manager of the team bribed the engineer in the factory to tie down the factory whistle every time the Alices went to bat. The Boss certainly had his troubles with that whistling system, but he stuck it out. When it did not work right, he tapped his code with one bat against another, or clapped his hands. Once he tried a tin bucket with a rosined rope tied through a hole in the bottom. That was too hard on his hands. But when he came back home, the Alices were still sticking to the whistled signals. They had won more than half their games on the road, although they fell short of the two-thirds the Boss wanted. It so happened, however, that Paducah had been in a serious slump, being also on the road, and the Alices were still in position to clinch the pennant in the last ten days.

A whirlwind finish would land the flag, for Paducah had only two games margin on first place, with four games to play with the Alices here in Vincennes. If the Alices could take three out of the four, they could win out. The Boss came into the office on Tuesday afternoon after we had gone to press, the club having no game scheduled until Thursday afternoon, when Paducah was due to start that four-game series.

"Well, what's the good word?" I asked.

"Not so good," he said. "We've got to win all four of these games, and clean up on Hopkinsville for four more to win the pennant. It's some job."

"Impossible?"

"No, but darned near it."

"Cheer up," I said. "We're for you. How's Cross hitting?"

"Rotten. He's hitting about as hard as putty. If he could only hit, we'd walk in. One hitter's all we need. And if he could hit, nothing would stop him. He'd go up as high as they go."

"Well," I said. "There's no known cure for weak hitting."

"No, there isn't. But sometimes we can improve a poor hitter by changing his stand. You know, every man that falls down at the plate begins trying the foxy stuff. Instead of standing back and taking a good old roundhouse at the ball, he crowds the plate, crouches down, chokes his bat and looks 'em over. Tries to outguess the pitcher and the umpire too. That's what Double's doing. I tried to get him to stand back in the farthest corner of the box, grab his bat by the end of the handle and swing as far and as hard as he can."

"No use?"

"Not any. He goes up and fouls one that way, and then forgets. Shortens his grip on the stick, hunches his shoulders and winds up by popping out to the pitcher. I've cussed him, begged him, kidded and coaxed him, but it's no use."

"I'd like to see the boy make good," I said.

"So'd I. The way he fields and throws, he'd go great in any league if he could hit."

"Did you tell him that?"

"Sure. Told him everything I could think of."

"Too bad," I said. "By the way, did he tell you what he did that night after you let him stay to catch the next train?"

"Yeah; and say, there's the reason I'm for that kid. He's a thousand per cent. Do you know why he was in such a hurry to marry the girl?"

"I didn't ask, and he didn't say."

"It would make a good story for your paper," said the Boss. "He had been going with her for some time, and last spring they decided to get married as soon as they could. She was working in a department store, long hours and all that, and not very well. He had a job as a telegraph operator but didn't get along very well with the union, or something, and lost out. Picked up one or two odd jobs, but nothing to make any money at. He had played ball in one of the amateur leagues around Cleveland, and his friends told him

he'd oughta be a whiz in professional baseball. They told him he could make more money in the summertime than he would make all year as an operator.

"About that time the girl got sick. The doctor said she had tuberculosis, and should rest up in Arizona, but her family can't afford to send her. To them, Arizona is twice as far away as Paris, and three times as expensive. She stays at home and rests, but gets worse. Cross writes and asks her to come down here and get married, and then go on out to Arizona, with him supplying the money out of his wages. She wont do that, she says. Her father makes just about enough to keep the family from starving, but he arranges to borrow the money of one of these pay-all-your-life concerns, and she starts out.

"When she stopped off here, she only wanted to see him a minute or two before she went to the Southwest. Maybe she had a notion she might not come back, or something. But when he started talkin' to her, he won her over to the notion of gettin' married.

" 'But supposin' I shouldn't come back,' she said.

" 'That's the very reason why I'd rather not wait.' And when he said that, she gave in. He told me afterward she cried. Well, he made her send back all the money her father had borrowed, and he dug up his own little roll. He's been mailin' money-orders to her ever since."

THERE may have been more fine things done by the boys who play our baseball for us, but I never heard of them. The Boss told the story in the same simple straightforward manner in which Cross had played his brave-hearted part.

"Seems to me you might raise his wages a little, just to help along some," I suggested. "I'd be glad to ask the stockholders to O. K. it."

"Stockholders be hung!" the Boss exploded. "I did give him a raise, and if they don't like it, they can have his job and mine too."

While we were standing there, Cross himself came in to see me. The Boss went out after all three of us had talked awhile, and then Cross spoke.

"I just wanted to say I'm much obliged to you for helping me out the way you did that night. Everything went off in such a hurry that I didn't remember till afterwards that I hadn't even said thanks."

"You needn't mention it," I said. "Glad to give you a lift if I could. But how is the wife getting along?"

"Well, she's some better."

"Not cured yet?" I asked.

"No, and that's just the trouble," he said, frowning and biting his lips.

"Why is that?"

"I don't mind telling," he said, "especially since you've been so good to us. I've been sending her most of my wages, but the season is almost over, and my money is about gone. I couldn't make enough doing anything else in the wintertime to support her down there, not even if I could get a job telegraphing. I had her ask about prospects for work down there in Arizona for me. The doctor and the sanitarium people told her that convalescing tuberculosis patients took all the work there is to be done. So that puts us kinda up against it."

"Too bad," I said. "What are you going to do?"

"Well, I've written her to start back here and meet me when the season is over. The sanitarium can't keep her on credit, they said, and those Southwestern States all say they've got too many charity patients now. I wont have her be a charity patient, anyway. I'll take as good care of her as I can this winter, wherever I can get a job. Mebbe next summer I can send her back again, to stay till she's cured. Or till she's had her chance and—"

He stopped and swallowed hard; I patted him on the back.

"Cheer up," I said. "Maybe we can stir up something for you around here. The doctors around this part of the country say you don't have to go to Arizona for tuberculosis treatment. They say fresh air and good food right here at home will cure it, if it isn't too far along."

"Awful nice of you folks to help a man along," he said. "But you understand, I'm not askin' anybody's charity."

He spoke as if he had a chip on his shoulder, and I admired him for resenting any thought that he might be begging. We talked a little while and I assured him I had no intention of doing anything beyond seeing that he had a chance to earn his living through the winter. He went away somewhat more cheerful than he had been when he came into the office.

Late in the afternoon I started for home, and met the Boss again, on Main Street.

"What did Double want?" he asked.

"Nothing, but he gave me an idea," I said. "He's simply crazy about that girl. I told him we'd help him get a job around town here for the winter, and she could stay here with him. No use for her to go back up around Cleveland and the lake neighborhood with that trouble of hers. Since she's coming back, I'd like to get her here for the last games with Paducah. Might do her some good, and him too. What do you say?"

I have always been a kind of sentimental fool about these big red-blooded, red-necked athletes.

"Great," said the Boss. "Great stuff. And listen—I'll get her to talk to him about his hittin'. Maybe if she'd argue with him about his future in baseball, and their future, and all that, he'd stand back there in the box and take his swing, instead of forgetting it after one foul ball. If I can only get that boy to swingin', with them long arms and the leverage he oughta get outa them long legs, he'll hit 'em high up and far away. I know."

"Send her a telegram," I suggested.

"I'm on my way."

THAT series with Paducah was the greatest thing that has happened in this part of Indiana or the Kitty League for a hundred years. The oil-wells over in Illinois turned their men loose, and everybody from the coal-country came in to stay for the end of the week. All the melon-growers came to town. The glassworks shut down, and most of the stores declared holidays every afternoon. You wouldn't believe that so many people could turn out for a ball-game in these parts. Every day was Sunday and the Fourth of July rolled into one.

We needed three of the four games we were to play, beginning Thursday. Paducah had to have only two of them to hold first place, and came armed to the batbags to defend the lead. Every game was a battle from the time the umpire yelled, "Play ball," to the last out. We won the first day, and the town went crazy. The racket we made must have carried all the way down the river to Paducah. But the next day we lost, and you'd have thought the whole population had gone into mourning. I'm not trying to tell you about the baseball that was played. You have read all about ninth-inning finishes, timely hits, costly errors and flashy fielding-stunts. More than that, you probably have guessed by this time that Double Cross, while he played his usual snappy fielding game, failed to hit. He stood back and took his swing once or twice, and got a couple safe, but they were nothing to brag about. This sort of thing is old stuff. What I want to tell you about is the thing that decided the winning and losing of the four games.

"What's the big idea?"

Every man on the Paducah club asked himself that question, and then looked at their manager for the answer, when they heard the Boss blowing his little tin whistle in the first inning when we went to bat. He blew the whistle, and the whole crowd whistled the signal right after him. The Paducah pitcher got so rattled he made a bad balk. That started him to his downfall, and before long the game was in, with only half a dozen innings or so left to play. The Paducah gang had heard about the whistle-signals from other clubs, but had no idea how to figure them out. They not only did not know what to make of the signals, but the whistling of the crowds drove them wild.

Along in the fourth inning Shorty Dirks, our old friend playing second base for the Dukes, tumbled. He took off his glove and stooped over, pretending to find something wrong with a shoestring. Then he asked the umpire to hold time out, while he ran over to the Dukes' bench. Bluffing at fixing his shoestring, he talked to the manager of the Paducah club. Then he went back to his place, and a minute later the Paducah manager sent a utility man out of the park on an errand. He came back before the game was over. I found out what was up, that night, when the telegraph operator at the union depot came to the house.

"I wanta know if you don't think we'd oughta mob Shorty Dirks," he said.

"What's the matter?"

"Why, I've known all along the boys were using telegraph-code for those fool whistling signals. Spotted them one time when I had a day off. And this Dirks sent a Paducah ball-player around to the depot this afternoon to see if he could bribe me to come out to the park and tip off the Dukes what our crowd was tryin'. He'd oughta be lynched."

"Don't worry about that," I said. "If we make any fuss about it, he'll know he is right in thinking we are using the code.

That would end the system. But listen, you hunt up the Boss and tell him about it."

He went away, cooling off somewhat. The next day, though, we found out that Shorty had followed up his hunch. He had remembered Double Cross' mentioning the telegraph code, and told his manager all about it. The manager must have wired to Paducah for an operator, for there was one on the Dukes' bench the next day. They put an old suit on this operator, who was a middle-aged man with a long, old-fashioned beer mustache. He looked as much like a ball-player as my mother, age seventy, does which is not a great deal.

But he certainly knew his telegraph code, and he called every play the Boss signaled for. The result was that we lost the game. It was close, though, because we had some pitching, and runs were as rare as springs without fruit-killing frosts. The Boss went right through the game, blowing signals all the way, because he was afraid to try shifting them while the boys were all worked up over the fight. That night, of course, he got the club together, and they changed signals, with the idea of keeping the whistle in reserve. If the Dukes found out the new signals, the Boss would shift to the whistle, or mix them up.

SATURDAY morning, with Paducah still in first place, and the third game of the series due, the southwest corner of this State looked as if it was getting ready for a hanging.

I was out around town during the forenoon, watching the crowds, and when I returned to the office, just before dinner, there was a woman waiting for me. I told one of the boys to talk to her, because I wanted to go home to eat before the game. He said she had refused to talk to anybody but me, so I had him ask her to come around behind the counter into my office. It was Mrs. Cross, all the way from Arizona. I had forgotten about her, in the excitement of the first two games.

"You don't remember me," she said.

"Oh, yes, I do indeed," I said, offering her a chair.

"Well, I have come all the way back from Arizona," she explained. "But I do not know where to look for my husband."

"Doesn't he know you are here?" I asked.

"No. I had a wire, with a telegraphed money-order, from the manager of the baseball team, asking me to come back at once. Now that I'm here, I don't know where to find my husband or the manager. So I came to your office. Is there some surprise, or something, for Mr. Cross?"

"Well, yes," I said. Then I told her about this series, and how Double was not hitting the way he should. She was disappointed, and looked so hurt that I immediately began blowing about his wonderful fielding.

"That's the trouble," I explained. "He fields like a major leaguer, but he hits like the worst kind of an amateur at a Sunday-school picnic. The Boss thinks he can hit if he'll only change his style."

"How is that?" she asked eagerly. "Maybe I can help some way."

"The Boss says all he needs to do is to stand back in the box, near the back line, and take a long swing. Just now he chokes his bat and crowds the plate. He has a long reach, and he could hit anything if he would stand back and time his swing to meet the ball after it has curved. I think that's the way the Boss wants him to do. But Double knows."

"Let me talk to him about it, wont you?" she asked. "You people have been awfully kind to us, and I know he'd try his best if— But where is he? Wont you tell me where to find him?"

I apologized for keeping her so long, when she had seen her husband only half an hour since they were married, weeks before. I felt guilty, and so I took her out to my pony automobile, and drove her around to Double's boarding-house. Double came out when I honked the horn, and you never saw anybody so much surprised in all your life. He gasped a minute, and stuttered, and she began to cry a little. The flush came back to her cheeks.

"The trip has been too much for you, maybe," I said. "You should rest up as soon as you can."

They didn't pay any more attention to me than if I had not been there, so I drove on home for dinner. That afternoon I took her with my wife to see the game.

"I talked to him about his hitting," she said. "And he promised me he would stand back from the plate and swing hard at the ball. Was that right?"

WHEN we reached the park and were settled in some good seats not far back of the Alices' bench, I went down to

the bench to talk to the Boss a minute. He already knew Mrs. Cross had come back, because Double had told him how grateful he was for the surprise. He said Double had told him he was going to quit trying to fox the pitchers, and lay back for the old brodie from now on.

"And you take it from me, the boy means business," the Boss said. "I'd bank on him for anything he promised. But say, there's big excitement. Ed Stevens, a scout for the White Sox, is down here for a couple days, looking over a couple pitchers. Whaddayuh know about that? Mebbe we can make a sale."

"One of ours—Schultz?" I asked.

"Yeah, and one of the Dukes, that big right-hander of theirs that they are savin' for tomorrow. I'm workin' Schultz this afternoon."

When I told my wife and Mrs. Cross about the ivory-hunter, Mrs. Cross said it was too bad Double wasn't being inspected for possible major-league service.

"I just know he'd make good, if he had a chance," she declared. "But then I'd hate to see him leave here, because you people have been so good to him."

The game that afternoon was a riot from the start. All the people that could get inside the fences were on hand, filling the stands and lining up along the first and third base-lines. Fans with autos and horses and buggies made a ring around the outfield. They went home happy because we won, three to two. Schultz pitched a great game; the boys backed him up in fine style; and we had two pinch two-baggers to bring in the runs needed to win. Double Cross was the doubling boy, for he drove in all three runs, two with a two-bagger to right center, and the other one with a two-base line-drive to right. The Dukes nearly had heart failure when he smashed out his first liner; and when he hit the second one, they quit. It was time, anyhow, for that drive came in the last half of the ninth. The whistling that had been going on through the game was a murmur compared to the shriek that went up when Double wrecked the tie. I went down to the bench as the game broke up, to congratulate the Boss on getting back into first place.

When I got there, a stranger was talking to the Boss.

"Meet Ed Stevens, an old friend of mine who is scouting for the White Sox," said the Boss.

"Like the game, or are you sick of bush baseball?" I asked.

"Nice game," he said. "And I never get tired of bush baseball, because there is always something good in it."

"We get some good pitching now and then," I remarked, with the idea of boosting Schultz if I could.

"Yeah?" was all he said. His tone was rather casual and carried a bored note, so that I decided it would be no use for me to try pushing Double Cross. I thought there was no chance, even if Double had hit two two-baggers and started three double plays in that one game.

"I hope you can stay over tomorrow," I said, "for we ought to have another close game. Paducah's got a big right-handed pitcher who is there, and may interest you. But I suppose the Boss, here, has told you about him. Glad to have met you, anyhow. Good-by."

I LEFT them talking together, and went away, feeling like an amateur. Nothing cools off as quickly as amateur enthusiasm under the chilly stare of the bored professional.

On the way home Mrs. Cross said she had spoken to Double about standing back from the plate and taking his swing.

"He promised to do the thing right," she said. "I'm glad he did, for he made some improvement, didn't he?"

Improvement? I had to laugh. After hitting about a minus .041 all season, Double's pair of two-baggers, driving in all our runs, constituted the biggest single day's improvement known to the baseball guidebook.

If one of these photographers with a panorama camera had taken a picture of Saturday's crowd, the same view would have fitted the scene Sunday. The only difference would have been that more people were in the rows circling the outfield. Fried chicken, stewed chicken and dumplings and roast chicken were slighted at Sunday dinner, the whole town turning out early. A lot of people went straight from church to the park to be sure of seats.

Our Alices were desperate to win and hold the small lead taken Saturday. Business men made up a hurried pot of thirteen hundred dollars to be divided among the boys, a hundred apiece, if they should win the pennant. The mayor went down and told the Boss about it, and he spread

the word. That made the boys all the more anxious. Thousands may be thousands to the big leaguers, but down here a hundred dollars are a hundred dollars.

PADUCAH'S bunch came on the field with fire in their eyes and a piece of strategy in their brains. Shorty Dirks had worked out a scheme for every Duke to carry a whistle. The Paducah manager wired an Indianapolis hardware store, the night before, for a dozen policemen's whistles, special delivery. Each Duke tied a string to his whistle, and put the string around his neck, with the whistle in his shirt pocket. Shorty's idea was to fight back at the Boss and our crowd when the rattling process began. The idea was successful for about seven innings.

That game was a horse-race. We got two runs in the first inning on two hits, a pass and an error, our crowd's whistling contributing to the bases on balls and the misplay. In the second they tied it up. Their first man got our pitcher in the hole, and then, as he was winding up with the count two and three, the whole benchful of Dukes let blow with their whistles. A wild pitch was the result, with one man on. The next man hit one down to Double, and he shot to second for a double play. Their whistles were going full blast, a dozen of them; and McGee, the second baseman, got rattled and threw over the first baseman's head. A two-bagger into the crowd followed, sending in two runs.

When we went to bat, the Paducah telegrapher, under orders from the manager, began trying to mess up our play. He whistled a signal to the hitter every time a new man went up to the plate, and when anybody got on, he whistled for stolen bases, the hit and run, and everything else the Dukes' manager could think of, all at the wrong time for us. From then on, the game was a riot. Teamplay was ruined on both sides, and it was a case of walk up and take your swing, hold your base if you got on until a hit was produced, and die if no hit came through. The Dukes smashed out a run in the fifth, and we tied it in the sixth. They hammered over two more in the seventh, and we tied it right up at five-all in the last half. By this time the whistling had faded out, partly because the crowd had no lungs left, and partly because everybody was deaf from the din. The Boss had quit blowing signals, and told every hitter who went up to use his own judgment, and to hold his bag if he got on base. The Dukes stopped using their whistles too. Nothing was heard, therefore, but the usual noises of a closely contested game, and this was quiet, compared with the whistles.

WE shut out the Dukes in the first half of the eighth, thanks to a nice double play started by Double Cross. Double had hardly been in the game up to this time, having had only two assists and hit only one two-bagger. But in the last half of the eighth inning McGee, who went up with one down, drew a base on balls. Then our catcher went up and whaled a single to left field, on which McGee had to stop at second. Double went stalking out to the plate with two bats, so nervous his knees were knocking. The Boss had no orders to give him, because there was nothing to do but hit. The pitcher was up next, and we had no pinch hitter to send in for him, so that a sacrifice would have been a forlorn gamble. There was no way out for Double but to come through with a hit.

"There comes old Double Cross! Starts more double-plays'n any player'n this league," yelled Jack Martin, a pitcher, coaching at first base for us.

"Yes, and hits into more double plays'n any player'n this league," yelled Shorty Dirks. "Come on, boys—le's get two." He imitated Double's favorite line of talk, and then grinned at Cross, up there at the plate.

Double looked at the first one the big Paducah right-hander shot through, and the crowd applauded when the umpire called it a ball. He looked at the second, but it was a strike. The Dukes' catcher squatted for the signal, and his pitcher shook his head once, before agreeing to another signal. He nodded. Every fan in the grounds could see Double deciding to swing at the next one, on the hunch the pitcher was trying to outguess him with a fast ball straight through the heart of the pan. Double knocked the dirt out of his spikes, set his feet far apart and back in the box, and gripped his bat at the end of the handle. The pitcher looked over the base-runners and prepared to wind up. Right here, Shorty Dirks tried some of his devilishness. He took his whistle and blew sharply on it, cutting the air with a series of harsh, staccato notes.

Cross looked over his shoulder hastily toward our bench, and then turned his attention back to the pitcher. The whistle apparently worried him, but he swung with keen determination as the pitcher whipped a fast one over, waist high. Double met the ball squarely with a terrific drive behind his bat. The crash of the wood against leather was heard above the roar of the crowds almost as far as first base. He sent the ball to left center on a line for what looked to be a certain two-bagger. McGee and the catcher were off running, and Double turned first base, traveling about sixty miles an hour. As he approached second, the crowd, which had settled temporarily to be satisfied with a hit into the crowds in center field, good for two bases under the ground rules, let out another roar. The ball was climbing steadily, rising higher the farther it traveled. Double, startled by the renewed uproar, raised his head to watch the ball, and straightway eased his gait. His drive was sailing over the fence into the fair grounds.

THERE, as the ball-players say, went the old game. We won, eight to five, for Paducah couldn't come back in the ninth. It was a long time before I could get to the bench. When I did, I found the White Sox scout ahead of me, waiting for the crowd to thin out.

"Well," I said. "I hope you like some of the pitchers you saw down here."

"Pitchers, hell," he said, turning to the Boss. "Hey, Jake, why do they call that long-legged third baseman Double Cross?"

"That's a fine question to ask," the Boss replied, grinning, "after you've seen him start four double plays and try for a fifth, in two days."

"Unh-hunh," the ivory-hunter grunted.

"Like his looks?" asked the Boss. "If you do, why not buy that kid pitcher I showed you yesterday and—"

"Kid pitcher, my eye!" said the scout. I came down here lookin' for pitchers, all right, but the woods are full of 'em. I found a third baseman, which is a scarce animal. What'll yuh take for that baby?"

That was the way Double Cross went to the big leagues. The bargain that the Boss drove is no part of this story. If I told how much we got for Cross, other bush-league clubs would be trying to rob the big fellows. That night we had a meeting of the stockholders of the club, in answer to a call from the Boss.

"Men," he said. "I called this meetin' on my own hook, because I wanta take some action, quick. An old friend of mine scouts for the White Sox, and he's been here two days lookin' at some pitchers. Thought I could sell him our kid left-hander, but he's buyin' Double Cross instead."

There was a gasp of surprise.

"That's all right," the Boss assured us. "Double is a ball-player, from his spikes up. He'll field with anybody, and he's got the nerve to hit in a tight place. Now, I don't know how many of you know his affairs, but I'd like to ask the club to give him half the purchase-price. He hasn't asked for it, and wouldn't, bein' backward. But if a felluh ever needed the money, Double does. This kid"—and he wiped his face and his eyes with his handkerchief—"made a girl marry him one night last summer so he could send her to Arizona for T. B. treatment. She's had to come back because his job ends with the season, and his coin's gone."

"Oh, forget it, Jake," said Sam Winders, the hardware man. "We know all about that. I move we give the boy half the money and send her back to be cured. All in favor say aye. No? Carried. That's enough, isn't it?"

THEY appointed me a committee to go with Jake and tell Double and his bride all about his graduation to the big leagues. We found them at the boarding-house, and between us managed to break the news. She laughed, and hugged him, and then she cried awhile. So did he, after at first refusing to take the money, saying he had not earned it.

"If it was for anybody but the girl, here," he said, "I'd not take it."

When we left them, she was crying again, and he was holding her.

Jake didn't have much to say on the way back downtown, and neither did I. We bumped into Shorty Dirks in front of the cigar-store.

"Hey, Shorty," said the Boss. "Wanta ask yuh something. Now that it's all over, what was that you whistled at Cross?"

"Kiddin' somebody?" growled Shorty. "Go jump in the Wabash."

"On the level, no. I never heard any signal like that. What was it?"

"Oh, well,"—and Shorty grinned, sheepishly,—"Double double-crossed me. I whistled, kiddin' him, for a home run."

Deep-Water Men

"In the Heart of Old Delhi" describes the dramatic events which accompanied the further adventures of that famous ruby, the Glowing Ember.

By Culpeper Zandtt

IN the bazaars and jewel-shops of the Chandni Chowk they will tell you that the way of the *Angresi* and the way of *Hind* are as the poles apart, and that never the two by any chance meet. They will say, with a sniff and the flinging a pinch of dust over the shoulder, that the average Occidental is by way of being a fool in his straightforward plunging at everything—as transparent as rock crystal in his ideas and methods. From which, his thoughts—his probable actions, his goings and comings—are so easy to read as to be common talk of the bazaars and caravansaries, and there is little which goes on among the governing class which is not discussed with complete understanding among *ayas* and *wallahs* and *babus* and *khitmutgars* wherever they of brown skin and yellow squat together for a smoke or a frugal meal, or mere gossip for gossip's sake.

Thus, Asaf Aimal—calculating his gains in the dim recesses of his jewel-shop in the Chandni Chowk—was also considering whether by chance a certain Captain Pottinger of a Sikh regiment would have among his possessions family heirlooms in the way of jeweled rings or pins to sell, when his circumstances should become a bit more desperate and compelling. For it was known that the Captain's *syce* had whispered to Chuckram Jeejetsee—the Parsee expert in sick pearls—certain observations which indicated a very low condition in his master's finances and a still lower one in his frame of mind. Carry the thing far enough and, as all Delhi knew, there would be pawnings in the Chandni Chowk, after dusk, if anything were left to pawn or sell.

Usually the *Angresi* had a graded succession of low-water marks in the personal things they were compelled to dispose of, and it often fell out that the lowest of all proved the best bargain. A famous polo-pony, for example, had been supposed the property of three different men until a fourth came upon a run of hard luck and was forced to sell him after disposing of pretty much everything else. So the bazaars and the jewel-shops and the pawnshops waited with the inexhaustible patience of the East, as in a million similar

cases before, for that which comes to him who waits, in the fullness of time.

MEANWHILE, in club and regimental mess, some one occasionally wondered if Jim Pottinger were not going it a bit strong—due for a cropper, presently; but nobody knew a hundredth part as much concerning his personal affairs as the brown and yellow men all about them. Pottinger was slow pay, these days, even upon regimental matters and I-O-U's—but most subalterns come upon such periods at one time or another, and so none of his associates thought for a moment of refusing to play cards with him or lend small sums when in funds.

Matters came to a climax one night when he accompanied a couple of brother officers to the quarters of a handsome widow on the Ridge, where there was usually rather stiff play before the evening was over—but with such varying fortune as to stamp Helen Wythe-Ranald as a thoroughbred sport who played absolutely straight at everything she went in for. Luck had been against the widow and her partner during most of the evening, until they were five thousand rupees to the bad; but they began to pick up after eleven and stood winners at one in the morning by over seven thousand rupees. Of this amount Pottinger owed nearly four thousand and was compelled to give an I-O-U for it—not possessing a tenth of the amount or knowing where under the sun he could raise it. His pay was mortgaged for months ahead. Borrowing was becoming difficult for any sum larger than pocket-money. He had no rich relatives, no expectations upon which he could realize, and his personal effects wouldn't bring over three thousand rupees even at top prices.

Pottinger was a younger son who had gone into the army as a matter of course. In the German War he had done as well as the average, no better—invalided home with a couple of wounds, and then transferred to an Indian regiment of Sikhs until he should have entirely recovered. During his war service there had been little object in, or time for, gambling for anything but small stakes. In Delhi, among the resident army people he found both play and expenses much higher, and as so many thousands have done before him, he plunged—to recoup. Like the others, he only got deeper into the quicksand of debt and impending disgrace.

Leaving the Wythe-Ranald house on the Ridge with a Naval Reserve lieutenant who had been recently ordered to Delhi with his report upon the killing of his former chief,—a Resident Commissioner in upper Burma,—the Captain accompanied Brandon to his quarters in one of the new government buildings for a final pipe and chat before retiring; Lieutenant Brandon had commanded, on the Salwin River, an armed houseboat used by Colonel Sir Martin Jephson as his official headquarters in the hill-province of Mong Klang and neighboring territory at a time when the Resident Commissioner was murdered by a Japanese secretary of the American railway magnate, Henry K. Brundage—for reasons unknown. Afterward Brandon had acted for several months as Deputy Commissioner until the Colonel's successor arrived to take over the administration of British interests in that section. Then he was ordered up to Government headquarters at Delhi to give his account of Jephson's murder and the general conditions in Mong Klang, where an American archæologist, Jardine, recently had been recognized as the lawful Prince—having been the duly constituted heir of the late Rajah.

At the old Mogul capital, friends in the Service had suggested that he cram for an official examination and see if he couldn't win a commissionership for himself, inasmuch as he had been thoroughly familiar with provincial administration while serving under Sir Martin. So it happened that when they reached his quarters, Brandon's *khitmutgar* said one of the officers on the "civil" side had left word that he'd be glad to quiz the Lieutenant for half an hour if he cared to come over. It was a chance he couldn't afford to miss—but he didn't wish to appear discourteous to Pottinger, who had proved himself good company upon several occasions.

"I say, old chap! Make yourself comfortable here in my den for half an hour, until I get back. Gunga will mix a couple of pegs for you, and there are illustrated gazettes just out from home. Eh? Gunga's a satisfactory old bird—he'll not disturb you unless he hears you clapping your hands."

POTTINGER settled down in a Bombay chair and loaded his pipe. He'd been in two minds about going off to his own quarters instead of waiting for the Lieutenant's return at that time of night, but

had some vague idea of talking a bit with the Naval Reserve man—he couldn't say just why, unless it was the urge to describe the fix he was in and ask advice. For at the moment Pottinger saw no alternatives but either to shoot himself or to resign from the Service, disgraced for life, and try to make a living somewhere under another name. His breeding and family pride made shooting appear the only way out—but to his surprise, in this introspection, something kept whispering to him: "Chuck it all—and begin again somewhere! If you manage to make a go of it, you can send back the money to clean up these old debts. If you don't—well, what's the odds? You'll be getting along somehow, and nobody'll know you!"

While lounging in the bamboo chair,—smoking, thinking it over,—he had subconsciously picked up a little bronze Buddha from Brandon's table-desk and was admiring the perfect modeling of the image—a reproduction of the famous Kamakura figure. He remembered hearing the Lieutenant say that it had belonged to his much-admired chief, Sir Martin Jephson, and that after his murder he had kept it as a souvenir, at the Rajah's suggestion. Presently, the little bronze slipped from his fingers and fell upon the floor. As he picked it up, hoping that no injury had been done by his carelessness, the plug of teakwood and plaster which had sealed the bottom of the hollow figure dropped out upon his lap. Looking up inside to see just how the plug had been fitted, he noticed a wad of cotton wool with corners of a gleaming something sticking through, in places. Poking at this with his finger, the mass came out and unrolled in his hand, revealing a blazing crimson jewel of approximately one hundred and fifty carats, as nearly as he could judge.

Pottinger felt that he was scarcely breathing at all—the thing, if genuine, was too unbelievably priceless and beautiful. Then he found himself glancing from the corners of his eyes to see if the *khitmutgar* had heard the thing fall and was coming in. Apparently not. The door was closed—nobody else in the room—no sound of footsteps in the little hall. His mind began to race. He had never heard of a garnet or ruby of this size—except? Wait a bit! Wouldn't it correspond very closely with that marvelous stone, the Glowing Ember, said to have been mined in Burma, cut in Amsterdam, shrouded in mystery for three years, reappearing at the Governor's ball in Singapore during the previous winter in the possession of an American girl, stolen during the ball, never seen after that? To the best of Pottinger's recollection, the descriptions of the Glowing Ember tallied very closely with this wonderful thing in his hand. But—a million dollars, gold, had been mentioned as merely a tentative price for the big ruby, its value being probably higher! The perspiration began trickling down inside his collar. He wondered if Lieutenant Brandon knew of the ruby's concealment inside the bronze Buddha? Impossible! No man of sense would leave such a thing in a place where any dishonest *khitmutgar* might get away with it!

Brandon's first impulse would be to rent a box in the safety-vault of some bank and put the stone there. As for Sir Martin Jephson, who had used the Buddha for a paper-weight on his desk through many years, had he known what was inside of it? Possibly—because the image had been in his possession much longer than when the ruby was first heard of in Amsterdam. Had he concealed the stone in such a place, himself, for reasons which made such an act seem reasonably safe? Again—possibly. Had he told Brandon what was in it when he lay dying? Absurd! There had been no suggestion of Brandon's keeping the Buddha at all until after Sir Martin's death. So—it was morally certain that Brandon had no knowledge of the stone. He would never know it had been concealed in the bronze unless Pottinger told him—in which case such an honest course should entitle the Captain to share whatever it brought when sold, because by keeping his mouth shut he might have the entire amount for himself.

AT this point in Pottinger's bewildered line of reasoning, it suddenly occurred to him that he was losing precious minutes in restoring the Buddha to its original condition, inasmuch as that was the only feature which gave no time for reflection. As a matter of fact, all this had flashed through his mind in probably less than three minutes—a man's brain works pretty fast under such conditions. Glancing about to see what might be done in the way of fastening the plug inside the base of the image again, his eye fell upon a large stick of sealing-wax which Brandon had used on his official documents. The

plaster, when originally poured in upon the teak plug, had set fairly hard—but incessant dampness during the rains had softened it almost to a crumbling point. So he poured the melted wax upon the wood and the inner bronze of the image instead—and when pressed home, the plug appeared to be fastened quite firmly—enough so, at least, to hold until Brandon or his *khitmutgar* dislodged it. Placing the Buddha upon its pile of papers again, the Captain leaned back in his chair for reflection—the wonderful stone having been placed in the inside pocket of his waistcoat, as he happened to be in cit's that evening.

He had practically decided upon telling Brandon of his find when the Lieutenant came back—and suggesting an even split with him on the value of the stone. This seemed the only course that a gentleman could pursue in the circumstances—and Pottinger's breeding had been sufficiently good for most emergencies. But in a moment or two it occurred to him that the Naval Reserve officer—being himself the sort of man who does certain things or doesn't do certain others simply because gentlemen do or avoid doing them—would at once return the stone to the American girl, Miss Armitage, because it had been unquestionably her property when last seen. The Lieutenant wouldn't see—couldn't be made to see—how he could honorably do anything else. To be sure, there were the rewards offered by Miss Armitage and the Straits Government—two thousand and one thousand pounds, respectively. His half of these would very nearly set Pottinger upon his feet again, financially—enough so, at least, to make gradual payment of the remainder within the possibilities.

But the more he thought of the various hands through which the jewel must have passed since the night of the Governor's ball, and the cynical ignoring of Grace Armitage's ownership in each instance, the more it seemed to him absurd that there should be any question of hunting up a former owner for anything of such fabulous value. And yet—Brandon had met and liked Miss Armitage—also the Rajah of Mong Klang, from whom it was rumored that she had originally obtained it, after saving his life on a B. P. steamer.

Pottinger began to feel aggrieved at this insurmountable obstacle to his course of honorable action. He had always considered himself a gentleman, with the instincts of one—a man of honor. To explain the finding of the jewel and offer to go halves with the Lieutenant, seemed a thoroughly honorable course in the circumstances—one which would be approved by every acquaintance he had among the decenter set. But there seemed to be a limit beyond which one might be too *damned* honorable for everyday life. In this world, it's a case of every man for himself—scratch for a living as best he may. He simply can't *afford* sentiment. Very good! What then? Well—he *had* the ruby, hadn't he? He certainly had. Well?

WHEN the Lieutenant returned, Pottinger began to get nervous. He wasn't quite so sure that Brandon was unaware of the jewel's hiding-place. Gunga had not reëntered the room after bringing the brandy-pegs which his master had ordered for the Captain. There was no indication of any hole or crevice through which he might have spied upon what had been going on there. The Buddha was exactly where Brandon had left it—holding down some of his papers. If lifted, the base probably wouldn't come out again until it received another heavy blow. In short, unless he *had* been spied upon by some one, there was nothing whatever to connect Pottinger with the ruby, as even across the room, nobody could have determined just what the object was which fell out into his hand. None the less, he had the impression, in spite of all his arguments, that he was acting like a cad—until something occurred to him which seemed to strengthen his position.

Circumstances pointed to the almost certain assumption that it had been Sir Martin Jephson who concealed the stone in the Buddha. If so, he must have been fairly sure that it was actually the great ruby stolen from Miss Armitage. He *might* have intended returning it to her at the time he was killed—but he had not done so. If the stone were *not* hers, then it must rightfully belong to Jephson's heirs, if he left any, and not in any way to Brandon—who had certainly made no effort to look them up as far as anyone knew. You see? It's not so difficult to reason out some justification in a case like the Captain's if one puts his mind upon it. But though he felt better about it as concerned his recent acquaintance,

the Naval Reserve man, he was still ill at ease—and soon went off to his own quarters. One doesn't go about with a million-dollar ruby in his pocket, calmly, without thinking of the thing.

Once in his living-room, after dismissing his striker and locking the door, the Captain was concerned with providing a safe hiding-place for the jewel. He couldn't get at the safety-vault of any bank until the next day, and he knew it would arouse comment if he suddenly rented one at a time when he was known to be very hard up. Among other things acquired in his months of plunging had been a secondhand but fairly decent car—which naturally brought the accumulation in his quarters of various automobile accessories. While racking his brain to think of some method by which he might safely conceal his find, his eyes fell upon a tire-valve in which he had meant to insert a fresh washer—and a roll of tire-tape. Wrapping the ruby in tissue-paper to keep the tape from sticking to it, he placed the tire-valve against one end and wrapped the two in a solid mass with many thicknesses of tape until the lump—with one end of the valve projecting—looked like something upon which he had been experimenting—possibly an automatic bulb-connection to go inside the tire itself. Which is to say it looked like nothing which anyone familiar with automobile parts would recognize, and yet like something that might prove an excellent idea if it could be made to work. Such an object might have lain upon Pottinger's table or remained in one of his pockets for months without anyone being curious enough to meddle with it. In spite of this, he didn't sleep that night, and looked rather the worse for wear in the morning.

AFTER a good breakfast, however, and a ride up the Grand Trunk Road, he began to get some of his nerve back—and to speculate upon where or how he might sell the stone with some degree of secrecy. A jewel of premier class is not disposed of without the transaction becoming known, as a rule—unless sold at a ridiculous sacrifice. Pottinger's first idea was to apply for leave, go home to London and endeavor to find a purchaser there or in Amsterdam. But in the first place he would have had to borrow the steamer-fare—and would be facing the certainty that any house or dealer wealthy enough to buy such a stone must recognize it at a glance, and demand explanation of his assumed ownership, which would require a good deal of ability in imaginative lying. So it appeared certain that he must sacrifice the stone for a price much below its value to somebody who might take a chance on purchasing it for speculation. If obliged to do that, there was probably no better market in all the world than the jewel-shops of the Chandni Chowk, right there in Delhi—the only question being to ascertain, without betraying his secret, who of all the Oriental dealers was a reasonably honest man to deal with and how to put through the transaction with such a man confidentially enough to prevent its becoming known.

At this point in his reasoning Pottinger had what he considered an excellent idea. Imitating, passably, the handwriting of a correspondent in Hongkong, he wrote a letter to himself in which the supposed correspondent desired information concerning the most trustworthy jewel-dealer in Delhi—one who had a reputation for honest dealing, and sufficient standing to make a purchase of fairly large amount. After creasing and crumpling this letter, he placed it in an envelope recently received from his friend and then went out to consult some of his brother officers upon the matter with the idea of exhibiting the letter as his reason for so doing.

His first thought was to bring up the subject at mess and discuss the question generally around the table, but this seemed to involve altogether too much publicity—invite comment which he desired to avoid. Presently it occurred to him that the one man who would be likely to have reliable information upon the subject was Major Carmichael of the Indian Secret Service—an officer who could and did go among all classes of natives, in disguise, without detection. He found the Major in his private office, over in one of the new Government buildings—but a brother officer and a civilian whom he introduced as a Mr. Garford were with him. Pottinger's first impulse was to wait until he could talk with the Major alone, but finding that Carmichael was leaving by train within two hours, presumably for Bombay, he decided that he couldn't wait for the officer's rather indefinite return. So, explaining that he had dropped in for a bit of information, he read that portion of the supposed letter from Hongkong referring to the jewel-dealers in Delhi.

"I suppose, Major, that one could scarcely do better than refer my correspondent to Jadukishan Abdulla and Comp'ny—eh? They have about the largest shop—seem to be quite responsible. Eh?"

"They're all very well for tourists—any class of people which expects to be more or less done, an' pays two or three prices without overmuch grumbling. That's not to say Abdulla an' his partners are dishonest, mind. An Oriental is taught from childhood to be a close trader, never to pay the asking-price for anything. For example, if your correspondent had some bits of jewelry to sell, an' knew their value,—really *knew* something about jewels in the open market today, an' what constituted value in them,—he'd not come off so badly with Abdulla. He wouldn't get the top price, of course, but he'd get a more or less reasonable one, all things considered—an' the check would be perfectly good for the full amount. On the other hand, if he merely knew what some relative or acquaintance had *claimed* the stuff to be worth, he'd be offered some ridiculous price which he could take or leave as he pleased.

"Now, if I were your correspondent,—or you, if he places the sale in your hands,—I'd wait until an hour after dark an' then go to the shop of Hop Feng. You'll fancy it's closed, because there'll be nothing but a dim light in the window if any at all. But Hop usually does business up to quite a late hour if he thinks it worth while. A coolie will admit you, take you through an inclosed passage to a much larger *godown* in the rear of the shop. In fact, if you'd ever dealt with his relative Chang Feng of Singapore, you'd find the arrangement almost identical. When a Chinaman works out a good satisfactory arrangement in anything, he sticks to it for centuries."

"Fancy I've seen that little shop of Hop Feng's—down near the Burra Bazaar, is it not? Aye! But is the Chink in a large enough way of business to make a purchase running into thousands if it were offered to him? It's quite possible that my correspondent has some such thing in mind from the way he writes—I believe his family are wealthy."

"The Bank of Upper India has paid Hop's draft for more than one *lakh* of rupees, to my knowledge. Aye—an' it wouldn't surprise me if they honored his draft for a quarter of a *crore* in some particular emergency. A Chinaman of Hop Feng's class not only has his own personal accumulations behind him, you know, but is also in position to call upon God knows what big *tong* or association of *tongs* for backing if he needs it. Of course, there's no such word in their language—they refer to such associations as 'benevolent societies,' but they cover pretty much everything by the term."

"You think Hop would deal honestly with a chap—eh?"

"More so than most white men. If you go to Hop yourself, use my name if you like—as an introduction. He doesn't really *know* what my work is in the Secret Service, but I'm of the opinion that he has a dev'lish sight more information concernin' my movements at times than I care about."

AFTER Pottinger had left the room, Mr. Garford remarked that if for any reason he had been getting information for himself rather than for some one in Hongkong, the Major had very tactfully indicated an excellent excuse. At this, Carmichael and his brother officer exchanged a look which instantly told Garford he had hit the mark—but the Major answered in a noncommittal way that neither admitted nor denied the implication.

"Oh, I fancy Pottinger himself would have no occasion to deal with Hop Feng. He's not by way of bein' wealthy, you know—sufficiently to speculate in jewels—not the sort of chap who'd be havin' family heirlooms to dispose of."

This was no more than acting according to the code of the Service, which tacitly barred either of them from discussing a brother-officer's affairs with strangers—though each was convinced that Pottinger was rather deep in the hole and trying to pawn whatever he had. This Garford—*Bill Garford,* as they'd heard him called by a man who seemed to know him well—was presumably an ex-shipmaster who had made considerable money in speculation of one sort or another. A rough character, sometimes, judging by his occasional speech, but good company for all that.

As for Garford himself, the inquiring Captain had started an interesting line of thought. It had been rumored in the Straits that elimination of every other possibility indicated Garford as the man who had stolen the great ruby from Miss

Armitage at the Governor's ball, but there had been no shadow of proof, and it was quite certain that he hadn't it after being stripped to his underclothes by a gang of coolies who attacked him on the way down from Government House. For once, rumor and circumstantial evidence had a solid foundation. Garford *had* stolen the Glowing Ember at the ball and then lost it during the attack upon him. From that moment, he had been obsessed with the determination to find and get the jewel back if he spent two or three years at the task—which was mainly his reason for drifting up to Delhi. He knew the Chandni Chowk for one of the greatest jewel-markets in the world and had a feeling that, sooner or later, the stone would turn up there for disposal.

MEANWHILE, Pottinger determined to lose no time in seeing Hop Feng. He would at least know better where he stood, whether he disposed of the stone or not. Major Carmichael would have left on the Bombay Express some hours before dinner, and the other officer, Lieutenant Harms, was to accompany him. Garford, the civilian, was a stranger in Delhi, who would not be likely to prowl about the city after dark unless with a party. Nobody else knew of any possibility that the Captain might visit the Chinese merchant that evening. Nobody had a suspicion of what he carried about so carelessly in his pocket, or his life wouldn't have been worth two *annas* in the narrow twisting alleys of old Delhi after dark.

Shortly after eight o'clock he knocked at the door of Hop Feng's shop, and after some questioning upon the part of the coolie who opened the door, was admitted —the door being secured with a heavy bar after he was inside. This hesitation upon the coolie's part was pure camouflage, as every jeweler and pawnbroker in the Chandni Chowk was expecting the Captain Sahib to show up almost any evening with personal effects of one sort or another. Just as Carmichael had described the place, he was taken through a passage into a large building in the rear, piloted between towering bamboo cases of Oriental goods this way and that, until they came to a wonderfully furnished room which Hop used as living-quarters and private office. And the dignified Chinese would not discuss anything in the way of business until his visitor had partaken of delicious tea, rice-cakes and wine—followed by far better cigars than the Captain had ever smoked. Presently, however, they came to the question as to whether Hop Feng would consider the purchase of a very valuable stone—would be willing to pay cash for it?

Like most Chinamen of the merchant class, Hop didn't care to have *every* customer know that he was a man of education who spoke three or four languages fluently—sometimes this was a disadvantage. But in Pottinger's case, after he had mentioned the Major's name, there was nothing to be gained by continuing the conversation in pidgin.

"I am in business, Captain, to purchase or sell most anything of value—probably quite able to pay whatever an article is worth, though for any large amount you'd have to accept my check upon the Bank of Upper India. One does not keep a *lakh* of rupees in the house, you know. What is it you wish to sell, if I may ask?"

POTTINGER unwrapped the tire-tape, separated the valve from something wrapped in tissue, and then laid the lump of crystallized fire upon the onyx guest-table between them. Motioning for the Captain to keep it out of sight for a moment or two, Hop clapped his hands for one of the coolies—and had a black-iron lantern fetched in which had but a single half-inch opening in one side and an intense white light within. When the coolie left the room, Hop placed the ruby against the hole in the lantern, letting this concentrated white light shine through it. The effect was simply marvelous.

"Where did you get this stone, Captain Sahib?"

"Why—really, you know, I fancy that's none of your affair, eh? The ruby belongs to me, of course—or has been placed in my hands to sell for the owner, which amounts to the same thing. Either you consider purchasing it—or not. That's the business between us!"

"Very good—if you prefer putting it that way. This ruby is worth upwards of four million rupees if appraised by any responsible house and purchased from a bona-fide owner. I will give you, without asking further questions, fifty thousand rupees."

"What! You admit that it is worth four millions and then have the nerve to offer me but fifty thousand!"

"As the Captain Sahib appears to know

nothing about precious stones, I will tell him why. Rubies have been found up to eight or nine hundred carats, it is true—but invariably, every one of them except this has been cloudy or contained flaws when above twelve or fourteen carats. The Glowing Ember was cut in Amsterdam more than three years ago and is supposed to have been found in upper Burma. No other ruby of its size and perfection has ever been mined—there is no record of another having been cut. I never saw the stone myself—have no proof that this is it. But the lapidaries who cut it, anyone who has once handled it, could swear positively to the jewel anywhere in the world that it may appear. Now, if I purchase this ruby from you, I do it purely as a matter of speculation, with the knowledge that if found in my possession by anyone who could establish a legal claim to it, the jewel would be confiscated—inasmuch as I could not plead ignorance in the purchase. I must dispose of it to somebody willing to purchase it knowing these conditions—willing to pay me a handsome profit and take the chance of keeping it in his possession for at least seven or eight years, when the statute of limitations might bar a claim of former ownership. Of course the American *mem-sahib* would not pay any such price as I offer you, for her own property.

"As it happens, I think I know of such a purchaser—though it may be difficult to negotiate with him. H-m-m? Pottinger Sahib, I will take the chance of giving you seventy-five thousand rupees for the stone—*now*. And I think you will do well to accept that amount rather than run the risk of complication, probable arrest, if the stone is found in your possession. Of course, if you prefer not selling at such a sacrifice, I shall not mention where I happened to see the ruby. This is entirely a matter between ourselves. At present sterling exchange, I'm offering you very nearly fifty-four hundred pounds—call it that, if you prefer English money."

It didn't take Pottinger more than a moment or two for decision. Such an amount would not only clean up everything he owed but would leave enough capital, if well invested, to pay the bulk of his running expenses from the interest before drawing upon his pay. It was very far from the million or so which he held in his hand with the ruby, but he could get the cash at once with no further questions asked. He might never get as much for the jewel even if it were not found in his possession and confiscated. So he took Hop Feng's draft, found next morning that it was perfectly good, opened a new account in another bank—and passes out of the story. But he did profit somewhat by the lesson. He lived within his means and became rather popular from the taciturn habit which seemed to grow upon him. In his inner consciousness he knew himself for a cad—technically a thief. And he tried to overcome the possibility of a similar break in future. Lieutenant Brandon didn't know until mere chance revealed the fact, some years later, that the great ruby had ever been in his possession—and has no idea whatever as to when or by whom it was taken out of the little Buddha.

HALF an hour after Pottinger left the shop in the Chandni Chowk, Hop Feng came out and sauntered down a narrow street toward the Moti Bazaar as if he had all the time in the world and was going nowhere in particular. Even under the arc-lights of the main thoroughfare, he appeared to be plainly dressed, but a closer inspection would have shown that his dark under-jacket was of creamy brocaded satin, his quilted over-vest of silk that would have been a bargain at twenty rupees the yard, and the tight-fitting trousers of equally expensive material. On the top of his black skull-cap was an agate button. Whether it was excessive presumption upon his part to wear it, none but a Chinese aristocrat could have said—and even such a one might have hesitated about questioning it after a glimpse at the man's clothes and bearing.

Now, the Occidental who rambles about the district north of the Kashmir Gate during the evening—through the civil and military lines—finds himself in the beginnings of a cosmopolitan city which is the new capital of India. It is well policed; many of the newer buildings and residences are magnificent; there are Europeans in evidence along most any of the streets or roads. But let him penetrate south of Queens Road in the old walled city, and he may almost expect to meet Genghis Khan, Haroun al Raschid or Shah Jehan around the next corner. He is back in the land of the Arabian Nights—among manners, customs and architecture which have changed but little in forty centuries. Hence the white tourist should have con-

siderable knowledge of Oriental life and watch his step if he would avoid adventures of a more or less serious nature. Officers of the Indian Secret Service know this district from one end to the other—traverse it with impunity because, when not in disguise, they are well known, and at other times are able to pass as Hindu, Pathan, Ghurka or Bengali without detection. There are also people in the Civil Service and a limited number of commercial Europeans who go through it at night with more or less immunity. But aside from these, the person looking for adventure is likely to be gratified unless, by his appearance, he is too poor and worthless to meddle with.

A hundred paces behind Hop Feng, as he threaded his way through dimly lighted and twisting alleys—under projecting *mashrabiyehs* or solid archways—came a man who kept pretty well in the shadows but didn't lose sight of him for more than a second or two—a white man, in an old suit of clothes and a rough knockabout hat that was pulled down over his eyes. Less than half that distance behind *him,* came two powerfully built Shantung coolies who could have been on his back in two or three jumps at any time. Their braided straw sandals were noiseless on the ground, and they understood keeping out of sight a good deal better than the Caucasian, from their lifelong practice at it.

GARFORD hadn't the slightest idea where he was going, but he was on his way—playing a hunch that Pottinger's business with Hop Feng had been to dispose of something running to considerable more value than anyone supposed. The former shipmaster had no definite reason for thinking anything of the sort, but it seemed to him that the Captain acted like a man who had on his mind something too big to handle—something which he had neither the nerve nor the experience to put through successfully. If this reasoning were anywhere near the mark, if Pottinger actually sold anything of considerable value to the Chinaman, and *he* in turn had any definite idea where it might be disposed of at a handsome profit, Hop Feng would be likely to go out and try to see his prospective customer shortly after the Captain left him. The greater the value of whatever he had to sell, the more certain he was to go out—with some place *not* a tea-house or gambling-joint as his destination. As to whether he might actually have the thing *on* him—well, that was a toss-up, depending a good deal upon the character of his customer.

After many twists and turns in the labyrinth south of the Chandni Chowk, Hop switched under an archway and beyond it into a street barely seven feet wide—with the fronts of several Oriental houses on one side and a high red-sandstone wall on the other. At a small but heavy door in this wall the Chinaman knocked—not in any previously arranged manner, but as an Oriental knocks, which is markedly different from the pounding of a Caucasian.

In a moment or two a small wicket in the door opened to frame a swarthy face. Hop's credentials appeared to be worth considering—for the *khitmutgar* inside closed the wicket and went off to carry the message. And this seemed to Garford the psychological moment for him to act. If the Chinaman had the thing on him, it might be gotten then and there—once inside the wall, it would be too late. If he hadn't it, the adventurer at least knew where his possible customer lived and might consider him later.

Hop Feng had lived too long, through too many years of rough experience, to imagine for a moment that the chance of his being attacked for whatever he might happen to have on him in one of the darker, narrower streets was negligible. He invariably discounted the possibility and took certain precautions. The great ruby, for example, was by no means carefully hidden in a secret pocket; the hands of a searching enemy were far too likely to detect a lump of that size through his clothes. Instead it was carelessly wrapped in a wad of soiled newspaper and rested in a pocket of his voluminous left sleeve where he could put his right hand upon it instantly. And his hearing was exceptionally acute.

Thus, when he heard the faint thuds of Garford's running footsteps behind him, the wad of newspaper was in his hand. Springing upon him from behind, Garford naturally gripped the Chinaman's throat to prevent him from making any disturbance—and when Hop allowed his knees to give out under the double weight, they went down on the ground in one confused heap—against the old stone wall. So Hop was able, with his extended arm, to place the wad of dirty paper behind a little tuft of grass against the base of the

wall as surely as if that had been his intention all along.

GARFORD didn't expect much of a chance to go through the Chinaman at his leisure, and so worked with amazing quickness—passing his free hand over every part of his victim's body, locating several lumps in inner pockets, but none which felt to him like either a large stone or a jewel-case. And he probably hadn't been at work twenty seconds before the Shantung coolies, Hop's bodyguard, were upon *his* back in turn—and would either have knifed or choked him to death had it not been for a low whistle and the more or less silent arrival of four Sikh police, who methodically untangled the struggling figures until the ex-shipmaster could be weeded out and shoved a little distance down the alley. A low voice from an unrecognizable shadow against the wall said in his ear: "Get back to the civil lines outside the wall, you fool—and don't try this sort of thing in old Delhi! You had a narrow escape, just now—the advantage is always too much against you in a place like this!"

Glancing back, the struggling knot of figures seemed to have silently disappeared. As far as he could see, he was alone and he instinctively started off—following the excellent advice which had been given him. But what he *didn't* see and wouldn't have understood, was the way the police released the two coolies, escorted them down the alley to the next turn and then disappeared. They knew all about Hop Feng's bodyguard and were not interfering with them. As for Hop, he calmly picked himself up, brushed off his clothes as well as he was able in the darkness, picked up his wad of dirty newspaper from the base of the wall, and in another moment was admitted through the heavy door in the wall by the *khitmutgar.*

Returning to Garford, who was now wandering aimlessly along the narrow street beyond the archway: it soon occurred to him that Hop Feng would have little difficulty in convincing the native police, if they really *were* police, that he was at that gate in the old wall upon legitimate business, waiting for admission. He would be able to give the name of the person who lived inside—undoubtedly would be permitted to go in and attend to whatever affair brought him there. If so, well—if so—h-m-m! If it were only possible to get within the inclosure, some open window or door might give one a glimpse of the Chinaman, the person upon whom he was calling, and what they were doing together. Garford turned about and walked back—silently, but rather briskly, as one does when moving with a definite object.

Once through the old archway, he stood in its pitch-black shadows and examined the outline of the wall as well as he could against the brilliant stars. Passing his hand up and down on the stones, he found that time and erosion had crumbled away portions of many until an active man, particularly, a sailor, as he had been, could manage to get a foothold, here and there. As the wall was at least eighteen feet high he risked a nasty fall the higher he got—but the thing wasn't impossible. There were plenty of active Hindus who might have gone up that wall like monkeys, in daylight, but who never would dream of attempting it, day or night, because of the certain death awaiting them on the other side if caught. Anywhere east of Suez—like some more civilized localities—it is the lawful customary proceeding to kill an intruder in one's house surrounding grounds.

GARFORD understood this, of course, in a general way—but a man who risks his life every day or so for years acquires a certain contempt for danger which carries him through unbelievable risks and adventures until he finally, in most cases, *does* get it where the getting is fatal.

After listening intently for a moment or so to be sure nobody was approaching, he very carefully began to climb. Twice his foot slipped, leaving him to hang by the tips of his fingers until he could find another toe-hold—but in less than ten minutes he was on the top, within reach of a cypress-tree sufficiently compact in its foliage to risk a jump into it. The tree was shaped like a poplar—the sort one sees in Persian gardens and all through Kashmir. It was impossible to penetrate as far as the trunk—but he got a firm grasp of the outlying branches as he landed against them and let himself down, hand under hand, as any sailor does when going down a rope. In his descent there was no noise other than a slight rustling which couldn't have been heard ten feet away. On the ground he found himself in a square inclosure approximately a hundred and fifty feet each way, as nearly as he could

judge. Surrounding it were high walls—the upper portions of other dwellings and, along one side, what appeared to be a more extensive garden of some neighboring house. Nearly the whole of Delhi within the old seventeenth-century wall is closely packed with buildings if one judges by the appearance of the narrow streets through which he passes, but in the rear of these or the frequent red-sandstone wall on one side, are oases of completely shut-in open ground connected with more pretentious dwellings.

Now, the exterior of the wall had presented a thoroughly squalid appearance. For many years the inclosure inside had been probably as much so—as many an Oriental, spending much of what he had to secure that amount of privacy, would not go farther and beautify it unnecessarily at a much heavier expense. But the last purchaser evidently had been a person of wealth and taste. Even in the starlight, Garford could see that the little hundred-and-fifty-foot inclosure had been made a thing of exquisite beauty. In the center was a marble tank of crystal-clear water with a single jet rising twelve feet or more into the air before it broke and fell back in spray. Along the sides of the garden were Persian cypresses and arborvitæ planted so thickly and of such height that they concealed the surrounding walls—everything but the tops of a few houses.

At the farther end of the garden the cypresses were thinned away to permit views of it from *mashrabiyehs* running up to a height of three stories in the façade of what had been an old sandstone house, refaced with marble. And when the adventurer began hunting for a door, he felt along the blank wall until he came to the farther corner, where a small postern of heavy teak appeared to be firmly barred from the inside. There was no other opening in the wall of the house lower than the second-story *mashrabiyehs,* eight feet above his head—no other entrance to the garden save the little door in the street wall. If anyone happened to catch him there before he had time to climb over the wall again, it was a death-trap—for all its natural loveliness.

AFTER examining the house-door and softly testing it, Garford decided that any idea of forcing an entrance without discovery was out of the question. This left but the grilled windows, or *mashrabiyehs,* and the roof—if he could gain access to them. Searching about as well as he was able in the starlight, he presently noticed that one of the cypresses was growing so near the house that its upper branches were not more than six feet from the farther series of bays with their *mashrabiyehs*—and it occurred to him that if he went up hand-over-hand by the ends of the branches, on the side toward the house, the more slender upper trunk of the tree would be pulled over toward it with his weight until he could reach one of the grilles.

It required unusual muscular control and practice at that sort of thing, because the yielding branches doubled the effort required—but he managed it in a few minutes and got a fair hold with his fingers upon one of the grilles. To pull himself up by these was an easier matter—the heavier cross-framing giving an occasional precarious foothold. Eventually he reached a section of the open grilling through which he could see the interior of a spacious room.

A low *musnud,* covered with silk-mohair rugs, ran partly along one side of the room within eight feet of the bay. Among a pile of silk cushions squatted a rather corpulent man whose long caftan of amber-colored satin and ropes of pearls about his neck indicated a native prince of high rank. His hair and black mustache were closely trimmed in the European fashion. By his movements and command of English one inferred that he was accustomed frequently to go about in European clothes—even to pass for a heavily tanned white man, at times. Opposite him, at the edge of the *musnud,* sat Hop Feng upon other cushions—his agate button procuring for him some recognition of aristocracy which would not have been accorded to a mere shopkeeper. It was apparent that the two had met before in a business way—though the Maharajah of Burrancore was much too wealthy and prominent a man to frequent the bazaars.

"You were speaking, Hop Feng, of a ruby weighing approximately a hundred and fifty carats—of perfect color and water, perfectly cut? And you know as well as I do that there is but one such ruby in the world—the property of an American *memsahib* now in Singapore, though it was stolen from her some months ago. Are you suggesting that I buy that ruby from you?"

"I am asking if Your Highness cares to

purchase a very similar ruby whose history I know nothing about. Perhaps it is the Glowing Ember—perhaps not. I can obtain it for you by paying a rather considerable sum—that is, nevertheless, far below the value of the stone. Which is to say, I am offering you one of the world's great jewels. The Nizam has his own great diamond. The Gaekwar of Baroda has the Star of the South. His Highness of Indore has the famous scarf of pearls, worth millions. Is it not fitting that a fourth great prince of Hind—the Maharajah of Burrancore—should be the possessor of another great jewel in the same class? Would he not risk possible claims upon it for the sake of having such a ruby?"

"H-m-m—it need not be shown publicly for some time! And for that matter, a Maharajah of Hind is not to be held accountable for the source from which he obtains his jewels if he pays for them in good faith. Let me see the ruby! Oh—you're quite safe with it, here—at least, I'm not *that* kind of a thief!"

HOP drew from his sleeve the beautiful glowing thing and held it out upon the palm of one hand. The Maharajah was dazed, as he sat there looking at it. And the unsuspected shadowy figure clinging by toe and fingers to the *mashrabiyeh* outside, nearly slipped to the ground. Presently a low murmur came from the Maharajah's lips.

"What is thy price—O thou who comest to me in the night with such a thing? What price?"

"Will Your Highness give as much as two *lakhs—now*—and take the chance of possible claims upon the stone?"

(The *lakh* is one hundred thousand rupees—the *crore,* one hundred *lakhs.*)

"Two *lakhs*—for a jewel worth possibly half a *crore!* Art thou in earnest, O friend?"

"Can happen! If I ask more, I shall not get it from anyone who knows what the stone probably is; yet it is the greatest bargain in a thousand at the price."

"I have considerably more than the amount on deposit in the Bank of Bengal and the Bank of Upper India—can give you checks at once if you care to accept them!"

"Can do. But—has Your Highness a place secure enough to keep such a jewel—before it can be placed in a safety-vault?"

The Maharajah laughed—and clapped his hands. To the eunuch who immediately came in through a door at the farther end of the big room, he said a few words in Hindustani—and in a few moments he returned with fountain-pen and check-book, followed by a veiled woman, richly dressed. Holding out the jewel to the woman, whose oval face above her "yashmak" indicated great beauty, the Prince said:

"Look well upon this, O light of my heart—for, next to thee, it is my greatest treasure. It is my desire that thou shalt keep it—rendering up to me the jewel when there is occasion for my wearing it at *durbar* or other occasion. Guard it—as thou guardest thyself."

At this moment the adventurer outside the *mashrabiyeh did* slip—ripping loose a handful of the grille—and fell, with enough disturbance to attract their attention. According to all human chance, he should have broken a limb or his back—and been finished by the *khitmutgars* whom the Prince summoned as soon as he realized what had happened. But Garford caromed outward against the cypress and managed to grasp its branches so that he slid to the ground with no worse damage than somewhat lacerated hands. This time he was scared, and reached the little gate in a few seconds—his only possible chance for escape—clawing over it frantically to find how or where it was fastened. With the luck of a fool, his hands fell upon an iron bar which swung upward from its sockets on a swivel; then he found bolts at the top and bottom. He slipped through just as three powerful *khitmutgars* came running along the marble edge of the tank. In the blackness of the archway, down the narrow street, he squeezed himself against a wall until they ran by him; then turning back, he silently walked the other way until he had made several turns and come out upon a wider thoroughfare leading to the Chandni Chowk. Wiping the sweat from his face and neck, he drew a long sigh both of relief and exasperation:

"Ph-e-e-w! That was a close call! The Chink really *had* it all the time—damn him! Almost in my fist when I had him down! The Glowin' Ember itself! An' now a Ma'rajah's favorite dame cops it, in a Mohammedan harem, where a guy might hunt an' hunt an' hunt till he was *bald-headed,* supposin' he gets himself in an' out of such a place alive! The Glowin' Ember—in the keepin' of a harem dame! Good—*night!*"

The Bubble Reputation

Special Agent Britton had never before failed to get his man. This time, however —there's an interesting story to tell!

By Edgar Valentine Smith

IT had been more than five years since anything of the kind had happened on the southern division of the M. & A. Superintendent Dupree had been summoned from his residence. For more than an hour he had sat in his office, impatiently awaiting additional news. At intervals his gaze strayed to the little yellow slip that lay upon his desk. Presently he turned to the telephone and took down the receiver.

"Chief dispatcher's office!" he barked. And a moment later: "Mr. Dupree talking. Have Findlay come over."

Within a few moments Findlay, assistant to the chief train-dispatcher, stood in the doorway. "You wished to see me? Cap'n Jim," he asked.

Dupree indicated the yellow slip. "Got anything more on this holdup, Findlay?"

"Mr. Britton just wired in, sir," was the answer. "The messenger's been brought around, and—"

"Able to shed any light on it?"

"Very little. He—"

"Know what's missing from his safe?"

"Only one package—the pay-roll for the Chickasaw Naval Stores Company. Something like five hundred dollars."

Dupree pursed his lips and mused upon this for a moment. "Know how Britton got there so early?" he asked presently.

"I heard him say, just before Twenty-nine pulled out, that he'd had one of his hunches and guessed he'd better tag along."

"Hm-m-m!" Superintendent Dupree was not given to overtalkativeness. He plucked his stubby mustache with a thumb and forefinger while he meditated. After a moment he closed his desk and locked it, donned hat and coat.

"No use my staying here all night, Findlay," he commented brusquely. "I'm going back home. Britton's on the job, and that's all we can ask for. If anything of importance, turns up, though, let me know. I'll be down early in the morning."

"All right, sir!" Findlay turned to go, but paused in the doorway. "Guess that

somebody must have forgotten that Mr. Britton's still alive," he volunteered.

"P'raps so! Whoever it is, though, is due for a sad awakening. I'd bet a Liberty Bond against a canceled Mexican postage stamp that Dave Britton'll have him in less than two weeks' time."

EVEN at the odds offered, Superintendent Dupree would probably have experienced difficulty in finding takers, for practically everybody in the territory served by the M. & A. knew Dave Britton, the road's special agent, at least by reputation. Remarkable tales were told of him and his accomplishments. His first exploit of real importance was the breaking up of the Hupp and Kelsey gang, some eighteen years before. Then there was Rube Morrow, who for years had terrorized the northern portion of the State. In a misguided moment Morrow, looking about for new fields for his activities, had ventured into the domain of Dave Britton. His stay there was as short-lived for the outlaw as it was disastrous. One night shortly after his coming Morrow robbed the safe of a small station. Forty-eight hours later Britton, following the trail like a bloodhound, came up with him. They glimpsed each other simultaneously—but the coroner's inquest the next day was held over the remains of Morrow.

Other instances might be named, covering a period of twenty years, which had served to heighten the reputation of Britton. Some people even went so far as to clothe him with supernatural attributes. But even the bare fact read like a fairy story, for during the entire period of his incumbency of the office of special agent, Britton had never fallen down on a case.

Physically, the special agent was not what would be called handsome, though he was a man one would look at twice. Tall, he was, and slender almost to the point of spareness. There was a litheness about him, too, which took no account of the fifty-odd years he carried. His eyes were perhaps his most striking feature—small, dark, deep-set, penetrating. The texture of his hair, and his prominent cheek-bones hinted at a fusing of blood with the native tribes that once roamed through the pine forests and cypress swamps of the State. In manner he was quiet, unostentatious, taciturn.

He swung down from the Ten-fifteen in the Union Station the morning after the holdup of Twenty-nine, and passing through the gate, stopped for a moment at the telegraph office. Then he hurried in to report to Superintendent Dupree.

The latter plunged in without any formality. "Let's have it, Dave," he said.

Britton told his story briefly. "Kind of felt like there was something in the air last night, Jim," he began. By virtue of the intimacy engendered by long association with his chief, Britton was one of the few who called the superintendent by his first name. "So I decided to go along with Twenty-nine. At Four Miles water-tank I went out for a chat with the engineer—Mays. Soon as we started again I headed for the express-car. Just as I got in the door, I saw the messenger lying face down in front of his safe. There was a masked man standing at the side door, ready to jump. I threw down on him and fired twice. Then I signaled the train to stop and jumped myself. Picked up the trail and followed it to Glendon. The agent there said that a hobo had hopped Twenty-eight a little before midnight. Seemed to be crippled, the agent said—"

"Then, you must have hit him!" Dupree cut in.

"Couldn't have missed him, Jim."

"What next?"

"Kept the wires hot all night. Got a message from Brentwood as I came in awhile ago that a bum had been put off Twenty-eight there about daybreak. He was crippled too. I'm going out on Seventeen to round him up."

BRITTON went to Brentwood. He spent two days there, and returned—empty-handed. During the week he visited the place several times. The agent was positive that his original statement was correct. A hobo most assuredly had been put off Twenty-eight at Brentwood early the next morning after the holdup, and he was afflicted with a noticeable limp.

Britton stuck tenaciously to the trail, but the second week passed without his having accomplished anything. It began to be a matter of amazement to the old-timers of the road. Was it possible, some of them were asking, that Dave Britton, following a plain trail, hadn't caught his man yet? There were stanch supporters of the special agent, though, who were always ready with the retort that Dave'd get him yet. Hadn't he always turned the trick? Plenty of time. Just leave it to Dave and wait.

They waited. Another week passed. And Britton, upon those occasions when he was in the city, always had the same answer to the eager questioning of those who had a right to know: "Nothing definite yet!"

Then, of course, there began to be talk. It was inevitable that Britton should learn of the things that were being said, for there were not lacking those who saw to it that all slighting remarks, with additions and improvisations, were borne to his ears. He heard them all stoically, and with little sign that he had heard, save a visible tightening of the already taut lines about his grimly compressed lips.

AND presently Superintendent Dupree began to exhibit signs of restlessness. Apparently this had its effect upon the supersensitive Britton, for he too commenced showing evidence of strain. He exhibited a hitherto unobserved tendency toward churlishness when questioned about the case, and his normal reticence rapidly developed into downright churlishness.

The third week passed and the bandit still remained at large.

At the end of the fourth week Dupree sent for the special agent. "See here, Dave," he began with his usual abruptness, "something's got to be done about that holdup!"

"Jim," was the dogged answer, "that hobo that I trailed to Brentwood did the job just as sure as I'm talking to you!"

"Very good—as far as it goes. But where is he?"

"Still somewhere about Brentwood. If I know how to handle a gun, I hit him. I know that he got off Twenty-eight at Brentwood, and he hasn't left there."

"How do you know all this?"

"A crippled man can't travel, Jim, without attracting attention. Everybody in fifty miles of Brentwood knows about the robbery. The stations near there have been watched all the time. All train-crews have been on the lookout day and night. Besides—what you call my intuition tells me that he's there, or near by."

Dupree appeared to be considering the possibilities of this. He was silent for several moments.

"Where's Hardy now?" he asked finally. Hardy was Britton's chief assistant.

"Brentwood—or not far from there. Had him to relieve me yesterday."

"Does he know what to do?"

"Absolutely. I gave him positive directions, and he wont vary from them an inch."

For several moments Dupree plucked at his mustache and said nothing. When he did speak, his words were calculated—deliberate.

"It's been four weeks now since the robbery, Dave," he said, "and nothing definite has been accomplished yet." He hesitated for a moment, and then continued slowly and with emphasis: "I'd hate like thunder to have to call some one else in on the case, but it's got to be cleared up!"

Britton winced as though he had been struck full in the face. A dark flush intensified the bronze of his complexion.

Dupree began shuffling the papers upon his desk to indicate that the interview was ended. "See what you can report in the next day or two, Dave," he said.

Britton inclined his head slightly and started to leave the room.

"And remember, Dave," Dupree shot after him, "your reputation's at stake in this."

"Yes, Jim," Britton answered simply. "My reputation."

On the way out of the building he inquired at the telegraph office for a message from his assistant, Hardy. There was none.

THE next day Britton made life miserable for the operator. He fairly haunted the office. But still there was no word from Hardy.

Late that afternoon he was standing just inside the men's wash-room when he heard fragments of a conversation not intended for his ears. The speakers were Bob Jenkins, who had been the conductor on Twenty-nine the night of the holdup, and Dan McCreigh, master of trains.

"Guess old Dave's finally lost out," McCreigh was saying. "He's getting old like some of the rest of us, Bob."

"Y-e-s!" Britton could almost see the doleful wagging of Bob Jenkins' gray head. "Reckon you're right, Dan."

"Dave aint near the man he used to be," McCreigh went on. "You see, since folks got kind of civilized down here, we aint had a holdup in more'n five years. And it's been a long time since Dave's had to handle a case like this."

"If he does fall down on this, it'll just about finish him."

"If he does? He's already fell down, Bob! With him there when it happened, and a hot trail and everything else in his favor, he ought to 'a' had the man long before now."

"I feel sorry for him, though, Dan. It'll hurt his pride something awful."

"That's the trouble! Too much pride. But he gets it naturally from his mother's side."

"Creek, wasn't she?"

"Half. But Dave might's well own up he's licked this time. Every old horse has to run his last race *some* time, and old Dave's simply wore out. I feel sorry for him too, but—" The words trailed away into nothingness, as the two passed out of hearing.

FOR several minutes after they had left, Britton stood as though cast in bronze, a silent, motionless, Sphinxlike figure of a man staring out into the gathering dusk. It was impossible that he had failed to grasp the import of what he had just heard. His friends—some of them men with whom he had grown up in the service of the road—were beginning to pity him! Worse than that, they already believed that he had fallen down on a case!

Night was drawing on as Britton stepped from the station. A light rain soon became a steady downpour, but he plunged stubbornly onward, unheeding, and it was well past the hour of midnight before he stumbled up the steps of his unpretentious boarding-house and inserted his night-key. But upon reaching his room he did not immediately retire. First he changed his dripping clothing for dry garments. Then he crossed the room to a little old-fashioned horsehair trunk in a corner. From this he took a badly worn folder, such as lawyers use for their papers. He drew up a chair and then very gently and tenderly dumped the contents of the folder upon a table. There was a certain reverence, too, in his manner, for a man should be reverent in the presence of his gods.

The contents of the folder consisted, in the main, of a series of newspaper clippings, some of them yellow with age, others of a more recent date. There were several score of them.

Without a word Britton began reading these. They were all of the same tenor: they recounted the exploits of the special agent of the M. & A. railroad. Most of the clippings contained a likeness of Britton. One, of which he was particularly proud, showed him standing beside the huge bulk of Railroad Babe, the notorious negro desperado, whom he had captured and brought in single-handed. And among the list there was not a single account of failure. It was a public, published record of twenty years' success!

In addition to the newspaper clippings there were several letters. Some of these were from sheriffs of different counties; others were from men high in railroad circles. But there was one that Britton kept wrapped in a covering of silk—all by itself. It was from a former governor of the State, and of a comparatively recent date. It referred glowingly to the wonderful record that Britton had made during his long term of service with the railroad. This last he read through several times. When he had finished, he replaced the letters and clippings in the trunk, which he then locked carefully. Then he put out the light and sat late, brooding in the night.

Suppose that Dupree really should put some one else on the case? Then the fact would be blazoned to the world that Dave Britton had at last been compelled to accept defeat. Blast his reputation for success, and what had he to live for! He had never married; so far as he knew, he hadn't a living relative—was practically alone in the world. What had he accomplished in life, if, after having reared to himself a monument that all men had hitherto admired, the whole should be topped with failure? Failure!

IT was about mid-forenoon of the next day when a clerk poked his head through the doorway which led into Superintendent Dupree's private office.

"Mr. Britton wishes to see you, sir," he announced.

Dupree glanced up from the message that he was reading. "Show him in!" he ordered. He laid the sheet of paper, face downward, upon his desk.

As the door opened again, he pivoted about in his swivel chair—and started perceptibly. Surely it was Dave Britton who had entered the room—or was it? Dupree had to ask himself the question. For Britton's appearance was startling. Strikingly out of keeping with his usual mien of stoical self-possession, he was plainly laboring under the most intense emotion. His face, showing pallid beneath its copper

tint, was twitching. He fixed burning eyes upon Superintendent Dupree.

The latter, after his first involuntary start of amazement, regained control of himself.

"Out with it! Dave," he commanded.

Britton swallowed convulsively. "They're saying things, Jim," he began hoarsely, "that aint so! They're talking it around that old Dave's losing his grip! They call him a back number!" His agitation choked him momentarily, and he faltered.

Dupree broke in. "I wouldn't let that worry me, Dave," he soothed. "A man with your record can afford to laugh at 'em. What's it all about—that holdup?"

Britton nodded affirmatively. "Some of 'em are saying," he went on passionately, "that I'm like an old race-horse—that I'm worn out—a has-been! But they're wrong Jim. They're wrong!" His voice swelled exultantly. "I've got the man that held up that messenger on Twenty-nine!"

"That so, Dave?" Dupree received the announcement with extraordinary calmness. "Good work! Where is he?"

FOR just a moment Britton hesitated. Then he took a step forward. He tapped himself upon the chest. "I did it!" he rasped.

Dupree gasped. "*You* did it?" he repeated.

"Yes! I framed it up from the beginning, Jim. I needed money—bad." An unhalting, breathless stream of words gushed from Britton's lips. "I knew that pay-roll was going out on Twenty-nine, so I went along. At Four Miles I saw my chance. I slipped up behind the messenger when he was kneeling in front of his safe and sand-bagged him. That was before I went out to talk with Mays. I fired out the door twice, for a bluff, when I came back to the car. And—but you've heard all of it before—except that there wasn't any bandit. It was me!"

Dupree made as though to speak, hesitated, evidently thought better of it and remained silent. For at least half a minute he gazed into Britton's gaunt, ashen face. Presently he motioned to a chair.

"Sit down, Dave," he said kindly.

Britton obeyed mechanically.

"What about the money?" Dupree asked, after a moment.

"Here!" Britton thrust a hand into his pocket and drew out a huge roll of bills which he dropped upon the desk. He followed this with a handful of silver. "It's all there!" he explained doggedly. Then suddenly again that note of exultation leaped into his voice. "They can't say, now, that old Dave fell down! He may be out of the game for good, but he went out a winner!"

Dupree had been gazing stupidly at the money. He looked up now, shot a quick, searching glance at Britton, and faced the window. No one could have guessed the thoughts that played behind the phlegmatic mask of his features. For a long time he offered no comment. And when, at last, he did speak, his words sounded at first strangely irrelevant.

"There's a passage in the Bible somewhere, Dave," he said, "—at least, I guess it's there, for I've heard lots of sermons preached on it, where the question is asked: 'What shall a man be profited, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?' The preachers always proceeded upon the theory that most of us have got some little pet god hid away somewhere that we think more of than all the rest of creation put together. Pretty near right too, I guess. . . . . Just change the last word of that text, and it seems to fit your case perfectly. Here you are trying to swap your character, your future, your freedom and"—here Dupree glanced at the money upon his desk—"the savings of a lifetime—for what? The bubble of your reputation as a man-catcher! But you can't do it! Why, Dave—"

Dupree checked himself suddenly. Perhaps he feared that he might be nearing the sentimental. He grabbed the slip of paper that had been absorbing his attention when Britton was announced. He thrust it at the latter.

"Here!" he barked. He was again his normal, brusque, imperious self. "Read that—dammit! And then get the hell out of here!"

BRITTON accepted the sheet. It was a railway telegram. As a man awakening from a dream he read:

BRENTWOOD, 11-17-19—.

DUPREE,
MONTGOMERY.

Bandit robbed 29, wounded by Britton, captured moonshiner's cabin twenty miles east here. Signed confession. Money recovered. Report delayed account impassable condition of roads.

HARDY, 7.30 AM.

The Reel West

When the motion pictures came to the Leaning Circle.

By HARRISON R. HOWARD

I'M HERE to assert that there will be no more movie pictures taken on my Leaning Circle ranch. I'm willing to take a flyer on anything from craps to cribbage, where you've got a chance of detecting a loaded dice or a sanded card; but in this movie-picture game you never can tell when the worst is going to happen—and it generally does!

The morning the movie outfit showed up on the Leaning Circle, I was sitting at my desk in the ranch-house writing to my wife, Mary, who was over at Onyx visiting mother-in-law. Hearing automobiles, I looked out of the window, and there come five cars with enough paraphernalia to build a town.

I went back to telling Mary how much I missed her, and presently my Chinaman, Lee, comes sliding in and says a lady and a gentleman would like to see me. I told the boy to show 'em in, which he does.

I don't make any claims about being a character-reader at first sight, like my foreman, Bill Severs, does; but I'll say I didn't like their appearance any too well the minute they stepped over the threshold. And looking back, now, I realize that this sudden dislike must have been a sort of forewarning of the rise and fall of Johnny Quinn.

The man was an undersized young fellow in a tight coat, a flowering rainbow hat, tailored riding-breeches, and a pair of those foolish little chaps that only extend from below the knees to the ankles. Which is about all there was to him except a pair of heavy spectacles.

The girl, though, I could describe some. She was tiny—everything about her. Her hands and feet looked like a doll's, and her face wasn't any bigger than a minute. But what there was of it! I've seen appealing beauty in my time, but this girl could shake a lump into your throat just by smiling at you!

The man steps forward and takes my hand like he was afraid of soiling his. "You're Mr. Henry Gordon, owner of the Leaning Circle, aren't you?" he asks.

I admitted the charge, and he went on to tell who he was and why, and refers to the letters passed between us. I explained that I remembered it all completely

and he could go ahead and photograph the whole ranch so long as he didn't scare my nursing cows.

"Ah, thank you, Mr. Gordon. Your coöperation will certainly be appreciated. And—" He paused and looked over his shoulder to the girl. "Pardon me, Nita, for forgetting you." She smiled and came up. "Mr. Gordon, this is Miss Nita Dean, our leading lady."

HE didn't need to tell me that. I could see from the first she was far ahead of the rest. She holds out her hand level, back up, and I touches her fingers modestly, fearing that they'd break.

I expected her to smile shyly and courtesy like an old-fashioned girl—that's the impression her type of retiring beauty had given me. But I realized then that first impressions are like first marriages, they aint in the end what they seem in the beginning.

The leading lady grinned at me and says, "Hello, Daddy!"

I was ruffled. That kind of lingo would be all right if I were a nice old fellow with white whiskers and a wobble; but I'm a young man still, even if I have been married six months!

She comes over close and puts her arm under mine, and smiles up into my face. "So you're the dear old ducky who owns this big ranch! Last night at the hotel in Livingston I heard all about how you got married at the rodeo!"

Her smile was sticking in my throat like a fishbone, and I couldn't get it down no matter how many times I swallowed. I gurgled liquidly: "Well, I'm glad you heard about it. That'll save me explaining I got a wife."

She laughs like it was funny. "What's a wife got to do with it? I'm sure we'll be good pals, Daddy!"

I knew for sure then that she was not the sylvan nymph I took her for at first. She was a wild woman!

She goes over to the window and looks at my pots of flowers while the director and I make arrangements. He was just sharpening his teeth on the end of one of my expensive cigars when the door opens and in comes Bill Severs, my foreman, followed by young Johnny Quinn.

"Excuse me, boss," Bill said, looking worried and lugubrious, "but I've got to have a minute on important business."

The director gets up and walks over to the window where the leading lady is standing.

"Boss," Bill intoned sadly, leading Johnny Quinn up to my desk like a lamb to slaughter, "this here young galoot's got it into his head to join the bird gang and make dust on the trail."

Being boss, high plenipotentiary and court of last appeal on this Leaning Circle ranch, I frowned, gave Johnny a look that ought to retard his growth a year, and cleared my throat to dress him down.

"Save it, boss," Johnny says flippantly. "My mind's made up. I'm quitting."

"Just like that, eh? Gimme my hat, I'm in a hurry! What for you leaving us in the lurch this way, Johnny?"

"In the lurch? Quit your kidding, boss. This is the dead time of the year and you ought to be glad to knock a name off the pay-roll."

"That's for me to decide, young fellow. We took you in when you needed a job, and the Leaning Circle has the name of never having a man quit without a blamed good reason. I don't aim to lose that reputation, so just come!"

Johnny squirmed, and looked pitiful at Bill Severs, hoping he'd put in a helpful word. "There's no particular reason, boss, I'm just through, that's all, and want to move on."

The leading lady standing at the window had lit a cigarette and she came over to the desk to drop the match in the cuspidor. I instantly rises to the occasion and my feet, thereby making the horrible and lasting mistake which started Johnny Quinn toward his ruination.

"MISS DEAN," I said to her as she turned to go back to the window, "I want you to meet my foreman here, Mr. Bill Severs. And this over here is Mr. Johnny Quinn. Gentlemen, this is the leading lady of the movie-picture outfits, Miss Nita Dean."

"Howdy, Bill," Nita twitters at my foreman, looking up at him from under her long lashes. "So you're the Simon Legree on this campus, eh?" Bill grins. "Glad to know you, Bill."

Then she shakes hands with Johnny, and I saw right away she was no amateur. She was cold and calculating. Johnny being only a common, ordinary puncher didn't get much of a welcome home. She just nods to him, then to the three of us ensemble, and goes back to the window.

As I turned from this diversion to continue my up-and-down of Johnny, I noticed that he's standing there in his tracks staring after the girl.

Now Johnny Quinn is a susceptible young cuss, and the swish of a skirt is sweet music to his ears, and even though Nita gave him the cold shoulder, so to speak, I can see he's affected instantly with the virus of the deadlier sex.

He turns his handsome face back slowly and looks straight at me. "Boss, I was wrong wanting to quit this way on no notice at all. It's plumb unethical."

MY motto is: "When you get your horse going ride him!" So I gestures disinterestedly, and replies: "That's all right, Johnny. We'll struggle along under the loss someway."

"No, boss, I wouldn't feel right about it."

"Don't worry at all, Johnny! You said you've finished, and that means you've lost interest in the Leaning Circle. We don't want a man after he's that way. How will you have it, Johnny, cash or check?"

Johnny squirms. "But, boss, I don't want to quit!"

"Too late, Johnny."

He turns to Bill Severs. "Bill, aint I always done my work all right?"

Bill nods. "Better let him stay on, boss. He aint so bad for a young fellow."

I hesitated long enough to let Johnny know I wasn't stuck on continuing his company. "All right, Bill, but it's only for your sake."

And that's where I made my second mistake. If I'd have had any avoirdupois between the ears I'd have right then and there sent Johnny to join the birds!

The door opens again and a handsome young fellow about Johnny's age and build, dressed to knock them dead, comes in. "Pardon me, gentlemen," he says, "but have you seen Mr. Lapin? Ah! there you are, boss," seeing the director; "what's the word?"

The young fellow comes up, and the director and the leading lady gather about the desk. General introductions are in order and the order is filled. The young stranger proves to be Perry Bascome, the leading man.

Out of the small talk the director suddenly says, looking at Johnny Quinn, who is looking at the leading lady, "Mr. Quinn, are you a rider?"

Johnny blushes and admits his weakness.

"I'd like to engage you to double for Mr. Bascome in the riding shots," said Lapin. "It's too dangerous for a man not a skilled rider and Mr. Bascome has never been aboard a bronc."

Johnny, much pleased, shrugs his shoulders in my direction. I nods my permission, as it was in my agreement with the director that, as this is our slack time on the ranch, he could hire the boys for riding scenes.

"Fine!" twittered Mr. Lapin. "In one of the scenes especially there is hard riding. The hero rides after a wild horse ridden by the heroine and saves her. Miss Dean is an expert horsewoman, so will need no double. Mr. Quinn, do you think you could ride up alongside a galloping horse, pick Miss Dean off its back, and swing her on behind you?"

Johnny suddenly found something terrible interesting on the toe of his boot. "You mean Miss Dean here?" he asked.

"I said Miss Dean," Lapin replied equably. "Think you could do it?"

Johnny's face beamed, and looking up nodded with a gulp. "Uh huh!" he says, which translated from emotional to real English means "yes."

Johnny was standing like a dummy looking at Nita Dean from eyes that would have burned her pretty pink complexion if she was nearer. Nita looked away, very bored, opened her dainty red mouth to yawn and says, "ho hum!" which translated as before means "poor fish!"

THE movie company made quite a little family when they were all together. The two carpenters put up tents in the sheltered gully behind the house-well, and the actors spent the first afternoon making themselves to home.

Next morning they started work on the picture, shooting outside scenes while the carpenters were at work dolling up an old shack I let them use for the heroine's home. The hero didn't seem to have any more home than a rabbit; he lived romantically out under the stars with nothing for shelter but his slicker.

The first shot they took was down by the corral. The heroine was standing by the fence looking lonesome. The hero is supposed to come dashing up on his pinto, swing to the ground and kiss her real brotherly. This being an early kiss in the

picture it's got to be very platonic, the director explains without translating, so that it wont eclipse the real clutch at the end.

When Mr. Lapin, the director, had talked over the scene a couple of times, the camera-man gets ready and at the word starts cranking. Nita Dean, dolled up like a cow-girl—whatever that is—starts looking lonesome; Perry Bascome comes up gingerly on the pinto, steps to the ground like he was disembarking from a flivver, and kisses Nita right brotherly.

"Cut!" yelled the director. "Rotten! Rotten! Rotten! Rotten!"

At first I thought he was giving a barber-college yell, then I saw he was in earnest.

"Bascome," he roared, "that's a horse you're supposed to be riding, not a chair. Come up with a bit of speed and swing off like you was anxious to kiss Nita before the horse beats you to it. Try it again!"

When they were all set once more, the director hollers, "Action! Camera!" or something of the sort and Bascome comes galloping up. "Faster—more pep!" yells Lapin.

AND right there Perry makes his mistake. He gave her the gas entirely too sudden by digging the pinto with those elaborate spurs he's wearing. No horse likes that kind of treatment and the pinto just naturally stops sudden with all fours stiff. Over his head goes Perry and hits the ground like a full-grown steer.

Nita screamed and Lapin swore and we all ran to the leading man. He tried to get up but his leg wouldn't stand the pressure.

"Looks busted to me," I told Lapin when I'd examined the boy's leg.

"Damn!" Lapin said. "The very first day and wasting all that film when we haven't got any too much with us!"

The elderly actor who was to take the part of the sheriff and who, I learned later, was Bascome's father, looked at Lapin as though he was about to climb him.

"That's all you think about, Lapin. Film! The boy's leg is broke or badly hurt, and you rant about film! Haven't you got any feeling at all? I'm going to take him into town and have the doctor look at him."

When the old man with his son and a driver had left, Lapin looked around bewildered. "Where's Mr. Quinn? Get on the horse, Quinn, and we'll take some distant riding shots where you double for Bascome. Can't waste time waiting to hear whether his leg's busted or not."

So for a couple of hours Johnny cavorts over the landscape, doing some fine riding. They were all unimportant scenes, and he was always alone in them.

At noon the auto driver comes back from Livingston and reports that Bascome has a compound fracture and just naturally is starting for home and mother. When Lapin hears this he seems sort of faint and leans back against the corral.

"We're away out here miles from nowhere and two actors leave us in the lurch! Ye Gods!" He ruffled his hair with his long fingers and yells, "Quinn! come here a minute!"

Johnny shambles up and Lapin barks at him, "I want you to take Bascome's place!"

Johnny was sure startled and so were Bill Severs and I. But Lapin goes on like it was all in the day's work: "Actors aren't very important anyway so long as they're handsome and have a good director. All you got to do, Johnny, is remember the directions I give you and carry them out to the letter. Want to try it?"

Johnny looks at the leading lady, then at me. I nods, thereby making another grave mistake. That nod clinched Johnny's downfall.

"All right," says Lapin, and turns to Bill Severs. "Mr Severs, will you help out by being sheriff? There isn't much to the part, only in the big climax scene, and I'm sure you're more than equal to it!"

"I'll try anything once," said Bill.

"Thank you, Mr. Severs. All right, Quinn. Now we'll take that first kiss scene. Let's go!"

THE camera clicks; Johnny gallops the pinto up to the corral, and swinging off with a royal gesture, up and kisses Nita Dean.

"Cut!" yells Lapin, and Johnny lets Nita come up for air.

"Fine, Mr. Quinn! You're just awkward enough and timid enough to make that first kiss clumsily effective!"

Johnny swallows and looks at Nita out of the corner of his eye. "Uh huh!" he says.

Nita Dean looks bored as Swiss cheese and yawning says "ho hum!"

And looking back, now, I figure that "ho-hum" yawn must be the secret-sign and battle-cry of the vampires' union.

ONE evening about a week later Bill came into my office at the ranch-house all out of breath with a scared look in his eyes. He sat down in his regular chair across the desk, and looking at me doleful as a cow, shakes his head.

"Boss, it's terrible!"

"Sure it is, Bill," I replied, passing him my cigars. "I got 'em last spring and had an awful time getting rid of them. But since I married and quit whisky—"

"Boss," he cut in, "your humor is as exhilarating as sad music. They're cooking up on Johnny Quinn! They're planning to have him vamped! It's nothing to laugh at, I tell you!"

I was startled. "Shoot fast, Bill," I ordered.

"Well, boss, you've been so busy you haven't been out to see what's going on. But I have. They've finished all the long shots and are working on what Lapin calls 'dramatic situations.' Now, as an actor Johnny is a darn good puncher, but I guess he don't savee exhibiting emotion. All day Lapin has been tearing his hair and yelling about Johnny being cold as dead fish in the love scenes.

"It seems they're getting very short of fillum, and Lapin's afraid it wont last out to the end of the picture. And Johnny being an amateur actor he sometimes has to be taken over twice or three times. So Lapin's getting worried—and desperate!

"Just after dark I went over to the leading lady's tent to give her a handkerchief she lost and I found. When I got in front of her place and was going to call her, I heard she and Lapin inside talking. I'd have gone on but I happened to hear Lapin mention Johnny."

Bill cleared his throat and shook his head. "Lapin says, 'Nita, you've got to help me, or the picture'll be a failure.'

" 'I don't like the idea,' says Nita. 'It wouldn't be so bad if I liked Johnny, but I don't and I can't flirt with somebody that don't thrill me. Now if Mr. Quinn was like Mr. Gordon—' "

"Never mind the details, Bill!" I snapped. "Give us the meat and let the hide dry."

Bill looked hurt. "But boss, I'm just telling you what I heard. Lapin is pretty sore and says: 'Nita, you got to do it! Flirt with Quinn. Get him human and in love with you. He's as easy for me to work with now as a piece of ice, but if he falls in love with you I can do something with him!'

" 'He's a fish,' says Nita.

" 'I don't care if he's a halibut, Nita,' replied Lapin. 'Oh, I suppose money talks. A thousand for the job, Nita!'

"She's a real vampire, Henry," Bill remarks, wagging his head again. " 'All right, Lapin,' Nita says quickly. 'Money looks good to me.'

" 'And you got to get results!' Lapin orders.

"Nita laughed hardlike. 'I'll make him fall like a ton of bricks. The poor fish!' "

Bill puts out his hands appealing to me. "Boss, they're going to break Johnny's heart, and he's a sensitive young cuss! He'll get in deep with that blamed vampire and when the last scene is shot, and he gets the cold shoulder from her, he's liable to do anything—kill himself even! Boss, suggest something to do!"

"Damn!" I says, getting to my feet. "Nobody can treat one of my boys that way and get away with it! Come on, Bill, we'll get ahold of Johnny and warn him."

We goes out into the moonlight and starts toward the bunk-house. As we passed the clump of cottonwoods near the wagon shed, I heard voices and halted to listen in the shadow of the trees. Out in front of the shed is an old open buggy-body without wheels, and sitting on the seat of it in the moonlight are Nita Dean and Johnny Quinn.

"Johnny, dear," we heard Nita say, and saw her put a hand on top of his, "you're a lovely boy, and if I'm not careful I'll be losing my heart to you. You're a regular male vampire, Johnny, and you are taking advantage of me by flirting. Please don't make me fall in love with you!"

I DIDN'T wait to hear Johnny's comeback. I led Bill quietly back to the ranch-house. He drops into his chair, and looks rather despondent.

"We was just in time to be too late!" he says. "Gosh, Henry, aint she some fast worker?"

"And clever!" I admits, believing in paying the devil his dues. "She vamps him by calling him a vamp and asking him please not to vamp her!"

Bill seems to tremble all over with righteous anger. "Henry, that's what you call exploitation by indirection!"

I commenced to get real worried at that; I hadn't thought it was quite that bad.

"You're wrong, Bill," I replied. "Maybe you call it that but I'm right sparing of profanity since Mary married me."

Bill seems about to choke over something.

"Why didn't you up and butt in?"

"It's too late, Bill. The boy has already fallen and he wouldn't have listened to us. He'd probably get mad and make things worse. The only thing we can do now is to get good and even with Lapin and that woman for jobbing Johnny this way!"

"I'll bet she's an ignorant little gutter-snipe!" Bill explodes, getting nastier every minute. "Probably they picked her up in the tenderloin and put her in the pictures because of her face!"

"Stop orating uselessly, Bill," I says, "while I think."

I smoked a while in silence and I had a hard time getting out of my head that thought that perhaps Nita Dean *did* come from the tenderloin. Then suddenly my groping thoughts collide with an idea. "I've got it, Bill!" I admits.

I pass the cigars again and when Bill is comfortable, he begs me to elucidate.

"We'll have revenge. Bill. I was reading that scenario today. Now listen carefully. In the last big scene—climax they call it—Johnny, who is a young fellow with a terrible temper and who has lost his girl because of it, takes a terrible insult from the sheriff—which is played by you, Bill—and exhibits wonderful self-control in refusing to fight you, thereby showing the refining influence of woman, and winning the girl.

"Now, Bill, here's the point. Lapin is going to take that scene last. He's getting short of film. It's a long scene and will take about all the film in the camera. Now if I was to go to the tent after they started shooting that scene and swipe whatever raw film is left, and then the scene should be spoiled, what would be the result?"

Bill looked at me from beaming eyes. "That little director cuss would be just plumb ruined! But how you going to spoil the scene, Henry?"

"I'm not going to. Johnny Quinn is!"

"Johnny? Boss, they got that boy under their thumb."

I smiled at Bill's lack of perception.

"William, listen! At the climax of that scene, as I just explained, you, the sheriff, come in and insult Johnny scandalous. And he's too proud—too refined—to fight. That's the point of the picture; a woman's love overcomes a man's elemental nature!

"Now if at that moment, instead of just mumbling with your lips to represent the insult, you was suddenly to explain to Johnny that the leading lady is a vampire, hired for cold cash to trick him, besides being from the tenderloin and probably none too moral—what would happen? Would Johnny be too proud to fight; would he remember to be refined by the influence of woman? Why, Bill, he'll just climb your carcass like an uncultured wild cat!"

"Wonderful!" says Bill, so fervently I passed him a fresh cigar.

"That spoils the show," I went on, right proud of the idea. "It kills the sense of the story, and when Lapin sends for the rest of the film for a retake and finds none there—"

"Boss," says Bill in ecstasy and free from sarcasm, "you ought to write a melodrama!"

Which is Bill's idea of a compliment, but the more I think of it the less I think of it.

FOR two weeks they go prancing over the profile of the country shooting scenes and getting themselves worked up to the proper pitch for the big climax. Now and then I found time to watch them work, and I could notice the change in Johnny.

Lapin had changed his line of complaint. Now it was shortage of film, whereas before he had taken the bile out of his disposition by yelling at Johnny Quinn for being cold.

Even I could see the difference in Johnny's acting. There was an eagerness about the way he'd go about things; and one look at him in an emotional scene would show you Nita had earned her money. There was nothing cold about Johnny but his feet.

One day, after the boy had pulled through an important close-up with Nita, I happened to hear the director say to the leading lady, "You've certainly got Quinn going, Nita." He laughed a bit hard. "You're some little vampire, dear."

She blew cigarette smoke in his face and kicked at those senseless little chaps he was wearing. "You be still! Johnny Quinn is some little vampire himself!"

I tried to remember how aptly Bill had expressed that in profanity, but I couldn't recall the words.

FRIDAY afternoon Bill comes to the house grinning all over and actually presents me with a cigar.

"Thanks be, boss, they're gone."

I struggled up under the taste of the cigar and asked: "Who besides you, Bill."

"The picture company. Declared a holiday for this afternoon. All gone to town, and I let Johnny go with them. Sort of a little rest before the big day, which is tomorrow!"

At those words Bill's cigar suddenly tasted better. "Tomorrow they shoot the big scene, Bill?"

He nodded triumphantly.

"Fine! Now, Bill, when they get out to the set in the morning you have Elmer Jones sneak into the camera-man's tent and swipe all the new film he can find there."

"Don't need to, boss. Lapin told the company today that he's just got enough film left for the big scene and the final fade-out—whatever that is. Which is the reason for the little holiday. Lapin's been drilling us on that big scene till we all know it by heart. He is figuring on a final rehearsal in the morning, then the shot, and he says its got to be perfect or the whole job's ruined!"

"Bill," I says, full of enthusiasm, "the old horseshoe is pointing our way. Now, you know what to say to Johnny in the big scene?"

Bill chuckles like a rattlesnake. "Boss, when I have my little say to Johnny, he's going to forget all about the picture and the influence of woman, and just naturally fight."

"That's fine, Bill. And now you go out and send me in Elmer Jones."

When Elmer came in I said: "Tomorrow, Elmer, I've got a job for you. We're planning to spoil that movie picture. When they start shooting the big scene you stand behind Lapin and the camera-man and have two guns with you. If anything out of the ordinary happens you cover those two galoots and tell them if the camera-man stops cranking, or Lapin tries to interfere, you'll bore them both!"

Elmer swallows hard. "But boss, I'm Johnny's riding partner and he's got his heart set on the success of the picture. I can't—"

Thereupon I breaks out with rash and tells him the foul plot against Johnny. Elmer's for doing some killing on the spot, but Bill and I finally get him to see the light and he realizes that our brand of revenge is more subtle and effective. Johnny's way Lapin would be just dead; our way he'll wish he was!

I was up at break of day next morning, and as soon as breakfast was over Lapin herds his flock down to the set which the carpenters had built in the sheltered gully to represent the inside of the heroine's home.

I could see that Lapin was pretty nervous. "Now, listen," he said to the company, "we've gone over this scene half-a-dozen times. We'll rehearse it once more. There'll be no excuse for a mistake—and Lord help anyone who makes one. The scene has got to be shot right the first time. We haven't got enough film for a retake. Let's go with the rehearsal!"

THE scene opens with Johnny and Nita under great emotion talking across the kitchen table. She pleads with him, and he shrugs his shoulders to indicate that it's no use—he's got a wicked temper and can't help it. Nita reaches a climax of pleading when the door opens and Bill, the sheriff in the employ of the villain, comes striding into the room.

Bill laughs at the sight of the two of them; Johnny gets up and faces him with stiff jaw. Nita presses her hands to her bosom and registers fear. The sheriff begins to argue with Johnny who shakes his head. Bill continues to argue, and Johnny visibly begins to weaken. Nita's fear increases and she steals up behind Johnny with tears in her eyes and presses his hand in hers and behind his back leans down and kisses his fingers.

At that moment Bill's lips form the words:

"You're a sheep-herder and a horse-thief!" which of course is an insult no man can take. Johnny stiffens! He shows his teeth! But he doesn't move. Nita is still kissing the nicotine off his fingers. He raises his chin and laughs over the sheriff's head. He's too proud to fight! The refining influence of woman has conquered!

"Wonderful!" yells Lapin. "The finest rehearsal I've ever seen! Nita, you're very effective. Quinn and Mr. Severs are both excellent. Mr. Severs, your sardonic smile is great. Now we'll shoot the piece!"

I winked at Elmer Jones and he takes his stand behind the director and the camera-man. Bill goes out of the door and closes it. Nita and Johnny take their

places at the table again. My breath-pump begins to miss and wheeze and sputter.

"Ready, folks?" Lapin inquired in a thin, excited voice. "Careful now—remember we can't retake. Get up some tears, Nita, dear! Look helpless, Johnny. Great! All right. Camera! Shoot!"

"Clickety-click, clickety-click," says the camera.

"Please be a man!" says Nita's tearful eyes.

"I'm a free and easy wild-cat and can't help it!" says Johnny's shrug.

"Great!" yelps Lapin, ringing his hands. "Come in now, Mr. Severs."

Bill opened the door and strode in. I got to admit he's a pretty good amateur actor. I never knew before he could imitate the innocent, new-born-babe look of a politician. I nods to Elmer Jones and he pokes a revolver into the ribs of Lapin and the camera-man. They both looked startled.

Elmer whispers: "If you guys stop that camera or interfere with the scene I'm going to plug holes clean through you both."

Lapin looks at me, and I says: "Better obey orders, gentlemen."

Elmer laughs. "Don't worry about them obeying, boss. Crank that box, you!"

By that time Bill had crossed to the table and stood before Johnny and Nita Dean, who aren't wise to what's happened out there. Bill laughs like a sardine, and Johnny faces him like a Greek god. Nita sneaks up and kisses the hand Johnny puts behind him for the purpose.

Then Bill clears his throat, and my heart pops up into mine.

"Johnny," Bill says to the leading man, "you've been a poor deluded fish long enough. I'm going to open your eyes for you right now!"

Johnny looks startled and whispers hoarsely: "Use your lines, Bill! Use your lines! You'll get Lapin sore!"

"This aint in the picture altogether, Johnny," says Bill. "I want to tell you about that there Dean girl who has been making eyes and mooning around you."

"Bill, are you crazy?" Johnny gasps. He didn't dare look at the director, and hearing the camera click right along he naturally knows the scene is being shot.

"Johnny," Bill goes on wickedly, "you're nothing but a poor unsophisticated boob, and these bald-head vultures from Loz Ongalez—Lapin and Miss Dean—have just naturally played you for a fall guy."

The red temper was getting into Johnny's cheeks now. "Bill, you better watch your step!" he barks.

"Yea!" says Bill, insolent as Limburger cheese, "and I'm watching yours too. You got the idea that Nita's in love with you! Pooh! pooh! also pooh bah! and a couple of piffles!" Bill rears himself up to dramatic heights. "Johnny, I hate to tell you this, but that there girl took a thousand dollars from Lapin to vamp you!"

"Not—not—" Johnny stutters.

"Exactly," says Bill. "And she aint none too good, besides."

Nita Dean was crouching behind Johnny, kissing his hand and whimpering at each word from Bill. It was just like real happenings; not like acting at all. And when Bill reached the last word she just crumpled up and fainted on the floor.

"You're a damned liar!" screams Johnny, and then and there forgot all about the picture and the alleged refining influence of woman, and just simply uncoiled in front of Bill Severs like a package of steel springs.

IT was considerable battle. Johnny fought like a catamount, screaming curses at Bill every moment. Bill fought hard and cut Johnny up some, until I got sick of blood and called to Bill to apply the chloroform. Bill did so, hooking a wicked uppercut, and Johnny went to sleep.

"Let them cut!" I yells at Elmer Jones, who pockets his guns. I looked from Elmer to Lapin expecting to get my revenge by the expression of his face. But I found the little director trembling all over and grinning. He runs up to me and shakes hands like I'd done him a favor.

"Mr. Gordon, I don't understand all this, but that's the greatest climax scene I've ever seen taken. Have you ever directed a movie before, Mr. Gordon? Extraordinary! Out of the rut! The greatest fight ever filmed! This is going to be a knock-out on the silversheet!"

"Huh?" I asks.

"I'll change the story so that the hero *does* fight and it's the girl who changes over. She sees the fight and realizes the glorious manliness of physical combat. And did you see Nita pull that faint?"

I had no answer at all, and could only comment: "If you mean she acted that faint you're crazy. Get out of my way!"

I went out to the set where Nita has got up from the floor and is sitting at the table crying in her arms. Johnny staggers to his feet looking for Bill. "Severs," he yells, "I'm going to kill you for this! I'll choke an apology out of you for Nita or—"

"Shut up, Johnny!" I barked.

Johnny turned pitiful eyes to me, and pointed dramatically to Nita Dean.

"Boss, look what he's done to Nita! I—"

"He told you the truth!" I says.

JOHNNY catches his breath, and takes one shaky step toward me. "Oh, boss, not you, too! You don't mean that! You're such a good, square guy, boss. I felt sure we—Nita and I—could get a square deal from you!"

"A square deal from me!" I echoed. "Why, Bill and me have been trying to get you a square deal from Lapin and that —that woman!"

Johnny's face got scarlet.

"Don't you call her a woman!" he screams.

"Well, what the hell is she then?"

Johnny made a vast gesture toward the clouds. "She—she's my wife!"

Thereupon I swallowed my tobacco for the first time in fifteen years.

"Johnny," I asks shaky, "you mean to say you married—she married—you?"

"Yes, I—we did!" he snaps. "We got married in town yesterday!"

I saw then the error of our ways—especially Bill's. I stepped forward and sticks out my hand. "Johnny, you're a young fellow of good judgment. Anyone with half an eye could see that Nita will make you a wonderful wife!"

"Oh, dear old Daddy!" says a voice behind me, and I swung about and Nita throws her arms around my neck, kissing me plumb on the mouth.

"Nita," I asks sternly, "what did you do to yourself to get this way about marrying Johnny?"

She looks up from my shoulder, and smiles pitifully through her tears.

"Oh, Daddy, I just couldn't resist Johnny! He's a terrible vampire!" Those little eyebrows of hers slanted up. "Kiss me again, Daddy, and tell me you forgive and give us your blessing. Johnny says you're the nearest thing to a father he's ever had, so we just have to have your blessing!"

I ask you, what can mere man do? So I kissed her, but drops her right quick like she was hot, when a voice behind me says:

"Henry, how do you attain those strange ways? Do you sniff it, or shoot it in your arm?"

I turned about and faced my wife, Mary, slangy as ever and twice as pretty. She's back from her mother's and I'd been too occupied to hear the big racer come up. She was mad, and her eyes were red hot. She looks from me to Nita, who has run to Johnny and is crouching in his arms.

"Why, Anita!" chirps Mary.

"Mary!" gurgles Nita.

And then and there they're hugging and kissing each other.

"How," I asked my wife when they'd broke the clinch, "did you ever meet up with her?"

"Why, Henry, Anita and I went to finishing school together!"

Which was the last straw and entirely too much for my constitution. I took a fresh chew and starts for the corral to think things over, alone; but when I got there I found Bill had followed me.

"Bill, you're so brainy," I says sarcastically and being boss can get away with it, "that someday you're actually going to find yourself out."

"Lay off, boss!" Bill grumbled. "You thought up that there heinous plan of revenge!"

"Yes, I did; but why?"

"Why? How do I know? I'm no expert on insanity."

"Bill," I says severely and meaning every word, "do you remember that night we heard Nita call Johnny a male vampire?"

"Sure I do," Bill admits.

"And what did you say that was?"

"Why, you see she was vamping him by accusing him of vamping her. That's what's called exploitation by indirection!"

"That's it!" I said triumphantly.

"That's what?"

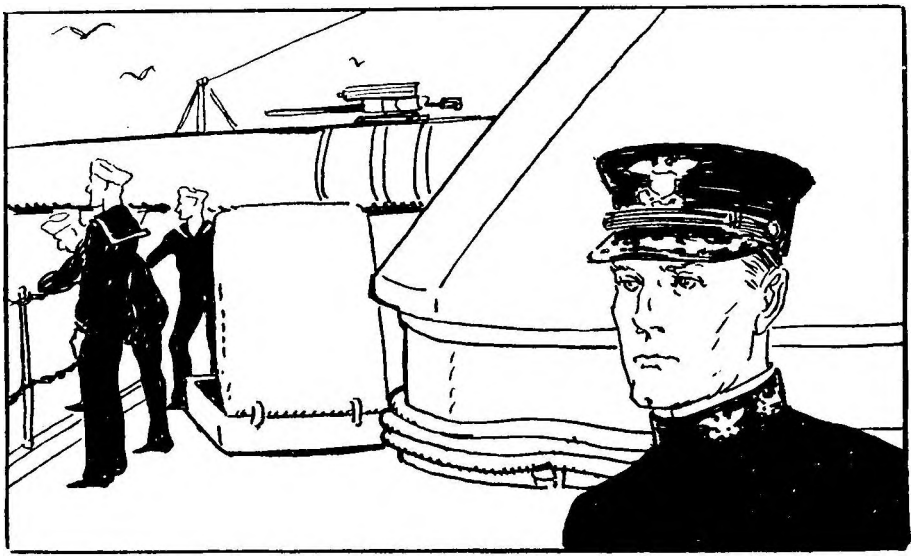
"What caused me to think up this plan. If you hadn't made so much of the matter by using those words—"

Bill groaned feebly, and stood swaying a moment like he was going to faint. Then he takes off his hat and solemnly lays it on his left shoulder.

"What's the idea?" I asked.

Bill shakes his head languidly, and looking straight at my head says:

"Henry, I always take off my hat in the presence of the dead."



The First Lieutenant

The grim old Sea laughed at the Reserve officer on the battle-wagon Alaska; *but the officer laughed last.*

By Warren H. Miller

IN books it is done thus and so; but occasionally the Sea puts a different twist on it,—a dear little twist of its own,—and a man's mind goes blank before it with dismay. A preposterous, unbelievable Fact stares him in the face. What happens thereafter depends on the kind of man he is—nothing else. If not that man, then some other man faces that Fact and downs it, conquers it. Such are real men of the sea.

Lieutenant-Commander Robert Attwood, U. S. N. R., was doing things out of a book, as the dreadnaught *Alaska* slowed down approaching her anchorage on the southern drill-grounds. For the first time in his life he was learning the real meaning of the word *trepidation*, for the Navy, suddenly and without the least warning, had passed the buck to him. It was done as quietly as you please. Attwood had been standing on the forward deck, well beyond the Number One turret, and was dividing his time equally between watching the faces and caps of the watch officer and captain up there in the high bridge before the basket mast, and watching the group of seamen, under a bosun, getting all clear around the huge anchor-gear. And then, without more than a casual grin, Jack Dimock, the regular first lieutenant, had turned to him with a careless: "You take her, Bob."

Attwood blew up higher than a balloon, at first. A moment before, he had been a spectator, an interested watcher and pupil; now the entire responsibility for mooring that mighty dreadnaught had been suddenly shifted to his own shoulders. Curiously enough, his first thought was exasperation at having a seafaring grandfather. This was what it had brought him to! He loved the Navy, had entered it with a yell of delight during the war, served until well after the Armistice, and now gave up his business holidays to take the yearly cruise of two weeks which the Navy arranges for the Reserves. That grandfather was responsible for all of it! He, with his tales of the China Seas and square-rigged ships that had fired Attwood with envy when a

boy—Attwood could recall those ringing, domineering tones of the old sea-captain to this day, and he was now forty. Those domineering traits of the old gentleman and that heritage of the sea that he had passed down to his grandson had driven him right up the ladder during the war. First bosun in charge of a patrol cruiser, then ensign on a sub'-chaser (where he had acquired merit), then, by gosh, lieutenant commanding a torpedo boat! After the war, confirmation and promotion to Lieutenant-Commander, which was as high as he could get in the Reserve.

That rank had got him a dreadnaught for his practice cruise, and the Exec' had assigned him to the ship's first lieutenant as his running mate. Now, the first lieutenant (his rank is usually commander) is the most responsible person on the ship next the executive officer; and among his other duties comes the care and management of all the ground-tackle—anchoring, getting under way, towing, all sorts of deck-seamanship jobs. Attwood had often watched Dimock anchor the huge fighter—seemed as if he could do it himself in his sleep! But after that first wild mental rush-around, the first steadying down, he found himself ditching all that, and clinging fast to the Book, like a downed sailor to a rock in a tempest. The Book, Admiral K——'s "Seamanship," said you did thus and so, and the printed paragraphs were orderly and logical and easy to remember.

ATTWOOD stepped forward in Dimock's place, for the *Alaska* was slowing down. A terrific tide-rip out of the Roads was running. He glanced anxiously up at the bridge, like the righteous looking to the hills for help, but there was none there. The Navy had passed the buck, and was watching him. Neither the Captain nor watch officer gave a sign. What *he* said and did would go down on his fitness-report, to make or mar it. A wild doubt winged through his mind: did he or the Captain give the order, "Let go anchor"? The Book did not say. It told how you made a tide moor, but it did not say who was to start things.

The majestic *Alaska* had slowed down to mere steerage-way. She rose astern, a thing of long bronze twelve-inch guns, of gray turrets and soaring bridge, of towering basket masts with a bank of smoke curling out of the enormous funnels as seen through the lacery of the mast. She weighed thirty thousand tons. Her anchors were big as a small house, and their chains large around as a man, as they stretched out in front of him, to bend down and disappear in the cavernous hawse-pipes. The bosun stood by the pelican with a sixteen-pound sledge in his hand, while the men kept clear to one side—for a running chain is death.

Attwood looked over the side anxiously. He did not want to make a famous ass of himself by anticipating an order that might properly belong to the Captain, but it seemed that she had slowed down plenty to give the right over-travel. The bosun was looking at him curiously, with something of that skepticism that men have for any untried officer. But there was a good deal of the look of the sea-dog, of a man to inspire confidence in that short, stocky figure of the Reserve first lieutenant's. The heavy, weather-picked face that no amount of desk work could pale, the choleric blue eye, the almost bald red dome of him when his cap was off—these bespoke the natural born sailor. Only Attwood himself knew the wild turmoil of doubt and perplexity that was assailing him at that moment! If only that first step could be made—by some one—and let him get at the rest!

"All right, Mr. Atwood," the Captain's voice megaphoned, and the tones were kindly. He was a veritable tiger of a man, wolfish eyes, heavy, tigerish jowl, fierce bristling gray mustache like a cougar's whiskers; and their intercourse so far had been mostly salutes—but the Captain never knew the flood of relief he let loose in the heart of his poor devil of a Reserve First by those words! Attwood could have loved him—had he not feared the carnivorous beast so much!

"Let go port anchor!" he sang out.

THE bosun smote on the pelican-hook, and there was a savage rattle of chain as the anchor dropped. The sailor up under the wireless stay kept changing boards with numerals on them as shot after shot of chain raced down the hawse-pipe. Ten, twenty, thirty, forty fathoms, he recorded. An absurd impulse to check the ship came over Attwood for a moment; hadn't he better call, "Back her, sir!" to the Captain? Forty fathoms was her proper scope. But in the nick of time, he remembered the Book and kept silent. This was a tide moor.

The numerals kept on changing. They changed slower and slower as the *Alaska* lost way. When the "80" board went up, he looked up at the bridge again. The Captain stared stonily. He had given him his one boost! Dimock was looking moodily over the side. The watch officer was busy sighting through a pelorus. It was up to him, and Attwood went to the Book again.

"Let go starboard anchor!" he ordered. Again the bosun smote. It rattled out, and Attwood checked it when up and down. No one said a word. They were all watching the Reservist taking his Examination. The ship hung motionless, then went slowly astern as Attwood signaled up to the bridge, while as slowly he came in on the port chain and let out the starboard, a seaman on each capstan head controlling the clutch. By the time both chains had forty fathoms out,—ahead and astern,—everybody had left the bridge. Captain satisfied, evidently! Attwood grinned to himself.

Dimock stayed to watch him rig on the riding-swivel. It would be tedious to describe it here. To a landsman it might seem impossible to disconnect both of those huge chains without the ship's getting away —to hook them both into a wrought-iron swivel that itself weighs half a ton, and finally to hang this huge thing through one hawse-pipe, so that the ship can turn about it as the tide turns without twisting up her chains. But it *is* done—one of the first lieutenant's jobs. It takes an hour of hard work, operation by operation, a huge wire-rope "snake," as thick as a man's leg, passed through both hawse-pipes and transferring the chain, while pelican-hooks hold their ends fast so that the swivel can be shackled on behind them.

"Pretty good, Bob!" exclaimed Dimock after it was all over and the *Alaska* was swinging safely to the tide. The Captain came up, looked over the side, sniffed, twisted his mustaches, and went away.

That was all the ceremonial of Attwood's ordeal, but he was more than elated. He was sure of his record, now! Only the Sea laughed—the old treacherous, sardonic Sea, which has sprung gins and pitfalls on mankind since the beginning of time, and has got up a lot of new ones for modern dreadnaughts.

"Wait!" murmured the tides, rippling around the huge ram of the *Alaska*. It had all been done all right, but—

Attwood did not wait. He went below to the wardroom, feeling that that old grandfather of his would have been mighty proud of him. But the old gentleman would have had his reservations too!

FOLLOWED three days during which each and every gun on the ship was bore-sighted for director firing. Many were the conferences between the gunnery officer and the various young watch officers who had charge of the turrets and five-inch secondary battery: erosion conferences, where the life of each gun was taken stock of and its probable new range calculated; convergence conferences, where the difference in angle between each gun and the master directorscope in the conning tower (by which all were fired) was worked out in minutes and seconds; plot conferences, where the coördination of every gun with the plot-room down in the bowels of the ship was decided on.

Attwood saw little or nothing of all this, for the Navy had passed the buck to him with a vengeance. Dimock got three days' leave of absence. Just the few words passed between him and the Exec' filled Attwood with pride, as he chanced to overhear them: "Sure! He'll do—just as good as a Regular—take his watch like any of us—sure thing!"

It did a man's heart good to hear that! Only the Sea laughed, gurgling down in his beard, unheard of them all.

During this time the Captain had unlimited opportunity to indulge in his pet pastime, hunting for that invisible speck of dust that he knew *must* exist somewhere on his spotless ship. The First is responsible for that speck of dust. The old man looked more like a Bengal tiger than ever as he called Attwood to make the rounds of the ship with him. He carried a flasher and it poked and peered into every cranny of the dreadnaught, down to her bilges, speck-hunting. Into the crew's quarters, the marine country, the ammunition-rooms deep down under the turrets, where racks and racks of great shells lay stacked; into the turbine-rooms, the long boiler corridors, pump-rooms, electric-light plant; down, on down, into the double bottom, the Captain bore his flasher, peering and looking for that speck of dust, commenting in rapid fire to his Reserve First as he went. Attwood began to sense dimly that the old man knew his ship better than any other of the thousand persons on board.

They found it, at last. Tucked away somewhere in the double bottom is the battle radio, a place where communications can still be kept up, even if the ship is hammered to a battered tin can above-water. The speck of dust lay under an emergency aërial coil, up in a cranny between a huge steel gusset and the woodwork of the wireless telephone booth. The radio officer—unlucky devil—happened to be there; so he and Attwood heard the tiger roar and shared the caresses of his claws. And it did not make the least difference, either, that Attwood had relieved Dimock and had nothing to do with the speck of dust. The tiger mauled them both, elaborately,—sort of stretching his vocabulistic muscles, as it were,—and then led on with the flasher.

ATTWOOD got used to it in time. The old man's bark was worse than his bite! He was only a man, anyhow—the real Examiner lay just outside the skin of the ship, purring like a lion that dreams of former kills. *He* turned on his Examination when the gunnery officer reported all batteries ready for firing. All the warning that Attwood had was a general order saying that the umpires and observers would be aboard at seven-thirty and the ship get under way at eight. Fifteen minutes before that hour, his forecastle watch was mustered, and the crew of the capstan engine below reported at stations. Attwood rang the bell for, "Ahead port capstan!"

The great cast-steel spool rumbled around and around, while steadily the shots of cable came pounding up through the hawse-pipe. What enormous links they were! Imagine a wrought-iron—doughnut—two feet across, the rims, more than four inches thick, and you have it. Crude, titanic, a chain that Pluto might have forged, it fitted the immense and ponderous dreadnaught behind it. The mooring swivel and gear had been cleared away early in the morning, so that Attwood had nothing to do but haul up his two anchors by their own capstans and then signal the Captain for power. He felt entirely complacent. Nothing to it! And as for his record, that was as good as sealed, signed and delivered (with enthusiastic endorsements) to the Bureau of Navigation already!

In the midst of this complacency the first gentle hint that the Sea had something to say about all this came to him. The port capstan began to labor and slow up. Then it stopped, with the whole power of the capstan engine hung up in mid-stroke. Attwood looked over the side uneasily. The port chain should have been up and down by now, but instead its line of massive links led out at a slant, almost parallel to the starboard chain, strumming sullenly in the tide.

"Stop her!" he ordered the bosun. His heart was beating fast; something unpleasant was going to happen, and he had no idea what it was or how to meet it. All this wasn't in the Book at *all;* there weren't any rules for *it!*

And then the Sea grinned. The *Alaska* lurched and dragged against her starboard anchor-chain, straightening even the sag of those enormous links. For just a moment something bobbed up out of the wash of the waves. It was as big as a small house roof, and was made of forged steel throughout. Immediately it ducked out of sight again,—just a flash of the Sea's grinning tooth,—but Attwood had seen enough. It hit him like a blow between the eyes, an unbelievable, preposterous Fact, but it was a Fact just the same. For that was his port anchor—fouled around the starboard chain!

"Anchors aweigh, there?" megaphoned the Captain's voice with the lash of steel claws in the tones. Attwood glanced at his wrist-watch. It was already eight o'clock, and the target-towing battleship of the day was creeping along the horizon on her way out to sea. The whole day depended on him, and the Navy would not take no for the answer.

"Port anchor's fouled, sir!" he called back.

"All right; I give you fifteen minutes," retorted the Bridge.

All right! It was anything but that! The infernal thing hung out there, blocking the whole game, and all the gear he had to untangle it with—the only gear that was strong enough—were his two capstans. The Navy had gone suddenly silent; they were watching him again.

Attwood searched his soul desperately for something to do about it.

"Ahead starboard capstan!" he croaked. At least it would do no harm to bring this thing in a little and see how bad it really was. The capstan clanked, and the starboard links began to come slowly in, creeping like huge turtles across the deck and feeding down into the chain lockers, where men below with steel hooks laid each link

in a proper fyke. The port chain veered around through the depths of the Sea. Attwood groaned, as it laid across the great steel ram, and hoped his soul out that it would not foul the torpedo outlet or anything! Then that malignant anchor came to view again. Like some monster marine creature it swam up out of the depths, its huge flukes clasping the equally huge body of the starboard chain.

"Easy there with the capstan!" he ordered, slowing down with turns of his wrist. "Stop!"

THE whole business was now hanging below the starboard hawse-pipe, and it was as bad as it could possibly be. Everything was at a standstill. No further could the starboard anchor be gotten up until this sullen and devilish clog be freed from its chain. The port chain now crossed the ram—Attwood thanked his stars that it had fouled nothing below nor caught under the bottom (that *would* have been hopeless!)—and it joined its anchor in a graceful loop, *after* making a complete turn around the starboard chain! The latter, not content with the loving embrace of the port anchor flukes, had managed to corkscrew itself at least once around the anchor stock. All these things weighed tons. To move even one chain link would require at least the fish-fall tackle, a rope as thick as a man's arm, but even then where would you be? Verily the Sea had been playing with those anchors, in spite of the riding swivel!

It just *couldn't* be, you know, Attwood stormed under his breath, as he cursed the whole tangle fervidly; but there was the Fact, staring him in the face, grinning at him in the way the Sea has when you are to do something about it and do it quick. If he could only get away into the quiet of his stateroom and figure it out with paper and pencil! The huge masses of steel looked *so* hopeless, *so* ponderous and immovable, when you faced them and tried to think!

A heavy breathing sounded beside him, and Attwood turned and sprang to salute, for the Captain was looking over the side. His tigerish eyes narrowed, and then he looked at Attwood.

"Hm!" he said, glancing at his wrist watch and standing back a few paces.

Attwood looked around wildly, for everyone was waiting. His mind took a lightning-like circuit, illuminating all his experience with ships and men since childhood. It was all in one flash, even including that secondhand, evanescent experience got from books—but there was no answer. His thinking capacities seemed paralyzed before that sullen mass of steel below; at a time like this you did not think—you *knew,* or else stood aside and let some other man do it. Even the bosun seemed to have the Answer in his eyes; his mind was evidently already made up as to what ought to be done.

And then way back out of Attwood's childhood, came a voice that carried the Answer. He could hear the old sea-captain telling him of an experience something like this, when he was caught in a sudden shift of wind in Cheefoo harbor and had to get out to sea without delay. The old gentleman's sharp, dominant voice, commanding, sure with the experience of a lifetime on the immortal ocean, barked out in choppy narrative: "And I ran forward to where Mr. Blount, the mate, was muddling up on the forecastle. I said, 'Mr. Blount—' "

Attwood looked over the side for the last time. Why, the two predicaments were precisely alike, except in degree!

"Bosun!" his voice rang out, "veer off a little on the starboard chain and come in on the port—she'll clear!"

BOTH capstans rumbled. Huge chain-links scraped around the steel prow to port and dropped clanking out of the hawse-pipe to starboard. An unbelievable lesson in mechanics followed; for as the ship straightened out the starboard chain once more, the pull on the port chain set that whole mass of the anchor in motion. Like a sailor wriggling around a rope, that ponderous mass of steel turned once, twice, about the taut starboard chain, unwound itself and dropped with the crash of many tons of ore into the sea! A huge white splash went up, showering everybody with spray. Swiftly the port chain tore itself around the ram, to hang with a grunt and a rumble up and down from the port hawse-pipe—free!

The Captain turned on his heel. "Ten minutes late!" he growled. "Well—I suppose we have to make allowances for you Reservists!"

But there was that in his eyes that told Attwood that his status as a reliable first lieutenant was now fixed, confirmed, in the mind of the Navy.

The Great

A Three-

By E. PHILLIPS

(*What Has Already Happened*:)

THE astonishing new coalition of Germany, Russia and China threatened the world with new war in this year 1934. For Germany, longing for revenge, was leading a restored Russia and a reunited China with her; and Great Britain, dominated by the pacifist Labor party, trustful of the strength of the League of Nations and credulous of her neighbor's good intentions —Great Britain had reduced her army and navy, abandoned her foreign secret service, and had grown fat with material prosperity.

Yet there had remained in England a few statesmen of the old type; one of these, Lord Dorminster, had even maintained a small private secret service of his own; and from one of these agents he received a code message which revealed the plot against England. At once Dorminster summoned his nephew and heir, Nigel Kingley, who waited in conversation with Dorminster's stepdaughter, Maggie Trent, while the old nobleman decoded the message. And in that interim Dorminster was murdered; and the message, except for one fragment, was stolen.

The authorities refused to believe the murder of political significance. Nigel, now Lord Dorminster, and Lady Maggie —who had herself done valuable secret-service work as a supposed governess in the family of the German president— were forced to fight alone. And it was in London, strangely enough, that leaders of the proposed enemy coalition were gathering for conference: Immelan, the German representative; Naida Karetsky, the wonderful Russian woman who was the right hand of the Muscovite leader Matinsky; and the great Prince Shan, the mysterious strong man of China who had lifted the Celestial Kingdom to its feet.

And now individual influences swung the fates of nations: strong personal attractions sprang up between Prince Shan and Maggie Trent, and between Naida Karetsky and Nigel Kingley. Fearing the defeat of his plans, Immelan tried to have Prince Shan murdered at a ball, but a

Prince Shan

Part Novel

OPPENHEIM

Chinese servitor, dressed to resemble his master, was killed instead. So, too, it happened that when Maggie, believing Prince Shan at the ball, broke into his house to steal a copy of the contemplated treaty between Russia, Germany and China, she found him at home and herself in his power. He released her, however, and told her that the treaty was not yet signed.

CHAPTER XXIV

AN hour or so later Prince Shan left his house in Curzon Street, and followed at a discreet distance by two members of his household, strolled into the Park. It had pleased him that morning to conform rigorously to the mode of dress adopted by the fashionable citizens of the country which he was visiting. Few people, without the closest observation, would have taken him for anything but a well-turned-out, exceedingly handsome and distinguished-looking Englishman. He carried himself with a faint air of aloofness, as though he moved among scenes in which he had no actual concern, as though he were living in some other world.

The morning was brilliantly sunny, and both the promenade and the Row were crowded. Slightly hidden behind a tree, he stood and watched. A gay crowd of promenaders passed along the broad path, and the air was filled with the echo of laughter, the jargon of the day, intimate references to a common world, invitations lightly given and lightly accepted. It was Sunday morning, in a season when color was the craze of the moment, and the women who swept by seemed to his rather mystical fancy like the flowers in some of the great open spaces he knew so well, stirred into movement by a soft wind. They were very beautiful, these Western women; handsome, too, were the men with whom they talked and flirted. Always they had that air, however, of absolute complacency, as though they felt nothing of the quest which lay like a thread of torture amongst the nerves of Prince Shan's being. There was no more distinguished figure among

the men there than he himself, and yet the sense of alienation grew in his heart as he watched. There were many familiar faces, many to whom he could have spoken, no one who would not have greeted him with interest, even with gratification. And yet he had never been so deeply conscious of the gulf which lay between the Oriental fatalism of his life and ways, and the placid self-assurance of these Westerners, so well content with the earth upon which their feet fell. He had judged with perfect accuracy the place which he held in their thoughts and estimation. He was something of a curiosity, his title half a joke, the splendor of his long race a thing unrealizable by these scions of a more recent aristocracy. Yet supposing that this new wonder had not come into his life, that Immelan had been a shade more eloquent, had pleaded his cause upon a higher level, that Naida Karetsky also had formed a different impression of the world which he was studying so earnestly—what a transformation he could have brought upon this light-hearted and joyous scene!

THE current of his reflections was broken. He had moved a little toward the rails, and he was instantly aware of the girl cantering towards him, a slight, frail figure, she seemed, upon a great bay horse. She wore a simple brown habit and bowler hat, and she sat her horse with that complete lack of self-consciousness which is the heritage of a born horsewoman. She was looking up at the sky as she cantered towards him, with no thought of the crowds passing along the promenade. Yet as she drew nearer, she suddenly glanced down and their eyes met. As though obeying his unspoken wish, she reined in her horse and came close to the rails behind which he stood for a moment bareheaded. There was the faintest smile upon her lips. She was amazingly composed. She had asked herself repeatedly, almost in terror, how they should meet when the time came. Now that it had happened, it seemed the most natural thing in the world. She was scarcely conscious even of embarrassment.

"You are demonstrating to the world," she remarked, "that the reports of your death this morning were exaggerated?"

"I had forgotten the incident," he assured her calmly.

His callousness was so unaffected that she shivered a little.

"Yet this Sen Lu, this man for whom you were mistaken, was an intimate member of your household, was he not?"

"Sen Lu was a very good friend," Prince Shan answered. "He did his duty for many years. If he knows now that his life was taken for mine, he is happy to have made such atonement."

She maneuvered her horse a little to be nearer to him.

"Why was Sen Lu murdered?" she asked.

"There are those," he replied, "of whom I myself shall ask that question before the day is over."

"You have an idea, then?" she persisted.

"If," he said, "you desire my whole confidence, it is yours."

She sat looking between her horse's ears.

"To tell you the truth," she confessed, "I do not know what I desire. Your philosophy, I suppose, does not tolerate moods. I shall escape from them some time, I expect, but just now I seem to have found my way into a maze. The faces of these people don't even seem real to me; and as for you, I am perfectly certain that you have never been in China in your life."

"Tell me the stimulant that is needed to raise you from your apathy," he asked. "Will you find it in the rapid motion of your horse,—a very noble animal,—in the joy of this morning's sunshine and breeze, or in the toyland where these puppets move and walk?" he added, glancing down the promenade. "Dear Lady Maggie, I beg permission to pay you a visit of ceremony. Will you receive me this afternoon?"

She knew then what it was that she had been hoping for. She looked down at him and smiled.

"At four o'clock," she invited.

She nodded, touched her horse lightly with the whip, and cantered off.

PRINCE SHAN found himself suddenly accosted by a dozen acquaintances, all plying him with questions. He listened to them with an amused smile.

"The whole affair is a very simple one," he said. "A member of my household was assassinated last night. It was probably a plot against my own life. Those things are more common with us, perhaps, than over here."

"Jolly country, China, I should think," one of the younger members of the group remarked. "You can buy a man's conscience there for ninepence."

Prince Shan looked across at the speaker gravely.

"The market value here," he observed, "seems a little higher, but the supply greater."

"*Touché!*" Karschoff laughed. "There is another point of view, too. The farther east you go, the less value life has. Westward, it becomes an absolute craze to preserve and coddle it, to drag it out to its farthermost span. The American millionaire, for example, has a resident physician attached to his household and is likely to spend the aftermath of his life in a semi-drugged and comatose condition. And in the East, who cares? If not today, tomorrow. Inevitability, which is the nightmare of the West, is the philosophy of the East. By the by, Prince," he added, "have you any theory as to last night's attempt?"

"That is just the question," Prince Shan replied, "which two very intelligent gentlemen from Scotland Yard asked me this morning. Theory? Why should I have a theory?"

"The attempt was without a doubt directed against you," Karschoff observed. "Do you imagine that it was personal or political?"

"How can I tell?" the Prince rejoined carelessly. "Why should anyone desire my death? These things are riddles. Ah! Here comes my friend Immelan!" he went on. "Immelan, help us in this discussion. You are not one of those who place the gift of life above all other things in the world?"

"My own or another's?" Immelan asked with blunt cynicism.

"I trust," was the bland reply, "that you are, as I have always esteemed you, an altruist."

"And why?"

Prince Shan shrugged his shoulders. He was a very agreeable figure in the center of the little group of men, the smile which parted his lips benign yet cryptic.

"Because," he explained, "it is a great thing to have more regard for the lives of others than for one's own; and there are times," he added, "when it is certainly one's own life which is in the more precarious state."

There was a little dispersal of the crowd, a chorus of congratulations and farewells. Immelan and Prince Shan were left alone. The former seemed to have turned paler. The sun was warm, and yet he shivered.

"Just what do you mean by that, Prince?" he asked.

"You shall walk with me to my house, and I will tell you," was the quiet reply.

CHAPTER XXV

"I SUPPOSE," Immelan suggested, as the two men reached the house in Curzon Street, "it would be useless to ask you to break your custom and lunch with me at the Ritz or at the club?"

His companion smiled deprecatingly.

"I have adopted so many of your Western customs," he said apologetically. "To this lunching or dining in public, however, I shall never accustom myself."

Immelan laughed good-naturedly. The conversation of the two men on their way from the Park had been without significance, and some part of his earlier nervousness seemed to be leaving him.

"We all have our foibles," he admitted. "One of mine is to have a pretty woman opposite me when I lunch or dine, music somewhere in the distance, a little sentiment, a little promise, perhaps."

"It is not artistic," Prince Shan pronounced calmly. "It is not when the wine mounts to the head, and the sense of feeding fills the body, that men speak best of the things that lie near their hearts. Still, we will let that pass. Each of us is made differently. There is another thing, Immelan, which I have to say to you."

They passed into the reception-room, with its shining floor, its marvelous rugs, its silken hangings, and its great vases of flowers. Prince Shan led his companion into a recess, where the light failed to penetrate so completely as into the rest of the apartment. A wide settee, piled with cushions, protruded from the wall in semicircular shape. In front of it was a round ebony table upon which stood a great yellow bowl filled with lilies. Prince Shan gave an order to one of the servants who had followed them into the room, and threw himself at full length among the cushions, his head resting upon his hand, his face toward his guest.

"They will bring you the *apéritiv* of which you are so fond," he said, "also cigarettes. Mine, I know, are too strong for you."

"They taste too much of opium," Immelan remarked.

Prince Shan's eyes grew dreamy as he gazed through a little cloud of odorous smoke.

"There is opium in them," he admitted. "Believe me, they are very wonderful, but I agree with you that they are not for the ordinary person."

The soft-footed butler presented a silver tray, upon which reposed a glassful of amber liquid. Immelan took it, sipped it appreciatively, and lit a cigarette.

"Your man, Prince," he acknowledged, "mixes his vermouths wonderfully."

"I am glad that what he does meets with your approval," was the courteous reply. "He came to me from one of your royal palaces. I simply told him that I wished my guests to have of the best."

"Yet you never touch this sort of drink yourself," Immelan observed curiously.

The Prince shook his head.

"Sometimes I take wine," he said. "That is generally at night. A few evenings ago, for instance," he went on with a reminiscent smile, "I drank Château Yquem, smoked Egyptian cigarettes, ate some muscatel grapes, and read 'Pippa Passes.' That was one of my banquets."

"As a matter of fact," Immelan remarked thoughtfully, "you are far more Western in thought than in habit. The temperance of the East is in your blood."

"I find that my manner of life keeps the brain clear," Prince Shan said slowly. "I can see the truth sometimes when it is not very apparent. I saw the truth last night, Immelan, when I sent Sen Lu to die."

IMMELAN'S expression was indescribable. He sat with his mouth wide open. The hand which held his glass shook. He stared across the bowl of lilies to where his host was looking up through the smoke toward the ceiling.

"Sen Lu was a traitor," the latter went on, "a very foolish man who with one act of treachery wiped out the memory of a lifetime of devotion. In the end he told the truth, and now he has paid his debt."

"What do you mean?" Immelan demanded in a voice which he attempted in vain to control. "How was Sen Lu a traitor?"

"Sen Lu," the Prince explained, "was in the pay of those who sought to know more of my business than I chose to tell—who sought, indeed, to anticipate my own judgment. When they gathered from him, and, alas, from my sweet but frail little friend Nita, that the chances were against my signing a certain covenant, they came to what, even now, seems to me a strange decision. They decided that I must die. There I fail wholly to follow the workings of your mind, Immelan. How was my death likely to serve your purpose?"

Immelan was absolutely speechless. Three times he opened his lips, only to close them again. Some instinct seemed to tell him that his companion had more to say. He sat there as though mesmerized. Meanwhile the Prince lighted another cigarette.

"A blunder, believe me, Immelan," he continued thoughtfully. "Death will not lower over my path till my task is accomplished. I am young,—many years younger than you, Immelan,—and the greatest physicians marvel at my strength. Against the assassin's knife or bullet I am secure. You have been brought up and lived, my terrified friend, in a country where religion remains a shell and a husk, without comfort to any man. It is not so with me. I live in the spirit as in the body, and my days will last until the sun leans down and lights me to the world where those dwell who have fulfilled their destiny."

Immelan drained the contents of the glass which his unsteady hand was holding. Then he rose to his feet. The veins on his forehead were standing out; his blue eyes were filled with rage.

"Blast Sen Lu!" he muttered. "The man was a double traitor!"

"He has atoned," his companion said calmly. "He made his peace, and he went to his death. It seems very fitting that he should have received the dagger which was meant for my heart. Now what about you, Oscar Immelan?"

Immelan laughed harshly.

"If Sen Lu told you that I was in this plot against your life, he lied!"

The Prince inclined his head urbanely.

"Such a man as Sen Lu goes seldom to his death with a lie upon his lips," he said. "Yet I confess that I am puzzled. Why should you plan this thing, Immelan? You cannot know what is in my mind concerning your covenant. I have not yet refused to sign it."

"You have not refused to sign it," Immelan replied, "but you will refuse."

"Indeed?" the Prince murmured.

"You are even now trifling with the secrets confided to you," Immelan went on. "You know very well that the woman who came to you last night is a spy whose whole time is spent in seeking to worm our secret from you."

"Your agents keep themselves well informed," was the calm comment.

"Yours still have the advantage of us," Immelan answered bitterly. "Now listen to me: I have heard it said of you—I

have heard that you claim yourself—that you have never told a falsehood. We have been allies. Answer me this question: have you parted with any of our secrets?"

"Not one," the Prince assured him. "A certain lady visited this house last night, not, as you seem to think, at my invitation, but on her own initiative. She was not successful in her quest."

"She would not pay the price, eh?" Immelan sneered. "By the gods of your ancestors, Prince Shan, are there not women enough in the world for you without bartering your honor, and the great future of your country, for a blue-eyed jade of an Englishwoman?"

THE Prince sat slowly up. His appearance was ominous. His face had become set as marble; there was a look in his eyes like the flashing of a light upon black metal. He contemplated his visitor across the lilies.

"A man so near to death, Immelan," he enjoined, "might choose his words more carefully."

Immelan laughed scornfully.

"I am not to be bullied," he declared. "Your doors with their patent locks have no fears for me. When you walk abroad, you are followed by members of your household. When you come to my rooms, they attend you. I am not a prince, but I too have a care for my skin. Three of my secret-service men never let me out of their sight. They are within call at this moment."

His host smiled.

"This is very interesting," he said, "but you should know me better, Immelan, than to imagine that mine are the clumsy methods of the dagger or the bullet. The man whom I will to die—drinks with me."

He pointed a long forefinger at the empty glass. Immelan gazed at it, and the sweat stood out upon his forehead.

"My God!" he muttered. "There was a queer taste! I thought that it was aniseed."

"There was nothing in that glass," the Prince declared, "which the greatest chemist who ever breathed could detect as poison; yet you will die, my friend Immelan, without any doubt. Shall I tell you how? Would you know in what manner the pains will come? No? But my friend, you disappoint me! You showed so much courage an hour ago. Listen. Feel for a swelling just behind—ah!"

Immelan was already across the room. The Prince touched a bell; the doors were opened. Ghastly pale, his head swimming, the tortured man dashed out into the street. The Prince leaned back amongst his cushions, untied a straw-fastened packet of his long cigarettes, lighted one and closed his eyes.

CHAPTER XXVI

NIGEL was just arriving at Dorminster House when Maggie returned from her ride. He assisted her to dismount and entered the house with her.

"There is something here I should like to show you, Maggie," he said, as he drew a dispatch from his pocket. "It was sent round to me half an hour ago by Chalmers, from the American Embassy."

"It's about Gilbert Jesson!" Maggie exclaimed, holding out her hand for it.

Nigel nodded.

"There's a note inside, and an inclosure," he said. "You had better read both."

Maggie opened out the former:

> My dear Dorminster,
>
> I am afraid there is rather bad news about Jesson. One of our regular line of airships, running from San Francisco to Vladivostok, has picked up a wireless which must have come from somewhere in the South of China. They kept it for a few days, worse luck, thinking it was only nonsense, as it was in code. Washington got hold of it, however, and cabled it to us last night. I enclose a copy, decoded.
>
> Sincerely yours,
> JERE CHALMERS.

The copy was brief enough. Maggie felt her heart sink as she glanced through the few lines:

> Report dispatched London. Fear escape impossible. Good-by.
>
> JESSON.

"Horrible!" Maggie exclaimed, with a shiver. "I thought he was in Russia."

"So did we all," Nigel replied. "He must have come to the conclusion that the key to the riddle he was trying to solve was in China, and gone on there. Look here, Maggie," he continued, after a moment's hesitation, "do you think anything could be done for Jesson with Prince Shan?"

Maggie was silent. They were standing in a shaded corner of the hall, but a fleck of sunshine shone in her hair. She was

still a little out of breath with the exercise, her cheeks full of healthy color, her eyes bright. She tapped her skirt with her riding-whip. Nigel watched her a little uneasily.

"Prince Shan is calling here this afternoon," Maggie announced. "I hope you don't mind."

"What are you going to say to him?" Nigel asked bluntly.

There was a short, tense silence. Even at the thought of the crisis which she knew to be so close at hand, Maggie felt herself unnerved and in dubious straits.

"I do not know," she said at last. "For one thing, I do not know what he wants."

"What he wants seems perfectly plain to me," Nigel replied gravely. "He wants you."

Maggie made a desperate effort to regain the light-heartedness of a few weeks ago.

"If you believe that," she said, "your composure is most unflattering."

THERE was a ring at the front doorbell, and a familiar voice was heard outside. Maggie turned away to the staircase with a little sigh of relief.

"Naida!" she exclaimed. "I remember now I asked her for a quarter past one instead of half-past. You must entertain her, Nigel. I'll change into something quickly. And of course I'll speak to Prince Shan. We mustn't lose a minute about that. I'll telephone from my room. —In a few minutes, Naida. Nigel will look after you."

Naida came down the hall, cool and exquisitely gowned in a creation of shimmering white. Nigel led her into the rarely used drawing-room and found a chair for her between the open window and the conservatory. At first they exchanged but few words. The sense of her near presence affected Nigel as nothing of the sort had ever done before. She for her part seemed quite content with a silence which had in it many of the essentials of eloquence.

"If the history of these days is ever written by an irascible German historian," Naida remarked at length, "he will probably declare that the destinies of the world have been affected during this last month by an outburst of primitivism. Do you know that I have written quite nice things to Paul about you English people? Honest things, of course, but still things which you helped me to discover. And Prince Shan, too. I think that when he rode here through the clouds, he believed in his heart that he was coming as a harbinger of woe."

"You really think, then, that the crisis is past?" Nigel asked.

She nodded.

"I am almost sure of it. Prince Shan returns to China within the course of the next few days."

"We have lived so long," Nigel observed, "in dread of the unknown. I wonder whether we shall ever understand the exact nature of the danger with which we were faced."

"It depends upon Prince Shan," she replied. "The terms were Immelan's, but the method was his."

"Do you believe," he asked a little abruptly, "that the attempt on Prince Shan's life last night was made by Immelan?"

There was a touch, perhaps, of her Muscovite ancestry in the cool indifference with which she considered the matter.

"I should think it most likely," she decided. "Prince Shan never changes his mind, and I believe that he has decided against Immelan's scheme. Immelan's only chance would be in Prince Shan's successor."

"Why is China so necessary?" Nigel asked.

She turned and smiled at her companion.

"Alas," she sighed, "we have reached an *impasse*. The great English diplomat asks too many questions of the simple Russian girl."

"It is unfortunate," he replied in the same vein, "because I feel like asking more."

"As, for example?"

"Whether you would be content to live for the rest of your life in any other country except Russia."

"A woman is content to live anywhere, under certain circumstances," she murmured.

Here Prince Karschoff, discreetly announced, entered the room with flamboyant ease.

"It is well to be young!" he exclaimed as he bent over Naida's fingers. "You look, my far-away but much beloved cousin, as though you had slept peacefully through the night and spent the morning in this soft, sunlit air, with perhaps, if one might suggest such a thing, an hour at a Bond Street beauty parlor. Here am I with crow's-feet under my eyes and

ghosts walking by my side. Yet none the less," he added, as the door opened and Maggie appeared, "looking forward to my luncheon and to hear all the news."

"There is no news," Naida declared as the butler announced the service of the meal. "We have reached the far end of the ways. The next disclosures, if ever they are made, will come from others. At luncheon we are going to talk of the English country, the seaside, the meadows and the quiet places. The time arrives when I weary, weary of the brazen ticking of the clock of fate."

"I shall tell you," Nigel declared, "of a small country house I have in Devonshire. There are rough grounds stretching down to the sea and crawling up to the moors behind. My grandfather built it when he was Chancellor of England, or rather he added to an old farmhouse. He called it the House of Peace."

"My father built a house very much in the same spirit," Naida told them. "He called it after an old Turkish inscription, engraven on the front of a villa in Stamboul—'The House of Thought and Flowers.' "

Maggie smiled across the table approvingly.

"I like the conversation," she said. "Naida and I are, after all, women and sentimentalists. We claim a respite, an armistice—call it what you will. Prince Karschoff, wont you tell me of the most beautiful house you ever dwelt in?"

"Always the house I am hoping to end my days in," he answered. "But let me tell you about a villa I had in Cannes, fifteen years ago. People used to speak of it as one of the world's treasures."

WHEN the two men were seated alone over their coffee, Nigel passed Chalmers' note and the inclosure across to his companion.

"You remember I told you about Chalmers' friend Jesson, the secret-service man who came over to us?" he said. "Chalmers has just sent me round this."

Karschoff nodded and studied the message through his great horn-rimmed eyeglass.

"I thought that he was going to Russia for you," he said.

"So he did. He must have gone on from there."

"And the message comes from Southern China," Prince Karschoff reflected.

Nigel was deep in thought. China, Russia, Germany! Prince Shan in England, negotiating with Immelan! And behind, sinister, menacing, mysterious—Japan!

"Supposing, he propounded at last, "there really does exist a secret treaty between China and Japan?"

"If there is," Prince Karschoff observed, "one can easily understand what Immelan has been at. Prince Shan can command the whole of Asia. I know they are afraid of something of the sort in the States. An American who was in the club yesterday told us they had spent over a hundred millions on their west coast fortifications in the last two years."

"One can understand, too, in that case," Nigel continued, "why Japan left the League of Nations. That stunt of hers about being outside the sphere of possible misunderstandings never sounded honest."

"It was unfortunate," Prince Karschoff said, "that America was dominated for those few months by an honest but impractical idealist. He had the germ of an idea, but he thrust it on the world before even his own country was ready for it. In time the nations would certainly have elaborated something more workable."

"You cannot keep a full-blooded man from clenching his fist if he's insulted," Nigel pointed out, "and nations march along the same lines as individuals. Its existence has never for a single moment weakened Germany's hatred of England, and the stronger she grows, the more she flaunts its conditions. France guards her frontiers night and day with an army ten times larger than she is allowed. Russia has become the country of mysteries, with something up her sleeve, beyond a doubt; and there are cities in modern China into which no European dare penetrate. Japan quite frankly maintains an immense army; the United States is silently following suit—and God help us all if a war does come!"

"You are right," Karschoff assented gloomily. "The last glamour of romance has gone from fighting. There were remnants of it in the last war, especially in Palestine and Egypt and when we first overran Austria. Today science would settle the whole affair. The war would be won in the laboratory, the engine-room and the workshop. I doubt whether any battleship could keep afloat for a week; and as to the fighting in the air, if a hundred airships were in action, I do

not suppose that one of them would escape. Then they say that France has a gun which could carry a shell from Amiens to London; and more mysterious than all, China has something up her sleeve which no one has even a glimmering of."

"Except Jesson," Nigel muttered.

"And Jesson's gleam of knowledge, or suspicion," Prince Karschoff remarked, "seems to have brought him to the end of his days. Can anything be done with Prince Shan about him, do you think?"

"Only indirectly, I am afraid," Nigel replied. "Maggie is seeing him this afternoon. As a matter of fact, I believe she telephoned to him before luncheon, but I haven't heard anything yet. When a man goes out on that sort of a job, he burns his boats. And Jesson isn't the first who has turned eastward, during the last few months. I heard only yesterday that France has lost three of her best men in China—one who went as a missionary and two as merchants. They've just disappeared without a word of explanation."

The telephone extension bell rang. Nigel walked over to the sideboard and took down the receiver.

"Is that Lord Dorminster?" a man's voice asked.

"Speaking," Nigel replied.

"I am David Franklin, private secretary to Mr. Mervin Brown," the voice continued. "Mr. Mervin Brown would be exceedingly obliged if you would come round to Downing Street to see him at once."

"I will be there in ten minutes," Nigel promised.

He laid down the receiver and turned to Karschoff.

"The Prime Minister," he explained.

"What does he want you for?"

"I think," Nigel replied, "that the trouble cloud is about to burst."

CHAPTER XXVII

MR. MERVIN BROWN on this occasion did not beat about the bush. His old air of confident, almost smug self-satisfaction had vanished. He received Nigel with a new deference in his manner, without any further sign of that good-natured tolerance accorded by a busy man to a kindly crank.

"Lord Dorminster," he began, "I have sent for you to renew a conversation we had some little time since. I will be quite frank with you. Certain circumstances have come to my notice which lead me to believe that there may be more truth in some of the arguments you brought forward than I was willing at the time to believe."

"I must confess that I am relieved to hear you say so," Nigel replied. "All the information which I have points to a crisis very near at hand."

The Prime Minister leaned a little across the table.

"The immediate reason for my sending for you," he explained, "is this. My friend the American Ambassador has just sent me a copy of a wireless dispatch which he has received from China from one of their former agents. The report seems to have been sent to him for safety, but the sender of it—of whose probity, by the by, the American Ambassador pledges himself, appears to have been sent to China by you."

"Jesson!" Nigel exclaimed. "I have heard of this already, sir, from a friend in the American Embassy."

"The dispatch," Mr. Mervin Brown went on, "is in some respects a little vague, but it is, on the other hand, I frankly admit, disturbing. It gives specific details as to definite military preparations on the part of China and Russia, associated, presumably, with a third power whose name you will forgive my not mentioning. These preparations appear to have been brought almost to completion in the strictest secrecy, but the headquarters of the whole thing, very much to my surprise, I must confess, seems to be in Southern China."

"In that case," Nigel pointed out, "if you will permit me to make a suggestion, sir, you have a very simple course open to you."

"Well?"

"Send for Prince Shan."

"Prince Shan," the Prime Minister replied with knitted brows, "is not over in this country officially. He has begged to be excused from accepting or returning any diplomatic courtesies."

"Nevertheless," Nigel persisted, "I should send for Prince Shan. If it had not been," he went on slowly, "for the complete abolition of our secret-service system, you would probably have been informed before now that Prince Shan has been having continual conferences in this country with one of the most dangerous men who ever set foot on these shores—Oscar Immelan."

"Immelan has no official position in this country," the Prime Minister objected.

"A fact which makes him none the less dangerous," Nigel insisted. "He is one of those free lances of diplomacy who have sprung up during the last ten or fifteen years, the product of that spurious wave of altruism which is responsible for the League of Nations. Immelan was one of the first to see how his country might benefit by the new régime. It is he who has been pulling the strings in Russia and China and, I fear, another country."

"What I want to arrive at," Mr. Mervin Brown said a little impatiently, "is something definite."

"Let me put it my own way," Nigel begged. "A very large section of our present-day politicians—you, if I may say so, among them, Mr. Mervin Brown—have believed this country safe against any military dangers, because of the connections existing between your unions of workingmen and similar bodies in Germany. This is a great fallacy for two reasons—first because Germany has always intended to have some one else pull the chestnuts out of the fire for her, and second because we cannot internationalize labor. English and German workmen may come together on matters affecting their craft and the conditions of their labor, but at heart one remains a German and one an Englishman, with separate interests and a separate outlook."

"Well, at the end of it all," Mr. Mervin Brown said, "the bogey is war. What sort of a war? An invasion of England is just as impossible today as it was twenty years ago."

NIGEL nodded. "I cannot answer your question," he admitted. "I was looking to Jesson's report to give us an idea as to that."

"You shall see it tomorrow," Mr. Mervin Brown promised. "It is round at the War Office at the present moment."

"Without seeing it," Nigel went on, "I expect I can tell you one startling feature of its contents. It suggested, did it not, that the principal movers against us would be Russia and China and—a country which you prefer just now not to mention."

"But that country is our ally!" Mr. Mervin Brown exclaimed.

Nigel smiled a little sadly.

"She has been," he admitted. "Still, if you had been *au fait* with diplomatic history thirty years ago, Mr. Mervin Brown, you would know that she was on the point of ending her alliance with us and establishing one with Germany. It was only owing to the genius of one English statesman that at the last moment she almost reluctantly renewed her alliance with us. She is in the same state of doubt concerning our destiny today. She has seen our last two Governments forget that we are an imperial power and endeavor to apply the principles of sheer commercialism to the conduct of a great nation. She may have opened her eyes a thousand years later than we did, but she is awake enough now to know that this will not do. There is little enough of generosity among the nations; none among the Orientals. I have a conviction myself that there is a secret alliance between China and this other power, a secret and quite possibly an aggressive alliance."

THE Prime Minister sat for a few moments deep in thought. Somehow or other, his face had gained in dignity since the beginning of the conversation. The nervous fear in his eyes had been replaced by a look of deep and solemn anxiety.

"If you are right, Lord Dorminster," he pronounced presently, "the world has rolled backward these last ten years, and we who have failed to mark its retrogression may have a terrible responsibility thrust upon us."

"Politically, I am afraid I agree with you," Nigel replied. "Only the idealist, and the prejudiced idealist, can ignore the primal elements in human nature and believe that a few lofty sentiments can keep the nations behind their frontiers. War is a terrible thing, but human life itself is a terrible thing. Its principles are the same, and force will never be restrained except by force. If the League of Nations had been established upon a firmer and less selfish basis, it certainly might have kept the peace for another thirty or forty yeares. As it is, I believe that we are on the verge of a serious crisis."

"War for us is an impossibility," Mr. Mervin Brown declared frankly, "simply because we cannot fight. Our army consists of policemen; science has defeated the battleship; and practically the same conditions exist in the air."

"You sent for me, I presume, to ask for my advice," Nigel said. "At any rate, let me offer it. I have reason to believe

that the negotiations between Prince Shan and Oscar Immelan have not been entirely successful. Send for Prince Shan and question him in a friendly fashion."

"Will you be my ambassador?" the Prime Minister asked.

Nigel hesitated for a moment.

"If you wish it," he promised. "Prince Shan is in some respects a strangely inaccessible person, but just at present he seems rather well disposed toward my household."

"Arrange, if you can," Mr. Mervin Brown begged, "to bring him here tomorrow morning. I will try to have available a copy of the dispatch from Jesson. It refers to matters which I trust Prince Shan will be able to explain."

Nigel lingered for a moment over his farewell.

"If I might venture upon a suggestion, sir," he said, "do not forget that Prince Shan is to all intents and purposes the autocrat of Asia. He has taught the people of the world to remodel their ideas of China and all that China stands for. And further than this, he is, according to his principles, a man of the strictest honor. I would treat him, sir, as a valued *confrère* and equal."

The Prime Minister smiled.

"Don't look upon me as being too intensely parochial, Dorminster," he said. "I know quite well that Prince Shan is a man of genius, and that he is a representative of one of the world's greatest families. I am only the servant of a great power. He is a great power in himself."

"And believe me," Nigel concluded fervently, as he made his adieux, "the greatest autocrat that ever breathed. If, when you exchange farewells with him, he says, 'There will be no war,' we are saved, at any rate for the moment."

CHAPTER XXVIII

MAGGIE, very cool and neat, a vision of soft blue, a wealth of coloring in the deep brown of her closely braided hair, her lips slightly parted in a smile of welcome, felt, notwithstanding her apparent composure, a strange disturbance of outlook and senses as Prince Shan was ushered into her flower-bedecked little sitting-room that afternoon. The unusual formality of his entrance seemed somehow to suit the man and his manner. He bowed low as soon as he had crossed the threshold, and bowed again over her fingers as she rose from her easy-chair.

"It makes me very happy that you receive me like this," he told her simply. "It makes it so much easier for me to say the things that are in my heart."

"Wont you sit down, please?" Maggie invited. "You are so tall, and I hate to be completely dominated."

He obeyed at once, but he continued to talk with grave and purposeful seriousness.

"I wish," he said, "to bring myself entirely into accord, for these few minutes, with your Western methods and customs. I address you, therefore, Lady Maggie, with formal words, while I keep back in my heart much that is struggling to express itself. I have come to ask you to do me the great honor of becoming my wife."

Maggie sat for a few moments speechless. The thing which she had half dreaded and half longed for—the low timbre of his caressing voice—was entirely absent. Yet somehow or other his simple, formal words were at least as disturbing. He leaned toward her, a quiet, dignified figure, anxious yet in a sense confident. He had the air of a man who has offered to share a kingdom.

"Your wife!" Maggie repeated tremulously.

"The thought is new to you, perhaps," he went on with gentle tolerance. "You have believed the stories people tell that in my youth I was vowed to celibacy and the priesthood. That is not true. I have always been free to marry, but although today we figure as a great progressive nation, many of the thousand-year-old ideas of ancient China have dwelt in my brain and still sit enshrined in my heart. The aristocracy of China has passed through evil times. There is no princess of my own country whom I could meet on equal terms. So, you see, although it develops differently, there is something of the snobbishness of your Western countries reflected in our own ideas."

"But I am not a princess," Maggie murmured.

"You are the princess of my soul," he answered, lowering his eyes for a moment almost reverently. "I cannot quite hope to make you understand, but if I took for my wife a Chinese lady of unequal mundane rank, I should commit a serious offense against those who watch me from the other side of the grave, and to whom

I am accountable for every action of my life. A lady of another country is a different matter."

"But I am an Englishwoman," Maggie said, "and I love my country. You know what that means."

"I know very well," he admitted. "I had not meant to speak of those things until later, but for your country's sake, what greater alliance could you seek today than to become the wife of him who is destined to be the ruler of Asia?"

Maggie caught hold of her courage. She looked into his eyes unflinchingly, though she felt the hot color rise into her cheeks.

"You did not speak to me of these things, Prince Shan, when I came to your house last night," she reminded him.

HIS smile was full of composure. It was as though the truth which sat enshrined in the man's soul lifted him above all the ordinary emotions or fear of misunderstandings.

"For those few minutes," he confessed, "I was very angry. It brings great pain to a man to see the thing he loves droop her wings, flutter down to earth, and walk the common highway. It is not for you, dear one, to mingle with that crowd who scheme and cheat, hide and deceive, for any reward in the world, whether it be money, fame or the love of country. You were not made for those things, and when I saw you there, so utterly in my power, having deliberately taken your risk, I was angry. For a single moment I meant that you should realize the danger of the path you were treading. I think that I did make you realize it."

Her eyes fell. He seemed to have established some compelling power over her. He had met her thoughts before they were uttered, had answered even her unspoken question.

"I wish you didn't make life so much like a kindergarten," she complained, with an almost pathetic smile at the corners of her lips.

"It is a very different place," he rejoined fervently, "that I desire to make of life for you. Listen, please: I have spoken to you first the formal words which make all things possible between us; and now, if I may, I let my heart speak. Somewhere not far from Pekin I have a palace, where my lands slope to the river. For five months in the year my gardens are starred with blue and yellow flowers, sweet-smelling as the almond blossom, and there are little pagodas which look down on the blue water, pagodas hung with creepers, not like your English evergreens, but with blossoms, pink and waxen, which open as one looks at them and send out sweet perfumes. When you are there with me, dear one, then I shall speak to you in the language of my ancestors, which some day you will understand, and you shall know that love has its cradle in the East; you shall feel the flame of its birth, the furnace of its accomplishment. Here my tongue moves slowly, yet I stoop my knee to you, I show you my heart, and my lips tell you that I love. What that love is you shall learn some day, if you have the will and the confidence and the soul. Will you come back to China with me, Maggie?"

She rested her fingers on his hand.

"You are a magician," she confessed. "I am very English, and yet I want to go."

He stood for a moment looking into her eyes. Then he stooped down and raised her hesitating fingers to his lips.

"I believe that you will come," he said simply. "I believe that you will ride over the clouds with me, back to the country of beautiful places. So now I speak to you of serious things. Of money there shall be what you wish, more than any woman even of your rank possesses in this country. I shall give you, too, the sister of my great *Black Dragon* so that in five days, if you wish, you can pass from any of my palaces to London. And further than that, behold!"

HE drew from his pocket a roll of papers. Maggie recognized it, and her heart beat faster. Curiously enough, just then she scarcely thought of its world importance. She remembered only those few moments of strange thrills, the wonder at finding him in that room, as he stood watching her, the horror and yet the thrill of his measured words. He laid the papers upon the table.

"Read them," he invited. "You will understand then the net that has been closing around your country. You will understand the better if I tell you this: China and Japan are one. It was my first triumph when patriotism urged me into the field of politics. We have a single motto, and upon that is based all that you may read there: *'Europe for the Europeans, Asia for us.'* "

Maggie was conscious of a sudden sense

of escape from her almost mesmeric state. The change in his tone, his calm references to things belonging to another and altogether different world, had dissolved a situation against the charm of which she had found herself powerless, even unwilling to struggle. Once more she was back in the world where for the last two years had lain her chief interests. She took the papers in her hand and began reading them quickly through. Every now and then a little exclamation broke from her lips.

"You will observe," her companion pointed out, looking over her shoulder, "that on paper, at any rate, Japan is the great gainer. She takes Australia, New Zealand and India. China absorbs Thibet and reëstablishes her empire of forty years ago. The arrangement is based very largely on racial conditions. China is a self-centered country. We have not the power of fusion of the Japanese. You will observe further, as an interesting circumstance, that the American foothold in Asia disappears as completely as the British."

"But tell me," she demanded, "how are these things to be brought about, and where does Immelan come in?"

Prince Shan smiled.

Immelan's position," he explained, "is largely a sentimental one; yet on the other hand he saves his country from what might be a grave calamity. The commercial advantages he gains under this treaty might seem to be inadequate, although in effect they are very considerable. The point is this: He soothes his country of the pain which groans day by day in her limbs. He gratifies her lust for vengeance against Great Britain without plunging her into any desperate enterprise."

"And France escapes," she murmured.

"France escapes," he assented. "Rightly or wrongly, the whole of Germany's post-war animosity was directed against England. She considered herself deceived by certain British statesmen. She may have been right or wrong. I myself find the evidence conflicting. At this moment the matter does not concern us."

"And is Great Britain, then," Maggie asked, "believed to be so helpless that she can be stripped of the greater part of her possessions at the will of China and Japan?"

Prince Shan smiled.

"Great Britain," he reminded her, "has taken the League of Nations to her heart. It was a very dangerous thing to do."

"Still," Maggie persisted, "there remains the great thing which you have not told me. These proposals, I admit, would strike a blow at the heart of the British Empire, but how are they to be carried into effect?"

"If I had signed the agreement," he replied, "they could very easily have been carried into effect. You have heard already, have you not, through some of your agents, of the three secret cities? In the easternmost of them is the answer to your question."

She smiled.

"Is that a challenge to me to come out and discover for myself all that I want to know?"

"If you come," he answered, "you shall certainly know everything. There is another little matter, too, which waits for your decision."

"Tell me of it at once, please?" she begged, with a sudden conviction of his meaning.

HE obeyed without hesitation.

"I spoke just now," he reminded her, "of the three secret cities. They are secret because we have taken pains to keep them so. One is in Germany, one in Russia and one in China. A casual traveler could discover little in the German one, and little more, perhaps, in the Russian one. Enough to whet his curiosity, and no more. But in China there is the whole secret at the mercy of a successful spy. A man named Jesson, Lady Maggie—"

"I telephoned you about him before luncheon today," she interrupted.

"I had your message," he replied, "and the man is safe for the moment. At the same time, Lady Maggie, let me remind you that this is a game the rules of which are known the world over. Jesson has now in his possession the secret on which I might build, if I chose, plans to conquer the world. He knew the penalty if he was discovered, and he was discovered. To spare his life is sentimentalism pure and simple; yet if it is your will, so be it."

"You are very good to me," she declared gratefully, "all the more good because half the time I can see that you scarcely understand."

"That I do not admit," he protested. "I understand even where I do not sympathize. You make of life the greatest boon on earth. We of my race and way of thinking are taught to take it up or lay it down,

if not with indifference, at any rate with a very large share of resignation. However, Jesson's life is spared. From what I have heard of the man, I imagine he will be very much surprised."

She gave a little sigh of relief.

"You have given me a great deal of your confidence," she said thoughtfully.

"Is it not clear," he answered, "why I have done so? I ask of you the greatest boon a woman has to give. I do not seek to bribe, but if you can give me the love that will make my life a dream of happiness, then will it not be my duty to see that no shadow of misfortune shall come to you or yours? China stands between Japan and Russia, and I am China."

She gave him her hands.

"You are very wonderful," she declared. "Remember that at a time like this, it is not a woman's will alone that speaks. It is her soul which lights the way. Prince Shan, I do not know."

He smiled gravely.

"I leave," he told her, "on Friday, soon after dawn."

She found herself trembling.

"It is a very short time," she faltered.

They had both risen to their feet. He was close to her now, and she felt herself caught up in a passionate wave of inertia, an absolute inability to protest or resist. His arms were clasped around her lightly and with exceeding gentleness. He leaned down. She found herself wondering, even in that tumultuous moment, at the strange clearness of his complexion, the whiteness of his firm, strong teeth, the soft brilliance of his eyes, which caressed her even before his lips rested upon hers.

"I think that you will come," he whispered. "I think that you will be very happy."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE great house in Curzon Street awoke, the following morning, to a state of intense activity. Taxicabs and motorcars were lined along the street; a stream of callers came and went: That part of the establishment of which little was seen by the casual caller, the rooms where half a dozen secretaries conducted an immense correspondence presided over by Li Wen, was working overtime at full pressure. In his reception-room Prince Shan saw a selected few of the callers, mostly journalists and politicians, to whom Li Wen gave the entrée. One visitor even this most astute of secretaries found it hard to place. He took the card in to his master, who glanced at it thoughtfully.

"The Earl of Dorminster," he repeated. "I will see him."

NIGEL found himself received with courtesy, yet with a certain aloofness. Prince Shan rose from his favorite chair of plain black oak heaped with green silk cushions and held out his hand a little tentatively.

"You are very kind to visit me, Lord Dorminster," he said. "I trust that you come to wish me fortune."

'That," Nigel replied, "depends upon how you choose to seek it."

"I am answered," was the prompt acknowledgment. "One thing in your country I have at least learned to appreciate, and that is your love of candor. What is your errand with me today? Have you come to speak to me as an ambassador from your cousin, or in any way on her behalf?"

"My business has nothing to do with Lady Maggie," Nigel assured him gravely.

Prince Shan held out his hand.

"Stop," he begged. "Do not explain your business. If it is a personal request, it is granted. If, on the other hand, you seek my advice on matters of grave importance, it is yours. Before other words are spoken, however, I myself desire to address you on the subject of Lady Maggie Trent."

"As you please," Nigel answered.

"It is not the custom of my country, or of my life," Prince Shan continued, "to covet or steal the things which belong to another. If fate has made me a thief, I am very sorry. I have proposed to Lady Maggie that she accompany me back to China. It is my great desire that she should become my wife."

Nigel felt himself curiously tongue-tied. There was something in the other's measured speech, so fateful, so assured, that it seemed almost as though he were speaking of preordained things. Much that had seemed to him impossible and unnatural in such an idea disappeared from that moment.

"You tell me this," Nigel began.

"I announce it to you as the head of the family," Prince Shan interrupted.

"You tell it to me, also," Nigel per-

sisted, "because you have heard the rumors which were at one time very prevalent—that Lady Maggie and I were or were about to become engaged to be married."

"I have heard such a rumor only very indirectly," Prince Shan confessed, "and I cannot admit that it has made any difference in my attitude. I think, in my land and yours, we have at least one common convention. The woman who touches our heart is ours if we may win her. Love is unalterably selfish. One must fight for one's own hand. And for those who may suffer by our victory, we may have pity but no consideration."

"AM I to understand," Nigel asked bluntly, "that Lady Maggie has consented to be your wife?"

"Lady Maggie has given me no reply. I left her alone with her thoughts. Every hour it is my hope to hear from her. She knows that I leave for China early tomorrow."

"So at the present moment you are in suspense?"

"I am in suspense," Prince Shan admitted; "and perhaps," he went on, with one of his rare smiles, "it occurred to me that it would be in one sense a relief to speak to a fellow-man of the hopes and fears that are in my heart. You are the one person to whom I could speak, Lord Dorminster. You have not wished my suit well, but at least you have been clear-sighted. I think it has never occurred to you that a prince of China might venture to compete with a peer of England."

"On the contrary," Nigel assented, "I have the greatest admiration for the few living descendants of the world's oldest aristocracy. You have a right to enter the lists, a right to win if you can."

"And what do you think of my prospects, if I may ask such a delicate question?" Prince Shan inquired.

"I cannot estimate them," Nigel replied. "I only know that Maggie is deeply interested."

"I think," his companion continued softly, "that she will become my princess. You have never visited China, Lord Dorminster," he went on; "so you have little idea, perhaps, as to the manner of our lives. Some day I will hope to be your host; so until then, as I may not speak of my own possessions, may I go just so far as this? Your cousin will be very happy in China. This is a great country, but the very air you breathe is cloyed with your national utilitarianism. Mine is a country of beautiful thoughts, of beautiful places, of quiet-living and sedate people. I can give your cousin every luxury of which the world has ever dreamed, wrapped and enshrined in beauty. No person with a soul could be unhappy in the places where she will dwell."

"You are at least confident," Nigel remarked.

"It is because I am convinced," was the calm rejoinder. "I shall take your cousin's happiness into my keeping without one shadow of misgiving. The last word, however, is with her. It remains to be seen whether her courage is great enough to induce her to face such a complete change in the manner of her life."

"It will not be her lack of courage which will keep her in England," Nigel declared.

PRINCE SHAN bowed with a graceful little gesture of the hands. The subject was finished.

"I shall now, Lord Dorminster," he said, "take advantage of your kindly presence here to speak to you on a very personal matter—only this time it is you who are the central figure, and I who am the dummy."

"I do not follow you," Nigel confessed, with a slight frown.

"I speak in tones of apology," Prince Shan went on, "but you must remember that I am one of reflective disposition. Nature has endowed me with some of the gifts of my great ancestors, philosophers famed the world over. It seems very clear to me that, if I had not come, from sheer force of affectionate propinquity you would have married Lady Maggie."

Nigel's frown deepened.

"Prince Shan—" he began.

Again the outstretched hand seemed as though the fingers were pressed against his mouth. He broke off abruptly in his protest.

"You would have lived a contented life, because that is your province," his companion continued. "You would have felt yourself happy because you would have been a faithful husband. But the time would have come when you would have realized that you had missed the great things."

"This is idle prophecy," Nigel observed, a little impatiently. "I came to see you upon another matter."

"Humor me," the Prince begged. "I am

going to speak to you even more intimately. I shall venture to do so because, after all, she is better known to me than to you. I am going to tell you that, of all the women in the world, Naida Karetsky is the most likely to make you happy."

Nigel drew himself up a little stiffly.

"One does not discuss these things," he muttered.

"May I not call that a touch of insularity," Prince Shan pleaded, "because there is nothing else in the world so wonderful to discuss, in all respect and reverence, as the women who have made us feel. One last word, Lord Dorminster. The days of matrimonial alliances between the reigning families of Europe have come to an end under the influence of a different form of government; but there is a certain type of alliance, the utility of which remains unimpaired. I venture to say that you could not do your country a greater service, apart from any personal feelings you might have, than by marrying Mademoiselle Karetsky. . . . . There, you see, now I have finished. This is for your reflection, Lord Dorminster—just the measured statement of one who wears at least the cloak of philosophy by inheritance. . . . Time passes. Your own reason for coming to see me has not yet been expounded."

"I have come to ask you to visit the Prime Minister before you leave England," Nigel announced.

Prince Shan changed his position slightly. His forehead was a little wrinkled. He was silent for a moment.

"If I pay more than a farewell visit of ceremony," he said,—"that is to say, if I speak with Mr. Merwin Brown on things that count, I must anticipate a certain decision at which I have not yet wholly arrived."

Nigel had a sudden inspiration.

"You are seeking to bribe Maggie!" he exclaimed.

"That is not true," was the dignified reply.

"Then please explain," Nigel persisted.

THE PRINCE rose to his feet. He walked to the heavy silk curtains which led into his own bedchamber, pushed them apart, and looked for a moment at the familiar objects in the room. Then he came back, glancing on his way at the ebony cabinet.

"One does not repeat one's mistakes," he said slowly, "and although you and I, Lord Dorminster, breathe the common air of the greater world, my instinct tells me that of certain things which have passed between your cousin and myself it is better that no mention ever be made. I wish to tell you this, however: There is in existence a document, my signature to which would, without a doubt, have a serious influence upon the destinies of this country. That document, unsigned, would be one of my marriage gifts to Lady Maggie—and as you know I have not yet had her answer. However, if you wish it, I will go to the Prime Minister."

Li Wen came silently in. He spoke to his master for a few minutes in Chinese. A faint smile parted the latter's lips.

"You can tell the person at the telephone that I will call within the next few minutes," he directed. "You will not object," he added, turning courteously to Nigel, "if I stop for a moment, on the way to Downing Street, at a small private hospital? An acquaintance of mine lies sick there and desires urgently to see me."

"I am entirely at your service," Nigel assured him.

PRINCE SHAN, with many apologies, left Nigel alone in the car outside a tall gray house in John Street, and, preceded by the white-capped nurse who had opened the door, climbed the stairs to the first floor of the celebrated nursing home, where, after a moment's delay, he was shown into a large and airy apartment. Immelan was in bed, looking very ill indeed. He was pale, and his china-blue eyes, curiously protruding, were filled with an expression of haunting fear. A puzzled doctor was standing by the bedside. A nurse, who was smoothing the bedclothes, glanced around at Prince Shan's entrance. The invalid started convulsively, and clutching the pillows with his right hand, turned towards his visitor.

"So you've come!" he exclaimed. "Stay where you are! Don't go! Doctor—nurse—leave us alone for a moment."

The nurse went at once. The doctor hesitated.

"My patient is a good deal exhausted," he said. "There are no dangerous symptoms at present, but—"

"I will promise not to distress him," Prince Shan interrupted. "I am myself somewhat pressed for time, and it is probable that your patient will insist upon speaking to me in private."

The doctor followed the nurse from the room. Prince Shan stood looking down upon the figure of his quondam associate. There was a leaven of mild wonder in his clear eyes, a faintly contemptuous smile about the corners of his lips.

"So you are afraid of death, my friend," he observed, "afraid of the death you planned so skillfully for me."

"It is a lie!" Immelan declared excitedly. "Sen Lu was never killed by my orders. Listen! You have nothing against me. My death can do you no good. It is you who have been at fault. You, Prince Shan, the great diplomatist of the world, are gambling away your future and the future of a mighty empire for a woman's sake. You have treated me badly enough. Spare my life. Call in the doctor here and tell him what to do. He can find nothing in my system. He is helpless."

THE smile upon the Prince's lips became vaguer, his expression more bland and indeterminate.

"My dear Immelan," he murmured, "you are without doubt delirious. Compose yourself, I beg."

A light that was almost tragic shone in the man's face. He sat up with a sudden access of strength.

"For the love of God, don't torture me!" he groaned. "The pains grow worse, hour by hour. If I die, the whole world shall know by whose hand."

The expression on Prince Shan's face remained unchanged. In his eyes, however, there was a little glint of something which seemed almost like foreknowledge.

"When you die," he pronounced calmly, "it will be by your own hand—not mine."

For some reason or other Immelan accepted these measured words of prophecy as a total reprieve. The relief in his face was almost piteous. He seized his visitor's hand and would have fawned upon it. Prince Shan withdrew himself a little farther from the bed.

"Immelan," he said, "during my stay in England I have studied you and your methods; I have listened to all you have had to say and to propose; I have weighed the advantages and the disadvantages of the scheme you have outlined to me; and I only arrived at my decision after the most serious and unbiased reflection. Your scheme itself was bold and almost splendid, but as you yourself well know at the back of your mind, it would lay the seeds of a world tumult. I have studied history, Immelan, perhaps a little more deeply than you, and I do not believe in conquests. For the restoration to China of such lands as belong geographically and rightly to the Chinese Empire, I have my own plans. You, it seems to me, would make a cat's-paw of all Asia to gratify your hatred of England."

"A cat's-paw!" Immelan gasped. "Australia, New Zealand and India for Japan, new lands for her teeming population; Thibet for you, all Manchuria and the control of the Siberian Railway!"

"These are dazzling propositions," Prince Shan admitted. "And yet—what about the other side of the Pacific?"

"America would be powerless," Immelan insisted.

"So you said before, in 1917," was the dry reminder. "I did not come here, however, to talk world politics with you. Those things for the moment are finished. I came in answer to your summons."

Immelan raised himself a little in the bed.

"You meant what you said?" he demanded with hoarse anxiety. "There was no poison? Swear that?"

Prince Shan moved towards the door. His backward glance was coldly contemptuous.

"What I said, I meant," he replied. "Extract such comfort from it as you may."

He left the room, closing the door softly behind him. Immelan stared after him, hollow-eyed and anxious. Already the cold fears were seizing upon him once more.

PRINCE SHAN rejoined Nigel, and the two men drove off to Downing Street. The former was silent for the first few minutes. Then he turned slightly towards his companion.

"The man Immelan is a coward," he declared. "It is he whom I have just visited."

Nigel shrugged his shoulders.

"So many men are brave enough in a fight," he remarked, "who lose their nerve on a sickbed."

"Bravery in battle," Prince Shan pronounced, "is the lowest form of courage. The blood is stirred by the excitement of slaughter as by alcohol. With Immelan I shall have no more dealings."

"Speaking politically as well as personally?" Nigel inquired.

The other smiled.

"I think I might go so far as to agree,"

he acquiesced; "but in a sense there are conditions. You shall hear what they are. I will speak before you to the Prime Minister. . . . See, up above is the sign of my departure."

OUT of a little bank of white, fleecy clouds which hung down, here and there, from the blue sky, came the *Black Dragon*, her engines purring softly, her movements slow and graceful. Both men watched her for a moment in silence.

"At six o'clock tomorrow morning I start," Prince Shan announced. "My pilot tells me that the weather conditions are wonderful, all the way from here to Pekin. We shall be there on Wednesday."

"You travel alone?" Nigel inquired.

"I have passengers," was the quiet reply. "I am taking the English chaplain to your church in Pekin."

The eyes of the two men met.

"It is an ingenious idea," Nigel admitted dryly.

"I wish to be prepared," his companion answered. "It may be that he is my only companion. In that case, I go back to a life lonelier than I have ever dreamed of. It is on the knees of the gods. So far, there has come no word, but although I am not by nature an optimist, my superstitions are on my side. All the way over on my last voyage, when I lay in my berth awake and we sailed over and through the clouds, my star, my own particular star, seemed leaning always down towards me, and for that reason I have faith."

Nigel glanced at his companion curiously but without speech. The car pulled up in Downing Street. The two men descended and found everything made easy for them. In two minutes they were in the presence of the Prime Minister.

CHAPTER XXX

MR. MERVIN BROWN was at his best in the interview to which he had, as a matter of fact, been looking forward with much trepidation. He received Prince Shan courteously and reproached him for not having paid him an earlier visit. To the latter's request that Nigel might be permitted to be present at the discussion, he promptly acquiesced.

"Lord Dorminster and I have already had some conversation," he said, "bearing upon the matter about which I desire to talk to you."

"I have found His Lordship," Prince Shan declared, "one of the few Englishmen who has any real apprehension of the trend of events outside his own country."

The Prime Minister plunged at once into the middle of things.

"Our national faults are without doubt known to you, Prince Shan," he said. "They include, among other things, an overconfidence in the promises of others—too great a belief, I fear, in the probity of our friends. We paid a staggering price in 1914 for those qualities. Lord Dorminster would have me believe that there is a still more terrible price for us to pay in the future, unless we change our whole outlook, abandon our belief in the League of Nations, and once more acknowledge the supremacy of force."

"LORD DORMINSTER is right," Prince Shan pronounced. "I have come here to tell you so, Mr. Mervin Brown."

"You come here as a friend of England?" the latter asked.

"I come here as one who hesitates to become her enemy," was the measured reply. "I will be perfectly frank with you, sir. I came to this country to discuss a project which, with the acquiescence of China and Japan, would have resulted in the humiliation of your country and the gratification of Germany's eagerly desired revenge."

"You believe in the existence of that sentiment, then?" the Prime Minister inquired.

"Any one short of a very insular Englishman," the Prince replied, "would have realized it long ago. There is a great society in Germany, scarcely even a secret society, pledged to wipe out the humiliations of the last great war. Lord Dorminster tells me that you are today without a secret service. For that reason you have remained in ignorance of the mines beneath your feet. Germany has laid her plans well and carefully. Her first and greatest weapon has been your sense of security. She has seen you contemplate, with an ill-advised smile of spurious satisfaction, invincible France regaining her wealth more slowly than you for the simple reason that half the man-power of the country is absorbed by her military preparations. France is impregnable. A direct invasion of your country is in all probability impossible. Those two facts have seemed to you

all-sufficient. That is where you have been, if I may say so, sir, very short-sighted indeed."

"Germany has no power to transport troops in other directions," Mr. Mervin Brown observed.

Prince Shan smiled.

"You have another enemy besides Germany," he pointed out, "a great democracy who has never forgiven your lack of sympathy at her birth, your attempts to repress by force a great upheaval, borne in agony and shame, yet containing the germs of worthy things which your statesmen in those days failed to discern. Russia has never forgiven. Russia stands hand in hand with Germany."

"But surely," the Prime Minister protested, "you speak in the language of the past? The League of Nations still exists. Any directly predatory expedition would bring the rest of the world to arms."

PRINCE SHAN shook his head.

"One of the first necessities of a tribunal," he expounded, "is that that tribunal should have the power to punish. You yourself are one of the judges. You might find your culprit guilty. With what weapon will you chastise him? The culprit has grown mightier than the judge."

"America—"

"America," Prince Shan interrupted, "can, when she chooses, strike a weightier blow than any other nation on earth; but she will never again proceed outside her own sphere of influence."

"But she must protect her trade," the Prime Minister insisted.

"She has no need to do so by force of arms. Take my own country, for instance. We need American machinery, American goods, locomotives and mining plants. America has no need to force these things upon us. We are as anxious to buy as she is to sell."

"I am to figure to myself, then," Mr. Mervin Brown reflected, "a combination of Germany and Russia engaged in some scheme inimical to Great Britain?"

"There was such a scheme definitely arranged and planned," Prince Shan assured him gravely. "If I had seen fit to sign a certain paper, you would have lost, before the end of this month, India, your great treasure-house, Australia and New Zealand, and eventually Egypt. You would have been as powerless to prevent defeat as either of us three would be if called upon unarmed to face the champion heavyweight boxer."

"It is hard for me to credit the fact that officially Germany has any knowledge of this scheme," the Prime Minister confessed.

"Official Germany would probably deny it," Prince Shan answered dryly. "Official Russia might do the same. Official China would follow suit; but the real China, in my person, assures you of the truth of what I have told you. You have never heard, I suppose, of the three secret cities?"

"I have heard stories about them which sounded like fairy tales," Mr. Mervin Brown admitted grudgingly.

"Nevertheless they exist," Prince Shan continued, "and they exist for the purpose of supplying means of offense for the expedition of which I have spoken. There is one in Germany, one in Russia, and one in China. The three between them have produced enough armored airships of a new design to conquer any country in the world."

"Armored airships?" Mr. Mervin Brown repeated.

"Airships from which one fights on land as well as in the air," Prince Shan explained. "On land they become moving fortresses. No shell has ever been made which can destroy them. I should be revealing no secret to you, because I believe I am right in saying, sir, that a model of these amazing engines of destruction was first submitted to your Government."

"I remember something of the sort," the Prime Minister assented. "The inventor himself was an American, if I remember correctly."

"Precisely! I believe he told you in plain words that whoever possessed his model might, if they chose, dominate the world."

"BUT who wants to dominate the world by force?" Mr. Mervin Brown demanded passionately. "We have passed into a new era, an era of peace and the higher fellowship. It is waste of time, labor and money to create these horrible instruments of destruction. The League of Nations has decreed that they shall not be built."

"Nevertheless," Prince Shan declared with portentous gravity, "a thousand of these engines of destruction are now ready in a certain city of China. Each one of the three secret cities has done its quota

of work in the shape of providing parts. China alone has put them together. I bought the secret, and I alone possess it. It rests with me whether the world remains at peace or moves on to war."

"You cannot hesitate, then?" Mr. Mervin Brown exclaimed anxiously. "You yourself are an apostle of civilization."

Prince Shan smiled.

"It is because we are strong," he said, "that we love peace. It is because you are weak that you fear war. I am not here to teach you statesmanship. It is not for me to point out to you the means by which you can make your country safe and keep her people free. Call a meeting of what remains of the League of Nations and compare your strength with that of the nations who have crept outside and lie waiting. Then take the advice of experts and set your house in order. You sacrifice everything today to the god of commerce. Take a few men like Dorminster here into your councils. You are not a nation of fools. Speak the truth at the next meeting of the League of Nations and see that it is properly reported. Help yourselves, and I will help you."

"WILL you come into my Cabinet, Lord Dorminster?" the Prime Minister invited, turning to Nigel.

"If you will re-create the post of Minister for War, I will do so with pleasure," was the prompt reply.

Prince Shan held out his hand.

"There is great responsibility upon your shoulders, Mr. Mervin Brown," he said. "You will never know how near you have been to disaster. Try and wake up your nation gradually, if you can. Call together your writers, your thinking men, your historians. Encourage the flagging spirit of patriotism in your public schools and universities. Is this presumption on my part that I give so much advice? If so, forgive me. Truth that sits in the heart will sometimes demand to be heard."

At the Prime Minister's request, Nigel remained behind. They both looked at the door through which Prince Shan had passed. Mr. Mervin Brown metaphorically pinched himself. He was still feeling a little dazed.

"Is that man real flesh and blood?" he demanded.

"He is as real and as near the truth," Nigel replied solemnly, "as the things of which he has told us."

CHAPTER XXXI

THAT night Nigel gave a dinner-party on Maggie's account at the fashionable London hotel of the moment. Invitations had been sent out by telephone, by hurried notes, in one or two cases were delivered by word of mouth. On the whole, the acceptances, considering the season was in full swing, were a little remarkable. Everyone was anxious to come, because, as one of her girl friends put it, no one ever knew what Maggie was going to be up to next. One of the refusals came from Prince Shan, and even he made use of compromise:

My dear Lord Dorminster,

Will you forgive me if in this instance I do not break a custom to which I have perhaps a little too rigidly adhered. The Prime Minister telephoned, a few minutes after we left him, asking me to meet two of his colleagues from the Foreign Office tonight, and I doubt whether our conference will have concluded at the hour you name.

However, if you will permit me, I will give myself the pleasure of joining you later in the evening, to make my adieux to those of my friends whom I am quite sure that I shall find among your company.

Sincerely yours,

Shan.

Maggie passed the note back with a little smile. She made no comment whatever. Nigel watched her thoughtfully.

"I have carried out your orders," he observed. "Everything has been attended to, even to the color of your table decorations. Now tell me what it all means?"

She looked him in the face quite frankly.

"How can I?" she answered. "I do not know myself."

"Is this by way of being a farewell party?" he persisted.

"I do not know that," she assured him. "The only thing is that if I do decide—to go—well, I shall have had a last glimpse of most of my friends."

"As your nearest male relative, in fact your guardian," Nigel went on, with a touch of his old manner, "I feel myself deeply interested in the present situation. If a little advice from one who is considerably your senior would be acceptable—"

"It wouldn't," Maggie interrupted quietly. "There are just two things in life no girl ever accepts advice upon—the way she does her hair and the man she means to marry. You see, both are decided by instinct. I shall know before dawn to-

morrow what I mean to do, but until then nothing that anybody could say would make any difference. Besides, your mind ought to be full of your own matrimonial affairs. I hear that Naida is talking of going back to Russia next week."

"My own affairs are less complex," Nigel replied. "I am going to ask Naida to marry me tonight, if I have the opportunity."

Maggie made a little grimace.

"There goes my second string!" she exclaimed. "Nigel, you are horribly calloused. I have never been in the least sure that I haven't wanted to marry you myself."

Nigel lit a cigarette.

"I've frequently felt the same way," he confessed. "The trouble of it is that when the really right person comes along, one hasn't any doubt about it whatever. I should have made you a stodgy husband, Maggie."

She sniffed.

"I think that considering the way you've flirted with me," she declared, "you ought at least to have given me the opportunity of refusing you."

"If Naida refuses me—" he began.

"And I decide that Asia is too far away," she interrupted.

"We may come together, after all," he said, with a resigned little sigh.

"Glib tongue and empty heart," she quoted. "Nigel, I would never trust you. I believe you're in love with Naida."

"And I'm not quite so sure about you," he observed, watching the color rise quickly in her cheeks. "Off with you to dress, young woman. It's past seven, and we must be there early. I still have the wine to order."

THE dinner-party was in its way a complete success. Prince Karschoff was there, benign and distinguished; Chalmers and one or two other young men from the American Embassy. There was a sprinkling of Maggie's girl friends, a leaven of the older world in Nigel's few intimates—and Naida, very pale but more beautiful than ever in a white velvet gown, her hair brushed straight back, and with no jewelry save one long rope of pearls. Nigel, who in his capacity as host had found little time for personal conversation during the service of dinner, deliberately led her a little apart when they passed out into the lounge for coffee and to watch the dancing.

"My duties are over for a time," he said. "Do you realize that I have not had a word with you alone since our luncheon at Ciro's?"

"We have all been a little engrossed, have we not?" she murmured. "I hope that you are satisfied with the way things have turned out?"

"Nothing shall induce me to talk politics or empire-saving tonight," he declared with a smile. "I have other things to say."

"Tell me why you asked us all to dine so suddenly?" she inquired. "I do not know whether it is my fancy, but there seems to be an air of celebration about. Is there any announcement to be made?"

He shook his head.

"None. The party was just a whim of Maggie's."

They both looked across toward the ballroom, where she was dancing with Chalmers.

"Maggie is very beautiful tonight," Naida said. "I could scarcely listen to my neighbor's conversation at dinner-time for looking at her. Yet she has the air all the time of living in a dream, as though something had happened which had lifted her right away from us all. I began to wonder," she added, "whether, after all, Oscar Immelan had not told me the truth, and whether we should not be drinking her health and yours before the evening was over."

"You could scarcely believe that," he whispered, "if you have any memory at all."

There was a faint touch of pink in her cheeks, a tinge of color as delicate as the passing of a gleam of sunshine over a sea-glistening shell.

"But Englishmen are so unfaithful," she sighed.

"Then I at least am an exception," Nigel answered swiftly. "The words which you checked upon my lips the last time we were alone together still live in my heart. I think, Naida, the time has come to say them."

Their immediate neighbors had deserted them. He leaned a little toward her.

"You know so well that I love you, Naida," he said. "Will you be my wife?"

SHE looked up at him, half laughing, yet with tears in her eyes. With an impulsive little gesture, she caught his hand in hers for a moment.

"How horribly sure you must have felt

of me," she complained, "to have spoken here, with all these people around! Supposing I had told you that my life's work lay amongst my own people, or that I had made up my mind to marry Oscar Immelan, to console him for his great disappointment."

"I shouldn't have believed you," he answered, smiling.

"Conceit!" she exclaimed.

He shook his head.

"In a sense, of course, I am conceited," he replied. "I am the happiest and proudest man here. I really think that after all we ought to turn it into a celebration."

The band was playing a waltz. Naida's head moved to the music, and presently Nigel rose to his feet with a smile, and they passed into the ballroom. Karschoff and Mrs. Bollington Smith watched them with interest.

"Naida is looking very wonderful tonight," the latter remarked. "And Nigel, too; I wonder if there is anything between them."

"The days of foreign alliances are past," Karschoff replied, "but a few intermarriages might be very good for this country."

"Are you serious?" she asked.

"Absolutely! I would not suggest anything of the sort with Germany, but with this new Russia, the Russia of which Naida Karetsky is a daughter, why not? Although they will not have me back there, Russia is some day going to lay down the law to Europe."

"I wonder whether Maggie has any ideas of the sort in her mind," Mrs. Bollington Smith observed. "She seems curiously abstracted tonight."

Chalmers came grumbling up to Mrs. Bollington Smith, with whom he was an established favorite.

"Lady Maggie is treating me disgracefully," he complained. "She will scarcely dance at all. She goes round talking to every one as though it were a sort of farewell party."

"Perhaps it may be," Karschoff remarked quietly.

"She isn't going away, is she?" Chalmers demanded.

"Who knows?" the Prince replied. "Lady Maggie is one of those strange people to whom one may look with every confidence for the unexpected."

She herself came across them, a few moments later.

"Something tells me," she declared, "that you are talking about me."

"You are always a very much discussed young lady," Karschoff rejoined with a little bow.

She made a little grimace and sank into a chair by her aunt. She talked on lightly enough, but all the time with that slight suggestion of superficiality which is a sign of strain. She glanced often towards the entrance of the lounge, yet no one seemed less disturbed when at a few minutes before eleven Prince Shan came quietly in. He made his way at once to Mrs. Bollington Smith and bent over her fingers.

"It is so kind of you and Lord Dorminster," he said, "to give me this opportunity of saying good-by to a few friends."

"You are leaving us so soon, Prince?" she asked in surprise.

"Tomorrow, soon after dawn," he replied, his eyes wandering around the little circle. "I wish to be in Pekin, if possible, by Wednesday, so my *Dragon* must spread her wings indeed."

HE said a few words to almost everybody. Last of all he came to Maggie, and no one heard what he said to her. There was no change in his face as he bent low over her fingers, no sign of anything which might have passed between them, as a few minutes later he turned to one side with Nigel. Maggie held out her hand to Chalmers. The strain seemed to have passed. Her lips were parted in a wonderful smile, her feet moved to the music.

"Come and dance," she invited.

They moved a few steps away together, when Maggie came to an abrupt standstill. The two stood for a moment as though transfixed, their eyes fixed upon the arched entrance which led from the restaurant into the lounge. A man was standing there, looking around, a strange, menacing figure, a man dressed in the garb of fashion but with the face of a savage, with eyes which burned in his head like twin dots of fire, with drawn, hollow cheeks and mouth a little open like a mad dog's. As his eyes fell upon the group and he recognized them, a look of horrible satisfaction came into his face. He began to approach, quite deliberately. He seemed to take in by slow degrees everyone who stood there—Maggie herself, and Chalmers, Naida, Nigel and Prince Shan. He moved forward. All the time his right hand was behind him, concealed underneath the tails of his dress coat.

"Be careful!" Maggie cried out. "It is Oscar Immelan! He is mad!"

Some of the party and many of the bystanders had shrunk away from the menacing figure. Naida stepped out from among the little group of those who were left.

"Oscar," she said firmly, "what is the matter with you? You are not well enough to be here."

He came to a standstill. At close quarters his appearance was even more terrible. Although by some means he had gotten into his evening clothes, he was only partly shaven, and there were gashes in his face where the hand which had held his razor had slipped. The pupils of his eyes were distended, and the eyes themselves seemed to have shrunk back into their sockets. His whole frame seemed to have suddenly lost vigor, even substance. He had the air of a man in clothes too large for him. Even his voice was shriller, shriller and horrible with the slow and bestial satisfaction of his words.

"So here you are, the whole nest of you together, eh?" he exclaimed. "Good! Very good indeed! Prince Shan, the poisoner! Dorminster, enjoying your brief triumph, eh? And you, Naida Karetsky, traitress to your country—deceiver—"

"That will do, Immelan," Nigel interrupted sharply. "We are all here. What do you want with us?"

"That comes," Immelan replied. "Soon you shall all know why I have come! Let me speak to my friend Shan for a moment. I carry your poison in my veins, but there is a chance—just a chance," he added slowly, with a horrible smile upon his lips, "that you may go first, after all."

NIGEL made a stealthy but rapid movement forward, drawing Naida gently out of the way. Immelan was too quick, however. He swung around, showing the revolver which he had been concealing behind him, and moved to one side until his back was against one of the pillars. By this time, most of the other occupants of the ballroom had either rushed screaming away altogether, or were hiding, peering out in fascinated horror from the different recesses. The chief *maître d'hôtel* bravely held his ground and came to within a few paces of Immelan.

"We can't have any brawling here," he said. "Put that revolver away."

Immelan took no notice of the intervener, except that for a single moment the muzzle yawned in the latter's face. The *maître d'hôtel* was a brave man, but he had a wife and family, and after all, it was not his affair. There were other men there to look after the ladies. He hurried off to call for the police. Almost as he went, Prince Shan stepped into the foreground. His voice was calm and expressionless. His eyes, in which there shone no shadow of fear, were steadily fixed upon Immelan. He spoke without flurry.

"So you carry your own weapons tonight, Immelan," he said. "That at least is more like a man. You seem to have a grievance against everyone. Start with me. What is it?"

THERE were some of them who wondered why, at this juncture, when he so clearly dominated his assailant, Prince Shan, whose courage was superb and whose *sang froid* absolutely unshaken, did not throw himself upon this intruder and take his chance of bringing the matter to an end at the moment when the man's nerve was undoubtedly shaken. Then they looked toward the entrance, and they understood. Creeping towards the little gathering came Li Wen and another of the Prince's suite, a younger and even more active man. The two came on tiptoe, crouching and moving warily, with the gleam of the tiger in their anxious eyes. Maggie caught a warning glance from Nigel and looked away.

"You are my murderer!" Immelan cried hoarsely. "It is through you I suffer these pains! I am dying of your accursed poison!"

"If that were true," Prince Shan replied, with the air of one willing to discuss the subject impartially, "might I remind you of Sen Lu, who died in my box at the Albert Hall? For whom was that dagger-thrust meant, Immelan? Not for the man whom you had bought to betray me, the only one of my suite who has ever been tempted with gold. That dagger-thrust was meant for me, and the assassin was one of your creatures. So even if your words were true, Immelan, and the poison which you imagine to be in your body was planted there by me, are we less than quits?"

Immelan's lie was unconvincing.

"I know nothing of Sen Lu's death," he declared. "I employ no assassins. When there is killing to be done, I can do it myself. I am here tonight for that purpose. You have deserted me at the last moment,

Prince Shan—played me and my country false for the sake of the Englishwoman whom you think to carry back with you to China. And you," he added, turning with a sudden, furious glance at Naida, "you have deceived the man who trusted you, the man who sent you here for one purpose and one purpose only. You too have done your best to ruin my scheme. Not only that, but you have given the love which was mine—mine, I say—to another —an Englishman! I hate you all! That is why I, a dying man, have crawled here to reap my little harvest of vengeance. You, Naida—you shall be first—"

Naida was suddenly swung on one side, and the shot which rang out passed through Nigel's coat-sleeve, grazing his wrist—the only shot that was fired. Prince Shan, watching for his moment, as his two attendants threw themselves upon the madman from behind, himself sprang forward, knocked Immelan's right hand up with a terrible blow, and sent the revolver crashing to the ground. It was a matter of a few seconds. Immelan, when he felt himself seized, scarcely struggled. The courage of his madness seemed to pass; the venom died out of his face; he shook like a man in an ague. Prince Shan kicked the revolver on one side and looked scornfully down upon him, now a nerveless wreck.

"Immelan," he said, "it is a pity that you did not wait until tomorrow morning. You would then have known the truth. You are no more poisoned than I am. If you had been in China—well, who knows? In England there is so much prejudice against the taking of a worthless life that as a guest I subscribed to it and mixed a little orris-root tooth powder with your vermouth."

The man's eyes suddenly opened. He was feverishly, frantically anxious.

"Tell me that again?" he shrieked. "You mean it? Swear that you mean it?"

Prince Shan's gesture as he turned away was one of supreme contempt.

"A Shan," he said, "never needs to repeat."

THERE was the bustle of arriving police, the story of a revolver which had gone off by accident, a very puzzling contretemps expounded for their benefit. The situation, and the participants in it, seemed to dissolve with such facility that it was hard for anyone to understand what had actually happened. Prince Shan, with Maggie on his arm, was talking to the leader of the orchestra, who had suddenly reappeared. The former turned to his companion.

"It is not my custom to dance," he said, "but the waltz that they were beginning to play seemed to me to have a little of the lure of our own music. Will you do me the honor?"

They moved away to the music. Chalmers stood and watched them, with one hand in his pocket and the other on Nigel's shoulder. He turned to Naida, who was on the other side.

"Nothing like a touch of melodrama for the emotions," he grumbled. "Look at Lady Maggie! Her head might be touching the clouds, and I never saw her eyes shine like that when she danced with me."

"You don't dance as well as Prince Shan, old fellow," Nigel told him.

"And the Prince sails for China at dawn," Naida murmured.

CHAPTER XXXII

PRINCE SHAN stood in the tiny sitting-room of his suite upon the *Black Dragon* and looked around him critically. The walls were of black oak, with white inlaid plaques on which a great artist had traced little fanciful figures—a quaint Chinese landscape, a temple, a flower-hung pagoda. There were hangings of soft blue silk tapestry, brought from one of his northern palaces. The cloth which covered the table was of the finest silk. There were several bowls of flowers, a couch, and two comfortable chairs. Through the open doors of the two bedchambers came a faint glimpse of snow-white linen, a perfume reminiscent at once of almond blossom, green tea, and crushed lavender, and in the little room beyond glistened a silver bath. Already attired for the voyage, his pilot stood on the threshold.

"Is all well, Your Highness?" he asked.

"Everything is in order," Prince Shan replied. "Ching Su is a perfect steward."

"The reverend gentleman is in his room, Your Highness," the pilot went on. "All the supplies have arrived, and the crew are at their stations. At what hour will it please Your Highness to start?"

Prince Shan looked through the open window out to the broad stretch of road which led to London.

"I announced the hour of my departure

as six o'clock," he replied. "I cannot leave before in case of any farewell message."

Prince Shan stepped through his private exit on to the narrow wooden platform. Already the mighty engines had started, purring softly but deeply, like the deep-throated murmurings of a giant soon to break into a roar. It was a light, silvery morning, with hidden sunshine everywhere.

PRINCE SHAN glanced at his watch—twenty minutes to six. He paced the wooden boards and looked again—fifteen minutes to six. Then he stopped suddenly. Along that gleaming stretch of private road came a car, driven at a rapid pace. Prince Shan stood and watched it, and as he watched it seemed almost as though the hidden sun had caught his face and transfigured it. He stood as a man might stand who feels his feet upon the clouds. His lips trembled. There was no one there to see,—his attendants stood respectfully in the background,—but in his eyes was a rare moisture, and for a single moment a little choking at his throat.

The car turned in under the arched roof. Prince Shan's servants, obeying his gesture, hurried forward and threw open the gates. The heavily laden limousine came to a standstill. Three people descended. Nigel and Naida lingered, watching the luggage being unloaded. Maggie came forward alone.

They met a few yards from the entrance to the platform. Prince Shan was bareheaded, and Maggie, at least, saw those wonderful things in his face. He bent down and took her hands in his.

"Dear and sweet soul," he whispered, as his lips touched her fingers, "may my God and yours grant that you shall find happiness!"

Her own eyes were wet as she smiled up at him.

"I have been so long making up my mind," she said, "and yet I knew all the time. I am so glad—so happy that I have come. Think, too, how wonderful a start! We leave the earth for the clouds."

"It is a wonderful allegory," he answered, smiling. "We will take it into our hearts, dear one. It rests within the power of every human being to search for happiness and, in searching, to find it. I am fortunate because I can take you to beautiful places. I can spell out for you the secrets of a new art and a new beauty. We can walk in fairy gardens. I can give you jewels such as Europe has never seen, but I can give you, Maggie, nothing so strange and wonderful, even to me who know myself, as the love which fills my heart."

Her laugh was like music.

"I am going to be so happy," she said.

The other two approached, and they all shook hands. They looked over the amazing little rooms, watched the luggage stored away in some marvelous manner, saw the crew, every one at his station like a motionless figure. Then a whistle was blown, and once more they all clasped hands.

"Very soon," Prince Shan promised, as he and Maggie leaned from the window of the car, "I shall send the *Black Dragon* for you, Lord Dorminster, and for the one other whom I think you may wish to bring. Asia is not so far off, these days, and Maggie will love to see her friends."

Almost imperceptibly the giant airship floated away.

"Watch, both of you," Maggie cried. "I am sending you down a farewell present."

She whispered to Prince Shan, who handed her something from his pocket, smiled, and gave an order. The great ship passed in a semicircle and hovered almost exactly above their heads. A little shower of small scraps of paper came floating down. Nigel picked one up, examined it, and understood. He waved his hat.

"It is Maggie's farewell gift to England," he said, "the treaty which Prince Shan never signed."

THEY stood side by side, watching. With incredible speed, the *Black Dragon* passed into the clouds and out again. Then, as it roared away eastwards, the sun suddenly disclosed itself. The airship mounted towards it, shimmering and gleaming in every part. Naida passed her hand a little shyly through her companion's arm.

"Isn't that rather a wonderful way to depart in search of happiness?" she murmured.

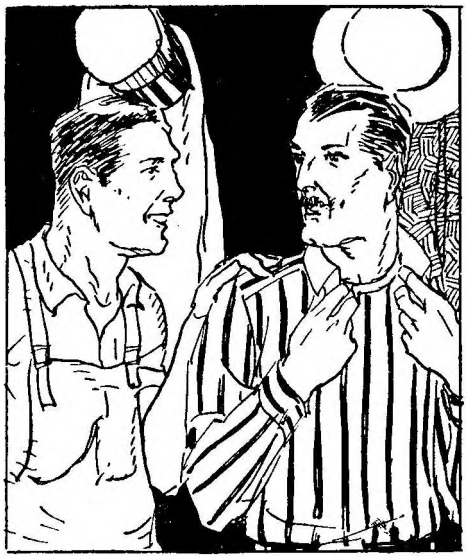
He smiled down at her.

"I do not think that we shall find the search very difficult, dear," he said, "though our feet may remain upon the earth."

Naida's lip quivered for a moment. Then she caught a glimpse of his face and gave a little sigh of content.

"There is heaven everywhere," she whispered.

THE END



Collars

Wherein the perplexing problem of getting the "white collar" men to mix with the "no collar" men is solved by selling sociability.

By R. B. JOHNSTON

ALMOST every undertaking in the world from winning a wife to building up a bankrupt trolley-line, is fundamentally a selling problem, in my mind. I proved this true in one instance by turning the employees' club of a big industrial plant from an acknowledged failure into a big success. Lack of capital is said to send most failing concerns to the coroner—but not this one. Money—why, there was too much back of the project originally, but too little understanding. When I first knew of it, the thing was in a nearly hopeless condition.

The energizing task came to me unexpectedly, and I took it up on an impulse as an alternative to idleness. The day I heard from my sales-manager that I must lay off, I called on a college mate, Frank Nelson, who runs a factory. Lack of certain raw materials needed in our product —caused by the situation in Russia—had forced a shutdown, and so I'd been invited to go home for an indefinite stay. My salary would continue, but I hated to think of loafing.

We'd been chums, and so I told Nelson of my fix and half jokingly asked him to put me at work. He laughed at me, saying I ought to be much obliged for a chance to loaf, and he wished he could help me rest. This was mostly sympathy, as he thrived on work. He'd learned his firm's business, starting as a day laborer, and so made the money for college. He is five years older than I, but we had been in the same class.

I persisted in asking for work, offering to do most any kind of labor. He said his concern filled most positions of any importance from a list of applications filed at the main office.

"But I don't want a 'position.' I have a good 'position,' and can keep it at my regular salary, but must loaf. Our whole department, from sales-manager to stenographers, has been told to take at least a six months' vacation and not to even go

near the factory in that period. What I'm after now is a 'job,' and you simply must give one to me."

"But a job means hard labor here," he replied. "We hire unskilled men off-hand. We do fill emergency vacancies, but generally those are for machine-tenders or engineers in the power-plant."

HE sat looking straight ahead for a few moments, then turned suddenly to me, shaking his finger defiantly in my face as he exclaimed:

"I'll give you a job. Yes, and at the same time you'll have a chance to make good on one of your pet ideas. I've heard you say that almost everything, reduced to essentials, depends for success on selling, or 'merchandising,' to quote you exactly. Haven't I?"

"Certainly, I can sell what you're making—"

"Not so fast. We've wasted a lot of time arguing that point. Our product is bought in bulk and the output is contracted for at top price at present. No, we don't need any road salesmen here nor at the main office."

"But why were you challenging my 'merchandising' belief?"

"There is a job in this plant fairly crying out for some one to take it, and none of us here appears to have any definite idea just how it ought to be handled. It is something in which I have a personal interest. In fact, the want exists because of a project started through my efforts. Perhaps I could make it go if I could spare the time, but that is impossible. It keeps me fairly busy directing the work of nearly two thousand men."

"Why not tell me about this job and let me tackle it, provided we think I can handle it. What's the nature of the work?"

"Perhaps you are the man who could put it over. I'm willing to let you try if you wish. It seems to me to need tact to a greater degree than any other qualification, and certainly you had to possess that to succeed in newspaper work after graduating. And your sales-ability—well, if you can sell the goods I'm willing to turn over to you, it will rank as an achievement."

"Maybe I could qualify. The *Planet's* city editor once or twice told me I had the makings of a diplomat. But about the job—don't keep me in suspense."

"You must have seen that three-story building off to the left, on the small hill near our lake. Well, there's your job, if you hate peace and quiet. It was put up as the home of our employees' club, but all it is to date is a clubhouse. It is not a home in any sense of the word. We had two regular club stewards, who threatened to do all sorts of things. Both have gone. My assistant is trying his hand, but says he can't do anything with it. Try to make that place a success. You can have a free hand."

But I never ran a club. I'm not even on a committee of either of those I belong to at home. I don't know the first thing about cooking or serving meals, which seems to be the chief excuse for the clubs I know anything about. What's the idea of passing it along to me?"

"You say you must have something to do. You were a good manager of the college paper, as it made money. You would have plenty of managing to do if you tackled this club, and there is no worry over profit. The firm pays all the bills. All I want is to see that building become the *home* of a real employees' club. Money is no object. The place was put up for the men and is used nightly by a dozen or so. There ought to be two hundred there.

"Think it over. When you went with your company, you worked more than a month in the stockroom, even tended a machine for three weeks. Enroll in one of our gangs that unload freight—you're strong enough. Live at a company boarding-house. Go to the clubhouse and study the proposition for a week or two, then tell me what you think of it.

"Frankly, I'm stumped. A committee of the men, my assistant being chairman, now runs the club, but it just drags along. It reminds me of the way our varsity team acted one year when there were too many big games early in the fall and we went stale the first week in November. You were a good foot-ball strategist and college-paper manager, have done well at reporting and selling. Here is a chance to use knowledge gained in four different pursuits. Meet me at the clubhouse two weeks from tonight and tell me if you've worked out a plan."

"You're on," I replied.

AFTER buying working clothes at a near-by store, I reported to the gang to which I'd been assigned and worked the remaining half day. I had told Frank he would neither see nor hear from me for two

weeks. I never told anyone there that I knew him. My room at the boarding-house was pleasant and the food good but not fancy. I made friends with several other boarder-workmen after supper, and when we'd talked baseball and politics for a time, turned in.

Unloading freight was hard work, and I was very tired the next night. Four of us talked again for a while after supper. I waited for some one to suggest going to the clubhouse, but no one did. Finally I asked what the building was, pointing at it through a window.

"That? Why that's a clubhouse the company put up for the employees," was the reply of Frank Harris, who had a room near mine. He was a New Englander, and as he liked baseball even more than I did, we had discussed the sport both nights.

"Are there certain times when it's open, or can any of us go there whenever we want to?"

"It's open all the time to all employees. But there are too many of the young gentlemen bunch from the offices there most of the time for it to be popular with those of us who have to work harder for a living than drive pens. But if you want to look it over, I'll take you over there right now if you say so."

"Not tonight—too tired. But suppose you show me through tomorrow night."

Harris agreed to this and I went upstairs. Unaccustomed hard work had left me muscle-sore and weary, but I didn't sleep for some time, thinking over what Harris had said. I felt I now had an inside view of the problem and knew what the trouble was. Sleep overtook me while I considered ways to get the workmen in the habit of using the clubhouse. I dreamed of a monster cane-rush in which I led the workmen to victory over the ranks of the office clerks, with Frank Nelson at their head.

WE visited the clubhouse the following evening. It was a fine concrete building and as sanitary-looking inside as a hospital. There was no white furniture, of course—the chairs and tables were of heavy fumed oak; but somehow it reminded me of a hospital. Perhaps it was the rubber floor-mats and coverings, along with the general air of subdued quiet. Everyone in sight walked so carefully and spoke in such low tones that I suddenly asked Harris:

"Who's dead? Why did they bring the corpse here?"

He looked dazed at first, then went into gales of laughter. Some young chaps, who looked as if they might be office clerks, gazed at us somewhat disapprovingly. This amused me, and I began to laugh too, for Harris was having so much fun that he got me going.

"Why this is a clubhouse, not an undertaker's place," Harris replied when he could control his laughter. "What put the corpse idea into your head?"

"All the men I could see around here seemed to be careful not to make any noise when they walked, and the talking was in such a confidential tone of voice I thought sure some one had died."

"That's pretty good," Bill Holland smilingly remarked as he came out of a room near where we stood. "It is about as noisy here as in the reading-room of the city library, though it hasn't any 'Silence Please' signs. But even at that, this is the first time I ever heard anyone worry about a dead man being around the place."

They laughed some more, and Holland wanted to know if this was my first visit to the building. Harris said he had offered to show me around and asked him to go along. Bill was now head timekeeper. He had been foreman of a freight-unloading gang a long time, but Frank Nelson had given him the other job because of his marvelous memory of men's names and faces.

Down in the basement there were four bowling-alleys, three pool-tables, shower-baths, and a plunge big enough for water polo. One of the tables was being used, the alleys being idle. Most of the main floor was devoted to a big assembly-room in which motion-pictures were shown once a week. The adjoining rooms on each side of the central hall had sliding partitions on the assembly-room side, so that the seating capacity could be enlarged, but my guides told me the extra space had never been utilized. The second floor had card- and game-rooms, a big reading-room and library and a few emergency guest-rooms. The gymnasium occupied the entire top floor with the exception of the space used for a locker-room.

"It's a fine place," I said as we started down from the gymnasium, "but there don't seem to be very many here. Is it an off night?"

"No, you could hardly claim it was very

densely populated," was Harris' comment, "especially when you consider that there are more than two thousand names on Bill Holland's list of employees."

"The boys ought to use the house more," Holland declared. "I can't for the life of me understand why they don't. I've been told this is as fine a place as any of the big city athletic clubs have. There is everything here a man could ask for, except a bar, and it's better off without that.

"Take this reading room!"—as we paused at the library door. "Here are five men, and there are seats for ten times as many. Let's see—there were two young fellows playing pool, four in a card-game; two were at it over a chessboard, and there are three up in the gym. And the exercisers aren't steady employees, but college students who work here every summer vacation. That makes sixteen, not counting us. That don't show much gratitude to the boss for building this clubhouse."

HARRIS and I raised the count to eighteen by staying in the reading room. We didn't tarry long. We wanted to read some "diamond dope" about our baseball favorites but couldn't find any. The newspapers on file were too conservative for such frivolous articles. The magazines, too, were the serious kind Harris didn't care for—nor I either, for that matter.

"Let's go downstairs and bowl a few games," I suggested to Harris as we got to the door. He agreed, and we walked back to the stairway. We met the pool-players going out as we started down, and Harris remarked:

"Looks like those young chaps were afraid of your corpse, or they wouldn't be quitting so early."

Harris was not much of a bowler, so we had a fine time. He won most of the games. The alleys were as good as any I'd ever seen and looked as if they had hardly ever been used. Harris became enthusiastic and agreed when I suggested that we get some more men from our boarding-house to join us the next night. He said it was kind of lonesome when there were only two of us in that big room.

We had quite a session the following evening. We had two teams of five men each. Although no new figures were made for the record books, we had a lot of fun. Because we started it, they made Harris and me captains. Four of them had never tried the alleys before, and so we each had two novices. My delegation had the best luck and we won, only to be challenged to bowl again the next night.

There was a lot of good-natured talk all day and we had quite a few spectators when we went at it again. Some of them got up games of their own, and others divided their time between watching the bowlers and playing pool. The scene was such an animated one that when Bill Holland came down about ten o'clock he rubbed his eyes in wonder and said:

"This looks something like a regular clubhouse at last."

That started the bowling idea in fine style. The men got up teams from the different departments, and before long all the alleys were working every night. The office men had done a little rolling a few months before, and the contagion spread to them. Finally there were some matches arranged between the teams that won the championships of the various divisions. The men of the technical force and the office clerks put their best men to the front. There was nearly as much bowling talk around that plant as Boston ever heard around World's Series time in the fall.

THE other floors were about as deserted as before, however, and one night I talked to Harris of it. I wondered why more workmen did not use the rest of the clubhouse. His guess was that they stayed away because the regular users of the rooms were better dressed. They didn't feel like "dolling up" to look like the clerks.

"You see," he went on, "you and I and the rest come down here without any collars. If we wore them, we'd take 'em off anyway, before we began to bowl. Even the clerks take off theirs as they go on the alleys; but upstairs it's different."

"So you think it's a case where the white collars of the clerks and technical men prevent the shopmen from enjoying the things the company has provided here? That does seem the reason, though it sounds kind of foolish. Now you mention it, I remember noticing there were a lot more of our bunch here last Saturday afternoon and Sunday than any other time, at least on the upper floors."

"Yes, and I'll tell you something else," said Harris. "You've had a good education and know something about magazines

and books. Take a look at what is laid out in that library for a lot of tired, hard-working men to read when they have a little while to spare and want something light or amusing."

This made me laugh, both the tribute to my education and the memory of the previous Sunday afternoon when I'd tried to find something to read in the library. I never found out who made up the list of magazines and books, but he'd make an excellent buyer for a reading room at an old ladies' home. The same person must also have picked out the newspapers on the files. Maybe they were great as literature, but they had about as much snap as a mummy in a museum.

THERE were good clay tennis courts alongside the clubhouse but they were seldom used. Nelson, who liked baseball himself when he had time to think about it, had ordered a fine diamond laid out just below the clubhouse. The workmen had previously made a playing-field of their own over at the far end of the company's property, where the contests between the plant's nine and visiting teams were formerly decided.

A few clerks used the new official grounds occasionally, but the old field had a big crowd of workmen on it after five o'clock every day the ground was dry enough for practice. They had been "choosing up sides" like a bunch of boys on city lots, but at that they had some wildly exciting five-inning games before supper. Harris was one of the busiest players. I asked him why they had not tried contests between teams representing different divisions, like those we had started among the bowlers.

"I don't know; I suppose because it never happened to strike us."

"I believe it would make the sport more interesting and get more men out to play. There's room enough over beyond left field to lay out another diamond if so many show up that this one gets crowded. We'd all play better if more of us could practice at once. Now, if there were only some way to get the boys together! We could talk over the division team idea and the plan of having another field over there near this one."

"We can talk in the big 'movie' room of the clubhouse—the boss said we could have it for meetings any time we wanted it," said Harris, saving me from too much suggesting. "Let's tell this bunch and spread it around the plant tomorrow that there will be a baseball fans' meeting at night. I'll ask Bill Holland right away if he will put it up to Mr. Nelson. If he doesn't object, we can start advertising it at once. There's a bowling match on, but the bowlers can settle their argument after the baseball bee."

Harris chased over to the nearest shop and telephoned to Holland. He ran back in a few minutes, saying the boss said to go ahead. He stopped the practice long enough to announce the meeting and its purpose. The players cheered him and promised to bring others. Men in different divisions began planning for their nines, boasting what their teams would do to the others.

Bill Holland was made chairman of the meeting after Harris declined. Technical men and office clerks had not been invited. No members of the plant's official team showed up, either, although some of them worked in the shops. They took themselves seriously and put on a lot of airs. Mostly they were but fair semi-professionals who got easy summer jobs so they would play ball against outsiders and nines from the firm's other plants.

I was glad none of the regular players were present. I'd feared they would all want to be captains. I asked a man who sat near me if the plant players could be members of the division teams. He answered he hoped not, and stood up at once. He proposed that none of the "summer workers," as he called them, be allowed to play in the series of contests being arranged. This was adopted without any discussion.

Nearly three hundred workmen were present. They made plans for six nines, representing as many shop divisions. A lot of them had never taken an active part in the sport, as the games had been limited to a few impromptu affairs and the regularly scheduled ones of the "summer workers." But they had all the average American's liking for baseball and promised to get out for practice. All showed eagerness to help the idea along. Bill Holland's announcement that Mr. Nelson said they could fix up the other diamond was cheered.

UNTIL just before the meeting ended I didn't know Frank Nelson had been sitting behind me. While Holland was tell-

ing the men that he'd had a fine time at their party, Frank leaned over to tell me he'd see me in one of the game-rooms in ten minutes. It was the night we had agreed on for my report, but I'd been so busy it had slipped my mind.

"You or some one more than made good tonight on my wish to see two hundred men in the clubhouse," was his greeting as we sat down. "Our pin-boys have certainly been earning their wages the last ten days, but that crowd of future Ty Cobbs established an attendance record. What do you think now of the job I gave you?"

"This is a selling problem you have here, Frank. I thought so from the start, but now I know it. What this dandy clubhouse has needed was a salesman to merchandise what it has to offer. No big college athletic association nor any city athletic club has a finer place than you've provided for the men. Of course, you have no running-track or athletic field but you don't need them.

"First I sold bowling to Harris by getting him to roll a few games. He beat me and liked the feeling of winning. Then we aroused the interest of a few others. They like the game too, and talked about it to their neighbors. The workmen had never shown any liking for bowling before, because no one had tried to sell the bowling idea to them. Now more than a hundred of them are sold on it, either as participants or spectators. And that isn't all, either, for about fifty active bowlers have sprung up out of your technical and office forces.

"Having given the sales-department the floor, you as the producing head must listen to some roasts of your line of goods, which is the clubhouse and its fittings—or rather, the way the building is arranged. The basement is fine and need not be changed. But this floor and the first—oh, my! Whoever fixed up that library and reading-room ought to have a life sentence to Cambridge, Massachusetts, or England.

"Frank, by chance did you ever examine the newspapers, magazines and books you've got over there across the hall? You should, especially some night when you're dog tired and want to be amused. Even an old-time college professor would go to sleep if he tried to read 'em. Judging by the dust, none have ever been taken from the shelves. I hauled out a lot of them one day and found that none of the pages had been cut.

"I'm serious about this library matter. When you shift the books, get rid of those two big tables and put in a lot of individual reading desks, each with a shaded light. Fill the shelves with all the correspondence-school volumes you can buy. Get books of travel, adventure, historical novels, reference works and a bunch of better modern fiction. Keep that room as a sort of peaceful place where men who want to read and study in quietness can do so undisturbed.

"Have your periodical reading-room on the main floor. Take two of those rooms and throw them into one by pushing back the sliding partitions. Let that be the place for those who want to look at newspapers and magazines. Get a dozen or so of the big-circulation newspapers instead of the three or four conservative ones that come now. Send for all the livest magazines, weekly and monthly. Be sure to include all the ones that go in for good stories and the others that tell of mechanical contrivances and new inventions. Get some one to put bulletin boards around the plant with brief notes of new things in the magazines likely to interest the men. Tell them about articles which they might miss unless they were told in some special way.

"FRANK HARRIS has helped me a lot without knowing it. He is not only a baseball fan, but he's a mighty good player. He and some of his cronies have been practicing over on the old diamond. They are so keen about playing they hate to stop for supper. I said they could practice longer if they got through work at four o'clock, and they're talking about asking you to make seven the starting hour instead of eight. If they do, for goodness' sake do it, even if you think you'd better put it to a vote. The decision will favor it, for the summer months, anyway.

"No provision has been made here for women. Yet more than a third of your men are married. The men's wives, mothers, sisters and daughters would enjoy a chance now and then for a gathering, social or otherwise. Have the clubhouse committee establish a ladies' night. The women can settle it among themselves by voting for the particular night they want each week. The firm could pay for lecturers to talk on subjects in which women are interested. There need be no hurry about working out this last idea properly—it's a cold weather stunt."

"How about money?" inquired Nelson. "You've done wonderfully well. I don't expect you to have only the laborer's wages you are credited with."

"Not an extra cent is coming to me," I answered. "I felt I was cheating, anyway, and wrote to my sales-manager about what I was doing. He seems to think it's a lark for me and writes that my regular check will go to my home address the same as if I'd obeyed orders to loaf indefinitely."

NELSON wasted no time doing the things I had suggested. He appointed Bill Holland a committee of one to attend to the library and reading-room changes. Bill was puzzled about the newspapers and magazines to send for, so he asked the workmen to make up lists for him. When he sifted the selections, he got the ones I'd hoped for. It made me proud to see so many young fellows spend their evenings in the library studying mechanics and a lot of other subjects treated in those correspondence-school volumes and reference works.

The reading-room was the real achievement, in my estimation. Big rugged workmen, a bit shy in the unaccustomed surroundings, went to that place in fast-growing numbers after the shift to the main floor. They found the kind of papers they bought when in the cities. The magazines had plenty of good stories and pictures in them, and there were none of the reviews and other bookish periodicals that had gathered dust on the tables upstairs.

Frank Nelson asked Holland's daughter Helen, the plant's head telephone-girl, to attend to the ladies' night. She took hold of the project and did her work well indeed. She was a tall, healthy girl with a great lot of reddish hair and was handsome rather than pretty. She played tennis well and was more than a match for most of the technical and office men on the courts. Nelson told her to buy enough rackets so all the women and girls that wished could play. He told them about it that first ladies' night and said he hoped to see many of them become players. They did, too, for Helen taught a lot of them how to play, and the courts became very busy places.

Her father pressed her into service to get the women's room arranged. She took a day off in the city and bought curtains and other things to fit up the place. She made her father and Harris help with the decorations. She also made up the list of magazines and got some of the older women to aid in picking out the books needed for the room. It scored an instant hit. The women liked their room and the clubhouse so well that the place looked as if it had been built for their special benefit every afternoon, after that, judging by the numbers that visited the building.

The shopmen were enthusiastic over the inter-division baseball idea. Before the first contest, however, another big meeting was held to discuss the seven o'clock starting hour for the shops. The crowd was bigger than for the first session. Nelson was there, the committee of captains having invited him. Harris explained why they wished the starting-hour advanced and asked Frank if he could grant the request. He told them he thought it a good idea but preferred to have all the men vote on the question. He told Bill Holland to be a one-man election-board. The next night it was announced that all but a dozen or so favored the earlier starting-hour.

The clubhouse speedily lost its hospital-like solemnity. Reading-room and library, bowling-alleys and pool-tables were attracting throngs nightly. But mostly the men showed up as baseball fans, and talk of big league stars and our own players was heard where quietness reigned so recently. Holland, who had mastered the intricacies of box-score keeping, was official scorer. He was a sort of unofficial and local National Commission when disputes arose, on the field or in the clubhouse, as they will.

HELEN and Harris saw quite a bit of each other during the next few months and their engagement was announced after the season's last baseball game. Harris' nine had won the inter-division series, then beaten the teams of the technical force and office clerks. The contest listed for the official plant nine for Columbus Day was canceled, and Nelson suggested that Harris pit his men against the "summer workers." Harris put his team into a one-run lead by daring base-stealing in their half of the ninth. He ended the battle by an unaided double play, jumping into the air after a hot liner and tagging a runner trying to get back to second base. Helen sat behind Frank Nelson and practically ruined

a perfectly good sailor hat by thumping Frank on the back with it when Harris made his spectacular play.

But the "no collars" shop-workers and the "white collars" technical men and office clerks were not fraternizing the way I'd hoped. There was not so much of the former stand-off spirit visible, and it stumped me how to make them like each other. But one night a couple of technical men talked over plans to go home for Thanksgiving Day. One told of the glories of Indiana and the other praised Pennsylvania.

Before those chaps left the reading-room I'd asked them if they wouldn't hunt out others from their former States and get up Hoosier and Keystone bowling teams. With State pride as an incentive, the idea took hold with a hurrah. Shopmen, technical experts and office clerks were mixed up in that way. At last I began to feel I'd done what I'd tried to accomplish, do away with the class feeling arising mostly from use or disuse of white collars, and so have all the employees use that clubhouse together.

EARLY in November my sales-manager wrote me to report December 1. Our chemists had found substitutes for the raw materials lost to us by the Russian situation, and my factory would resume production early in January. When I told Frank the news, he protested against my going away. He told me his firm's executive committee had empowered him to engage me, at any price, to go to its other plants and see if I could repeat what he styled my "great achievement."

"You are very nice to say that. Please thank your directors for me, but I must refuse," I answered. "I'm too fond of my regular work to do any other kind steadily, and hope to be sales-manager some day. This job you gave me was only temporary, as you know, and I couldn't keep at such work as a regular occupation. I wouldn't have done this for anyone but you, anyhow. I will be leaving Thanksgiving Day, after I've acted as best man when Helen Holland and Frank Harris are married."

"But what are we going to do?" Frank demanded. "Things are going fine now, but if you leave, there is no telling when matters will be just as bad as before. It would be worse then, for we've had a chance to see how finely the men can get along together. Better consider it carefully. The directors will be very happy to give you twice the salary your firm has been paying."

"It is impossible, Frank, but I'll tell you how to satisfy your board of directors. I'm sure Frank Harris and Helen could do better work than I at your firm's other plants. Both have done more actual good here than I, even if some of the suggestions were mine. I'll talk it over with them tonight. They seem an ideal couple to carry on such work. Both make and keep friends among all classes. I'm sure they would be very successful.

"They can do all I've done, and more, after I've explained things to them. In this job you wished on me all I had to do was to merchandise, or sell, sociability. Go the world over, analyze things, and you'll find that the man you don't know is the man you don't like. In this plant the 'no collars' men and the 'white collars' bunch were not friendly because they were not acquainted. By one plan and another they were mixed up together, so they had to know each other. Friendships followed as a matter of course, and now, with friendships as an established basis, your employees' clubhouse is an assured success. This building is really the 'home' of a club and will remain so."

LESS than half an hour's talking convinced Helen and Frank Harris they ought to accept the offer Frank Nelson made through me. They have been doing the work more than two years now, going from one plant to another. They are very happy and have accomplished great things for the employees' clubs that are now established at all the firm's factories. There is a big water-sports carnival at Frank Nelson's plant every July Fourth, started by Mr. and Mrs. Harris. Men and women row, swim and have canoe races. The Harrises insisted on my being a judge for the first one, and I went back there last year too.

Frank Nelson sent me a fine watch, a gift of his board of directors. It's about the size of a twenty-dollar gold-piece and does most everything but say good night to me when I wind it before I turn in at night. I don't like to let anyone open the case, for the inscription there calls me "the greatest salesman in the world" and I'm afraid some one might think I believed it.

The Girl He Left Behind

Wherein Mr. Dobb takes down his motto "Strictly Business" from the wall, and chops it into small, small pieces.

By F. Morton Howard

THAT rising man of affairs, Mr. Horace Dobb, was setting out on his afternoon stroll.

Upon his sleekly anointed hair there rested a soft felt hat of exceeding plushiness, with a tuft of strange feathers thrust into its band to hint at sporting prowess. A very high and very stiff collar encircled Mr. Dobb's throat; and upon a necktie of cheerful patterning there was pillowed a scarfpin conspicuously like the headlight upon a locomotive. A shaggy tweed suit of a hue which far o'erleapt snuff and only narrowly missed mustard, graced Mr. Dobb's frame, and his feet were encased in orange-colored boots.

When the eye had become inured to these glories, returning powers of vision brought apprehension of a silver-mounted cane, of a buttonhole of geranium blooms, of a cigar, and a festooning watch-chain, and of the phenomenon of tan gloves, not worn on the hands, but carried carelessly, as though their presence were due to a merest afterthought on the part of lazy luxury.

Thus, as it were, glossed and burnished and intensified, Mr. Dobb progressed down Fore Street and arrived at the corner where it joins Bridge Street; and here he paused to gaze up and down the road. A fine sense of dominance permeated Mr. Dobb as he stood there with an expression hovering midway between languid interest and patrician disdain.

And then, as an ancient ewer may be rare and valuable ware in one moment, and in the next, be but so much broken crockery, so in a twinkling was Mr. Dobb transformed from a proud autocrat to a quaking fugitive.

Gone was all trace of hauteur from his face; vanished completely was all swaggering complacency of manner. There was a hunted look in his eyes, and he had become limp and drooping and manifestly unstable at the knees. And the whole change had happened in that trice which is occupied by the clash of two pairs of eyes meeting each other in a glance of recognition across a narrow thoroughfare.

" 'Strewth!" breathed Mr. Dobb, aghast, and made a convulsive, clutching movement towards his hat, but checked his arm halfway. " 'Strewth!" he said again, but even more emphatically, and then spun round on his heel and began to retrace his way along Fore Street at a pace in marked contrast to his previous gait. Not until he had swerved round three successive corners did he feel emboldened to moderate his pace, and even then he traveled at something approximating a canter.

At last he came to the region of the harbor, and reaching the Flag and Pennant shipway, he vigorously semaphored for the attendance of the ferryman stationed there. On his hasty arrival, that functionary found himself directed to take Mr. Dobb across the river with the utmost speed.

MR. SAMUEL CLARK, the ferryman, well used to the vagaries of his present patron and former shipmate of the *Jane Gladys,* made no immediate comment, but assisted his passenger into the boat and began to transport him with commendable energy. Mr. Dobb, removing his high collar and thrusting it into his pocket, made the noises of one narrowly saved from suffocation, and gazed fearfully over his shoulder at the receding river-bank.

"I—I—I aint got the breath to hexplain now, Sam," he puffed presently. "Put me down over there by the Red Lion, and then go back and make up a yarn. And get some one to take your place. And then go and fetch Peter Lock and Joe Tridge, and bring 'em over yonder to me at once."

"Doings?" asked Mr. Clark, with the liveliest expectancy.

"Not 'alf!" was Mr. Dobb's reply. "Not 'alf!" he said again, and shivered perceptibly.

In face of this discouraging reply, Mr. Clark had not the hardihood to press for more explicit information. Ever one to concede that there was a wrong time and a right time to appeal to Mr. Dobb's confidence, the look on that gentleman's face warned him that this was indubitably one of the wrong times.

In pondering silence, therefore, did the plump and ancient ferryman bend his best efforts to conveying Mr. Dobb to the farther side of the harbor, and when this had been achieved, he immediately put about to accord loyal and unquestioning fulfillment to the remainder of Mr. Dobb's instructions.

WELL within the hour, Mr. Clark returned in convoy of Mr. Tridge and Mr. Lock, and the three entered the presence of Mr. Dobb in the otherwise vacant taproom of the Red Lion.

Mr. Dobb had recovered some meed of his composure in the interval, but the rosiness of complexion induced by violent exercise had now faded to an ascetic pallor, and his eyes looked up dully from deep and dark circles. Evidence of his mental state was afforded by the fact that he was sitting on his ornate hat.

"Lummy, 'Orace, you *do* look upset!" observed Mr. Tridge.

"He looks real downright bad," asserted Mr. Lock.

" 'E looks 'orrible," was Mr. Clark's contribution.

Mr. Dobb, gazing with lackluster eyes from one to the other of his old shipmates, shook his head forlornly and gave vent to a sigh of extraordinary duration.

"Why, 'e looks as if 'e'd seen a ghost," declared Mr. Tridge.

"I 'ave," said Mr. Dobb; "that's just what I *'ave* seen. A ghost—a real live ghost!"

Mr. Tridge threw a startled glance at the empty tumbler standing before Mr. Dobb.

"No, it aint that," said Mr. Dobb, comprehending. "That is only the third I've 'ad all day. It's a *real* ghost I've seen. A ghost from out of the past," he ended, with a fugitive gleam of pride in the quality of this phrase.

Mr. Lock, his head a little on one side, speculatively scrutinized this beholder of visions. Mr. Tridge and Mr. Lock stared at each other in a baffled way, and privately intimated a mutual disbelief in the sanity of their friend.

"Boys," said Mr. Dobb, "she's 'ere."

"Which she?" cried Mr. Tridge, not without perturbation.

" 'Oo do you *think*?" dallied Mr. Dobb.

"Not—not that widder woman from Teignmouth, that Mrs. Larstick?" queried Mr. Clark shakily. "Not *'er*? That I do 'ope. Don't say it's 'er?" he begged.

"N-n-n-nor y-y-y-yet th-th-th-that—" stammered Mr. Tridge, clearly lacking full control of his jaw.

"Why the dooce don't you say straight out, 'Orace?" asked Mr. Lock.

Mr. Dobb swallowed convulsively and steadied himself by taking a firm grip on the arms of his chair.

"It's—it's Looie Radling," he announced.

"Oh, *'er*!" said Mr. Tridge, swiftly reassured. "Nice little bit of goods, too."

"Werry nice," agreed Mr. Clark, in equal relief. "It'll be a pleasure to meet 'er again."

Mr. Lock, smiling, readjusted the set of his necktie.

"But—but 'ave you forgot?" asked Mr. Dobb, incredulously. "Talking like that! 'Ave you forgot or what?"

"Forgot what?" returned Mr. Tridge.

"Why," Mr. Dobb replied wretchedly, "I'm hengaged to that gal!"

"But 'ow can you be, 'Orace?" very reasonably contended Mr. Clark. "You're married to your missis, and she's a very 'ealthy-looking lady."

"I married my missis a bit sudden, about eight months ago, as you may remember," said Mr. Dobb.

"Oh, well, it wasn't in reason you could afford to miss the chance of owning a nice little shop like 'ers," pointed out Mr. Tridge extenuatingly.

"Quite so," acquiesced Mr. Dobb. "Only —only I 'appened by chance to be hengaged to Looie Radling at the time. I'd been hengaged to 'er two months and more when I first met my missis."

"And stayed be'ind and got married to 'er by special license and took up life ashore, while us other chaps went on in the *Jane Gladys* the last month afore she was sold," recalled Mr. Tridge. "I remember now."

"AH, I seem to remember something about you being engaged to a Miss Radling," admitted Mr. Lock. "Greenwich gal, aint she?"

"Yes; and I remember 'er coming down to the boat to meet you the first time we went back there, and you wasn't with us no longer. Very surprised but quite the lady she was," said Mr. Clark. "We told 'er you'd deserted or something."

"Anyway, she's tracked me down now," said Mr. Dobb, and made fretful gestures and noises for a while.

"Oh, well, you're married now, and there's an end of it," remarked Mr. Tridge soothingly.

"That's just where you're wrong," complained Mr. Dobb. "Now, Looie Radling's found me out, there wont be a end to it. It'll be the start, not the end."

"Breach o' promise!" cried Mr. Tridge. "Of course, I 'adn't thought of that."

"'As she got any of your letters, though?" asked Mr. Clark, acutely.

"'Undreds!" groaned Mr. Dobb.

"She wont half get some damages out of you," prophesied Mr. Lock cheerfully. "Having a business of your own now, and doing so well, they'll award her a real big sum. Three or four 'undred, I dare say," he hazarded, yawning carelessly.

"What?" screamed Mr. Dobb in consternation. "Why, I can't lay 'ands on a quarter of that!"

"No, I don't suppose you can," agreed Mr. Lock. "But then, I aint the judge and jury. They wont believe you in court, you being so well known in Shorehaven. You'll have to sell up your business and go back to sea, and pay her the damages in installments. Long, long years ahead from now you'll still be scraping together to pay her—"

"Oh, shut up!" bellowed Mr. Dobb, rendered almost hysterical by contemplation of so doleful a prospect.

"Did she see you in *them* clothes, 'Orace?" asked Mr. Tridge. "Well, then, that's done it! She'll be after you like a porous-plaster for them damages. Gals don't get the chance of marrying himitation dooks every day," he went on a little maliciously. "And when they 'ave the chance and loses it—"

"Yes, if only she'd seen you in your short-sleeves and your old trowsis," put in Mr. Clark, "very likely she'd only 'ave thought, 'Good riddance to bad rubbish,' and thought no more about you."

"Ah, and that aint all, neither," said Mr. Dobb, miserably. "What's going to 'appen when my missis 'ears about it? I sha'n't ever 'ear the last of it! If them two females was to meet—"

"There's men in your position 'ave drownded themselves, 'Orace," remarked Mr. Tridge tonelessly.

"That's about the only way out of it that *I* can see," observed Mr. Lock with brutal frankness.

"I never did trust women!" vehemently cried aloud Mr. Dobb. "Never!"

"The great thing, I should say," mentioned Mr. Lock, "is to keep from kicking and struggling. Just keep quiet, and when you go down for the third time, it'll be all over. I've heard say that it's really rather a pleasant feeling, once you get over your mouth being full of water."

Mr. Dobb, setting his palms on his knees, turned and stared coldly at Mr. Lock.

"Ah, I shall always remember how you're looking at me, 'Orace," said Mr. Lock gently. "Sort of sad and mournful!"

"I suppose," vouchsafed Mr. Clark thoughtfully, "I suppose as you can't prove a hallybee, 'Orace? I done that once, and it come off all right, and we had the goose that very same night for supper."

"Something could be done," said Mr. Tridge. "I'm sure it could. Only, of course, it's 'ard thinking when you're thirsty."

"You think away! I'll see you aint thirsty!" eagerly promised Mr. Dobb, and forthwith gave orders which appreciably increased sympathy for him in his tribulation.

"To begin with, you're sure she recognized you, 'Orace?" pressed Mr. Tridge.

"I see 'er regular jump at sight of me," asserted Mr. Dobb.

"P'r'aps," suggested Mr. Clark, "it was your clothes she saw."

"Next thing," continued Mr. Tridge, "what makes you think she's tracked you down special? It may be the biggest haccident 'er being 'ere and coming across you."

"Why, she may 'ave forgotten you," put forward Mr. Clark. "After all, it's eight months and more since you saw her last."

"Perhaps she's got married too," said Mr. Lock, hopefully.

"Well, there, I never thought of that!" exclaimed Mr. Dobb, brightening. "Bit fickle it would be, though, wouldn't it?" he went on in accents slightly flavored with disapproval.

"Seems to me," said Mr. Lock, "the best thing would be to find out just how the land lies. You're a pretty good hand at that sort of thing, Sam. Suppose you was to go over and look about, and see if you could see her and have a little chat with her?"

"That's it, Sam! You've got a nacheral gift of tact!" fawned Mr. Dobb. "You cut on back over to the town, and see if you can find 'er and learn what's in the wind."

"Right you are!" acquiesced Mr. Clark, very readily. "I shall want a couple of bob to stand 'er a cup of tea and so forth, though. You can only get women really chatty when they're drinking tea. Better make it 'alf a crown, 'Orace, in case she fancies a bun or what-not."

A vivid light is thrown on the state of Mr. Dobb's mind when it is mentioned that, with no more demur than a sigh and a shake of the head, he dropped two shillings into Mr. Clark's extended palm, and silently added two threepenny pieces when that gentleman did not move at once.

"I'll be as quick as ever I can," promised Mr. Clark in going. "'Ere," he sternly warned Mr. Dobb, "don't you go a-doing anything rash while I'm away, and give me all me trouble for nothing! Wait till I come back, at any rate!"

THE envoy departed, and a couple of hours passed before his friends saw him again. Meanwhile, Mr. Tridge and Mr. Lock had devoted the interval to the benevolent purpose of cheering up Mr. Dobb, and so successful had they been that Mr. Clark, on his return, stood awhile at the threshold of the Red Lion taproom to listen in amazement to the careless mirth within.

Mr. Dobb, now fully persuaded by his companions that the encounter with Miss Radling did not necessarily presage evil, had become even more eloquent than they in voicing the folly of meeting trouble halfway. And now, drawing equally on reminiscence and invention, the three were exchanging diverting anecdotes concerning occasions when alarm had proved groundless. Mr. Tridge had just concluded a droll story about a cheese in a sack, a policeman, a runaway horse and himself, and Mr. Dobb and Mr. Lock were chuckling very heartily at the dénouement, when Mr Clark thrust open the door of the taproom.

"That's right, 'Orace!" he observed significantly. "You laugh while you can!"

At these ill-omened words the merriment faded abruptly, and Mr. Dobb was distinctly heard to groan.

"'I've seed 'er," announced Mr. Clark; and advancing, patted Mr. Dobb thrice on the shoulder, very slowly and solemnly.

"Well, then," hotly cried Mr. Tridge, with due understanding of this action, "she's a mink! That's what she is—a mink!"

"You take my advice, 'Orace," recommended Mr. Clark. "Hostralia!"

There was a little wait while the quailing Mr. Dobb was sorrowfully regarded by his three friends, as though even now they were bidding him farewell on his departure to the Antipodes. Mr. Dobb gazed back, horror-struck, at each of his three companions in turn, and when his glance rested upon Mr. Lock, that gentleman rose and shook hands with him with a long and lingering clasp. And then Mr. Dobb shakily emptied each of the glasses on the table

before him, and no one had the hardness of heart to bid him nay.

Mr. Clark proceeded to narrate his interview with Miss Radling. He had found her, it transpired, in the High Street, and had at length managed to recall himself to her memory, a task which had been rendered a little protracted by the fact that Miss Radling gave but superficial attention to him at first, being more zealously employed in taking close heed of the faces of all male passers-by.

When, however, Miss Radling had recognized Mr. Clark as an old acquaintance of the *Jane Gladys,* she had expressed the keenest satisfaction in meeting him, and had at once asked for the address of Mr. Horace Dobb.

Mr. Clark immediately professed ignorance of Mr. Dobb's whereabouts, but pretended to a vague belief that the late cook of the *Jane Gladys* was now somewhere in Scotland. Miss Radling promptly controverted this, stating with complete certainty that she had herself seen Mr. Dobb in Shorehaven during that very afternoon. She had also added, with sinister vehemence, that she intended to see Mr. Dobb again and again before she had finished with him.

"But—but—but what for?" interposed the miserable Mr. Dobb.

"Just what I says to her," responded Mr. Clark.

"'What for?' I says. And she says as 'ow you was hengaged to 'er, and you 'adn't wrote 'er a line for months. 'Though,' she says, 'the letters 'e wrote me before that is quite enough to do the trick. I've kept 'em all,' she says, 'and I'm going to get even with 'im some'ow. Either 'e's got to put the banns up or else I goes to the best lawyer in Shore'aven. I've found out, by chance, that 'Orace Dobb is living in these parts, and,' says she—"

"Now, 'ow the dooce did she find that out?" questioned Mr. Tridge wrathfully.

"Wasn't the *Raven* in 'arbor here a fortnight or so after you settled into your shop, 'Orace?" put forward Mr. Lock.

"It was!" bellowed Mr. Dobb. "Well, there's a nasty, low, mean, under'and, sneaking trick to—"

"Anyway," said Mr. Clark, "she 'asn't got your correct address. She said she'd been looking all over the town for a shop with Dobb on it. And nacherally I didn't tell 'er that the board still showed your wife's name of Goffley. And she didn't know that you're married yet, neither."

"Can't you just see them *Raven* chaps a-grinning when they fixed all this up for me?" growled Mr. Dobb.

"Did she seem sort of forgiving at all, Sam?" asked Mr. Lock.

"Oh, dear me, no!" returned Mr. Clark. "Quite the contrary, in fact. You oughter seen the way she folded 'er lips. A nice-spoken, pleasant-looking, lady-like gal like that, too! I was surprised 'ow sharp and determined she could be."

AND now Mr. Clark, with considerable pride in his diplomacy, proceeded to speak of the clever foundations he had laid for an alibi. Insisting that Mr. Dobb was not within a hundred miles of Shorehaven, he had admitted to Miss Radling that the remaining members of the *Jane Gladys* crew now resided in the town. This, he suggested to her, might explain matters. Confusion of identity, he had reminded her, was of frequent occurrence among the mercantile marine.

"'But I see 'Orace with my very own eyes,' she says, and goes on to describe the very clothes you're wearing, 'Orace," continued Mr. Clark. "'Why,' says I, 'that just shows 'ow wrong you are! Them clothes is the clothes worn by Peter Lock on 'igh days and 'olidays,' I says."

Mr. Lock looked at him in surprise.

"Well, I chose you because you was always the dressy one on the *Jane Gladys,* Peter," explained Mr. Clark.

"'That there's Peter Lock in 'is Sunday clothes you saw,' I tells 'er, 'and you mistook 'im for 'Orace Dobb. You've forgot what 'Orace looked like, and Peter Lock 'aving been on the *Jane Gladys* to your knowledge—"

"That's it, that's it!" approved Mr. Dobb. "I'll lend you these 'ere clothes, Peter, for a hour or two, if you takes care of 'em, and you can meet 'er in 'em and prove old Sam was right."

"Anyway, you can *try* to," said Mr. Clark, soberly. "I must say she didn't look altogether convinced, as it might be."

But Mr. Dobb, already excitedly divesting himself of his coat and waistcoat, was paying no heed. And Mr. Lock, delicately massaging the nape of his neck with a forefinger, was immersed in thought.

"Wait a bit!" he requested coldly, at last. "Seems to me, if I don't help you now, 'Orace, you're in a tight corner?"

"Ah, I'm lucky to 'ave a true friend like you, Peter!" babbled Mr. Dobb.

"And you've got a motto, too, aint you, 'Orace?" went on Mr. Lock in steely accents. "'Strictly business'—that's what has been your motto ever since you went into your shop, aint it? Oh, you've drove it home to us often enough when it's been convenient to you and ill-convenient to us. Well, *my* motto's going to be 'Strictly business' now!" he ended firmly.

"Meaning?" invited Mr. Dobb, ceasing to struggle with a bootlace.

"Meaning I don't *borrer* clothes from nobody to help 'em out of trouble. See? If body to help 'em out of trouble. See? If you want me to help you, you've got to *give* me that rig-out. Otherwise I shouldn't dream of putting it on for a single moment."

MR. DOBB agitatedly stigmatized this as blackmail and robbery, and Mr. Lock quite unemotionally agreed with him in this view, but declined to be affected by it. Mr. Tridge and Mr. Clark, with eyes that glistened admiringly on Mr. Lock, said that, to them, it seemed a very fair bargain.

Ten minutes later Mr. Dobb and Mr. Lock made an exchange of vesture. Mr. Dobb somewhat huffily declined to agree with Mr. Tridge and Mr. Clark in their openly expressed opinion that Mr. Lock looked a *real* toff in the hirsute garments.

"I'll stroll along with Peter and 'ave a look for Miss Radling," said Mr. Tridge, as the quartet took their places in the ferry-boat. "I'll be able to back him up by saying you don't live anywhere in these parts. As for you, you'd better stay at 'ome while she's in the town, 'Orace."

"Stay at 'ome? I'm going straight to bed," declared Mr. Dobb, "and I aint coming down again till the coast is quite clear, neither!"

"That's right," said Mr. Tridge. "You leave it to me and Peter. We'll convince 'er, all right."

That same evening Mr. Dobb lay fretfully in bed, suffering from a vague ailment which, he averred, was not serious enough to demand a doctor, but too serious to permit of Mrs. Dobb's ministrations as a nurse. In these circumstances two visitors who called to see Mr. Dobb were about to be sent away by his wife, when Mr. Dobb, who happened to be standing at his open bedroom door, gave orders that they should ascend to his apartment.

"Well," he asked breathlessly, as Mr. Tridge and Mr. Lock entered, "'ave you convinced 'er? Is she gone?"

"No, she aint," said Mr. Tridge, regretfully. "She's looking for a situation in the town. And do you know, I don't believe she quite took in what we told 'er about mistaking Peter for you. I believe she's sharper than we think."

"But you've *got* to make 'er believe it!" wrathfully snapped Mr. Dobb.

"I doubt if she's the sort you can *make* do anything," said Mr. Lock.

"A most determined young person," said Mr. Tridge. "When she makes up 'er mind, I should say—"

"She aint half bitter against you, 'Orace," remarked Mr. Lock. "You ought to hear the things she said about you! What was that bit she told us about the bag of sweets, Joe?"

"I don't want to 'ear about sweets!" exclaimed Mr. Dobb impatiently. "I want to 'ear about 'er plans!"

"Well, she *said* she was going to try for two 'undred and fifty," replied Mr. Tridge. "Soon as ever she knew where to find you, she said, she was coming round to—"

Mr. Dobb, in an excess of nervous depression, dived beneath the bedclothes, moaning faintly.

"This I will say," maintained Mr. Lock. "Them chaps on the *Raven* 'ave gone a bit beyond a joke this time. Well, so long, 'Orace! Keep smiling!"

"We'll do our best for you," promised Mr. Tridge. "We'll keep on telling 'er she was mistook this afternoon."

"You keep on letting 'er see you in them clothes, Peter, till she sees she's wrong," directed Mr. Dobb, reappearing.

"I'm going to meet her tomorrow afternoon in them," replied Mr. Lock. "I'm going to help her look for *you*."

"'Ere!" croaked Mr. Dobb, in alarm; and then, at sight of Mr. Lock's humorous eyelid, he smiled wanly. "You're a artful one, Peter!" he stated.

"I am!" agreed Mr. Lock; and followed Mr. Tridge down the stairs.

NEXT evening, when Mr. Lock again called to report progress, Mr. Dobb was still clinging to the sanctuary of bed.

"Well, you aint found me yet, then?" he asked, with effort to be cheerful.

"Not yet," admitted Mr. Lock grinning. "We've been looking all over the place for you, too!"

"Aint she losing 'eart yet?"

"I can't say she is," returned Mr. Lock sorrowfully. "It only seems to make 'er firmer in mind. If you only knew how the soles of my feet was aching!"

"She still thinks I'm about, eh?"

"She's sure of it. She says she aint going to give up looking for you till she's found you, if it takes ten years!"

"There's hobstinacy!" growled Mr. Dobb, dashed.

"One thing, she aint going to find you as long as I'm helping her to look," said Mr. Lock. "So it'll be a long job, anyway."

"Thank you for nothing! I suppose you fancies yourself, walking about in them la-de-da clothes with a attractive young female?" harshly suggested Mr. Dobb.

"I do," said Mr. Lock.

"I—I wonder, Peter," remarked Mr. Dobb, sitting up suddenly and striving to sound casual, "I—I wonder you don't take up with 'er yourself!"

"Can't afford it, for one thing," said Mr. Lock quietly.

"Walking about in a suit of clothes you've 'ad give to you don't cost much," contended Mr. Dobb.

"Ah, but you can't set up a home on a suit of clothes!" pointed out Mr. Lock regretfully; and then he laughed quite merrily. "Why, I hardly know the young lady, either!"

"A nice, pretty, well-spoken girl she is, too!" said Mr. Dobb. "Make any man a good wife, she would. I tell you straight, if I wasn't married—"

"I must say, I can't make out how you had the heart to do it, 'Orace," observed Mr. Lock.

"Neither can I, now! Serves me right! I—I couldn't ever be really worthy of 'er. A nice, smart, good-looking young fellow, that's 'oo she deserves for a 'usband. A young fellow just like *you*, Peter," he ended softly.

"Me? Oh, I dunno!" murmured Mr. Lock in confused modesty.

"Well, I do!" cried Mr. Dobb. "You take my advice, my boy, and go in and win!"

"And leave everything nice and clear for you, eh?" asked Mr. Lock.

"I—I wasn't thinking about myself," said Mr. Dobb. "I aint so selfish as all that, Peter."

"Anyway, what's the good of talking?" demanded Mr. Lock irritably. "I can't afford to set up housekeeping. Where am I to get the furniture from for a start off?"

"Why, you can run up a bill with me!" quickly proffered Mr. Dobb.

"That aint my idea, starting married life in debt."

"Well, I—I might give you a few things as a wedding present. Jugs and so on."

"Mind you, I wouldn't mind taking up with her," said Mr. Lock. "Looie—Miss Radling—she's just my sort, and I don't mind admitting that I've thought a lot about her since I met her yesterday. But—"

"And—and to think that you was a 'ardy British mariner once!" urgently cried Mr. Dobb. "You go in and win!"

"I reckon it'll cost me all of fifty quid to set up a home," said Mr. Lock, gazing squarely at Mr. Dobb.

For a long time Mr. Dobb defiantly held Mr. Lock's regard, and then he glanced away.

"And, after all," added Mr. Lock, softly, "it'll come cheaper for *you*, 'Orace."

"I see what you're after!" rasped Mr. Dobb. "Call that friendship?"

"No," said Mr. Lock honestly. "I don't! I'm a sort of pupil of yours, 'Orace, and I calls it 'strictly business!' However, we were only *talking*, after all. Good night, old sport, and sleep well!"

TWO days elapsed. Mr. Dobb, attaining sufficient convalescence, had left his couch and spent most of his time behind his window curtain, watching the traffic of the street in considerable trepidation. And whenever the shop-bell jangled Mr. Dobb crept silently to the head of the stairs and stood there to listen with bated breath till persuaded that there was no cause for alarm.

Mr. Lock had not visited him once during those two days, and the only news he had derived from that gentleman was from Mr. Tridge, who, paying a brief visit, let fall the information that Mr. Lock and Miss Radling had been observed together at a matinee performance at the local cinema theater.

Mrs. Dobb had just locked the little shop for the night, and Mr. Dobb, upstairs, was feeling a consequent measure of relief, when the private bell rang. Mr. Dobb, as though pulled by the same wire, at once listened at the top of the stairs. Hearing only the voices of his wife and Mr. Lock, Mr. Dobb summoned the callers upstairs.

"Thought you'd like to know," said Mr. Lock, entering the room and carefully

closing the door, "me and Looie have fixed it all up this very afternoon."

"No!" cried Mr. Dobb joyously. "Well, there's quick work!"

"I see I was wrong now to suggest about that fifty quid to you, 'Orace," said Mr. Lock penitently.

"Don't mention it!" begged Mr. Dobb. "I never give it another thought."

"Yes, I know now I was wrong," repeated Mr. Lock. "Looie pointed it out to me as soon as ever I told 'er."

"Ah, a nice, sensible, right-minded girl!"

"Yes; as she says, if we wants money to set up housekeeping with, let's wait till after—"

"After what?" asked Mr. Dobb as Mr. Lock stopped.

"Why, till after she's got her breach of promise damages out of you. She reckons on at least a hundred and fifty."

"But—but now she's hengaged to *you*, she's got no claim on *me*!"

"They'll only have *your* word at the court that she's hengaged to me, 'Orace. We aint told no one else yet," observed Mr. Lock happily. "By the way, I'm bringing her round to see you tomorrow."

"She'll never get a hundred and fifty pounds out of *me*!"

"No; but she'll have a jolly good try to! In any case, I bet she don't get less than a clear fifty, so we sha'n't be no worse off," said Mr. Lock. "And on the other hand, your missis—"

Mr. Dobb, with his hands clasped at the back of that garment he euphemistically described as a dressing-gown, stalked moodily about the bedroom for a few moments. The voice of Mrs. Dobb, engaged in a trifling dispute with a neighbor, came shrilly up to him, and he shivered.

"All right, I'm beat!" he yielded. "Talk about nourishing a viper!"

"I'll call round tomorrow morning and go to the bank with you, 'Orace," said Mr. Lock.

And it was so.

IN rather less than six weeks' time the wedding of Mr. Peter Lock and Miss Louise Radling was solemnized. The occurrence is still remembered in Shorehaven, very largely on account of the extreme height and niggardly circumference of Mr. Samuel Clark's top-hat, and for the remarkable exhibition of agility given by the best man, Mr. Joseph Tridge, out in the High Street, toward the close of the festivities.

Mr. Horace Dobb, an old friend of the bridegroom and bride, attended the ceremony, in company with Mrs. Horace Dobb. Many people subsequently expressed the opinion that Mr. Dobb took the affair far too seriously for a mere guest.

It was just before Mr. and Mrs. Peter Lock were setting forth on their honeymoon that the newly fledged husband summoned Mr. Dobb aside.

"You must be sure to come and see us in our little 'ome when we come back, 'Orace," said Mr. Lock fondly. "I'm sure no one's got a better right among our pals to sit on them tables and chairs—"

"All right!" growled Mr. Dobb. "Don't rub it in!"

"I just want to tell you something, though. You know that motto of yours what you've got painted on a board hanging in your shop? 'Strictly Business,' it says, don't it? Well, mottoes is like curses—they come home to roost sometimes!"

"Meaning?" loftily queried Mr. Dobb.

"Why, I felt so sorry for Looie when she come down to the old *Jane Gladys* to ask for you, and you'd jilted her, that I—I got sort of writing to her to cheer her up; and before long we got engaged. Oh, four or five months ago it must have been, though we didn't tell anybody! You see, I'd got an idea up my sleeve, and I was only waiting till my wages was raised."

"Then—then—then really she was hengaged to *you* when she come to Shore'aven?" queried Mr. Dobb in a stifled voice.

"She was. Why, it was *me* who managed the whole thing. It was me who wrote and told her to come to Shore'aven. It was me who told her what to say to Sam and Joe."

"You—you—you—" breathed Mr. Dobb irately, and then became aware of the approach of Mrs. Dobb. "You mind you don't miss your train," he finished somewhat lamely. . . . .

Late that same evening Mr. Dobb took a small lettered board off a nail in his shop. In grim silence he surveyed its legend: "Strictly Business!"

Mrs. Dobb, coming down next morning to light the kitchen fire, found that selfsame panel, neatly chopped into very small pieces, lying ready to her hand in the fender.

The Blonde She of Yachats

A new story of Black Buck, the great dog who went back to the wilderness after the murder of his master.

By CHARLES ALEXANDER

BLACK BUCK'S feelings were unorderly and beyond control. It was as if masses of light and color were flashing and shocking his eyes. Yet he was crouched almost alone in the blue darkness of a high mountain-side, and his eyes, keeping sharp watch, could see little farther into the night than the eyes of the mate of the cougar might see. Even had there been no need to keep guard against the mate of the cougar, Black Buck would still have been wide awake, and his mind excited.

His ears sprang up, and his mind for the moment cleared. Up-mountain from his narrow ledge a rattling noise arose. Here was something Black Buck's senses could analyze. As he listened, his mind pictured a harmless burrowing mountain boomer. Yet such was the danger of the night, when the mate of the cougar, seeking vengeance, might follow her nose to them, that Buck challenged every hint of movement about him.

Because his head was swimming with this new, strange warm sentiment, Buck found old habits he had long since mastered reasserting themselves. At the little noise on the mountain-side he twice sniffed and sampled the wind, finding it entirely empty, before he realized the uselessness of sniffing. For the bridge of his nose was crumpled, where a bullet fired by a murderer within his master's cabin had plowed its way. Finding that his nose no longer bore to him the secrets of the forest, Buck by painful practice had developed the rudiments of reason latent within his dog brain.

It was not for his own safety that he this night kept watch. Beside him, ripped almost to death, lay that marvelous being, the blond she of Yachats. And it was not alone her presence beside him once more, amazing in itself though that was, that threw Buck's thoughts into delicious chaos.

Snatches of the great events of the afternoon and evening came back to Buck. At certain of these visions he stiffened, and his

fangs gleamed. Others moved him strangely, so that he lay quiet. These latter had to do with the wolf beside him, and when at such times his watchful eyes rested on her, he wanted to flatten himself beside her and tenderly lick her wounds.

But instead of doing this, he only moved a bit in his position, and kept up his sharp watch. As his eyes saw along the ledge toward the hills bordering the Pacific, he remembered the cabin where in the old care-free days the master had fed him and loved him—the days when his nose ran ahead of his eyes and his ears, bringing him knowledge of the world, and when he did not have to puzzle and think upon things.

He longed to return to that cabin. But while his mate lay helpless on the ledge, Buck would keep sleepless guard before her.

IN its beginning the day had held no sign that it was to mark an epoch in Black Buck's life. A hint of warmth in the winter sun had called him from sleep. Buck loved the daylight. Unlike the white wolves, who preferred the night Buck hunted at night only because of necessity. Man hunted by day, and Buck's blood had run in the veins of ten thousand ancestors who had helped man hunt by day.

His old puppy love for man was reawakening. Man was the only being who loved. Buck was a killer, the king of all killers on the Yachats, in his struggle for life having given full rein to all the ancient cunning of killing within him. But he was also of the breed long loving man and by man beloved. In his crude memories he felt that he had fought to death for man time and time over, and he knew as well, that masters in the dim past had died fighting his fights.

Buck was fiercer than the timber-wolves of the Yachats, but unlike them he had need to give love, and to receive it. He had mastered the coast wolves, and led them; but he had learned there was no loyalty in them for each other or for him. Buck was lonely, as the brave dogs of kind dead masters have always been lonely—lonely and uncomforted.

This mood led him toward the secluded cabin where he had been happy with the miner Brownlee. The barking of coyotes brought back his caution. He paused to listen. The barks were muffled, and yet near.

He came carefully out into the familiar clearing, where now the salal brush was swarming. The yapping of many coyotes was near at hand, but no coyotes were in the clearing. Buck circled it, keeping in the edge of the thickets. The coyotes were within the clearing, and yet they were not within the clearing. Somewhere they were hidden at their mischief. Everything that went on in Buck's realm was Buck's business. He was especially jealous of this clearing, where his love attached itself to dim memories.

It would have been easy to locate the intruders by scent, had Buck possessed a sense of smell. No hiding-place would have sheltered them from that master-key. But Buck was forced to circle and puzzle and apply his brain to the problem. A sudden suspicion brought him to a stop. At the thought his lips writhed, and he leaped out of hiding.

His guess was correct. The coyotes had gathered in the cabin of the dead master, which had housed Buck in his puppyhood and which now was a shrine to his dreams. Buck had taught the prowlers of the Yachats to hold it inviolate. And now a pack of thieving coyotes desecrated it, coyotes who would not have dared sneak within the clearing while the master lived.

Buck guarded the hole underneath the shanty by which the vandals had entered, and waited. He knew that a whiff of his own breath would be potent medicine to the coyotes. Within a moment the scuffling inside stopped. Grey forms glided up from under the cabin. Swift as were the gray streaks, Buck's slashing fangs were swifter.

When the procession ended, Buck crept inside. A grizzled dog-coyote had chosen to stay and fight, and sprang as Buck's head emerged.

Afterward Buck gathered the bones of John Brownlee that the beasts had held in their paws and gnawed. One by one he buried them again beneath the floor. Each he covered lovingly, nosing little patches of soft dirt over them.

SOMETHING in the quietness of the coast jungle reawakened in Buck his great need. Answering this urge, he trotted inland toward the higher mountains as though he had in mind some defined purpose. When he stopped, after miles of travel, is was over nothing more remarkable than the faint imprint of a wolf's foot.

There was nothing about the wolf-track to arrest attention, and yet Buck's attention was arrested. It probably had been made by a strange wolf, for Buck was in a strange country. He thrust his nose into it, longing to be able to identify it in that manner. But his nose told him nothing. The track was fresh, and Buck lifted his head for a scrutiny of the old burned mountain-side.

She was watching him. She stood like a statue on a bleached snag, a young timber-wolf as large and as lithe as a small woman. Instead of being mousy-white, her thick, fluffy coat had a slight tawny tinge. Her heavy brush drooped gracefully. On the point of an ear a tiny scrap of body-down clung, gyrating wildly in the still air, the only moving thing about her whole form.

Her slightly oblique eyes were fixed in surprise on Black Buck. Never had she seen such a creature. He was larger than the largest wolf. All over him his black hair curled in flat ringlets. His mouth was the mouth of a killer; his fangs were even longer than the terrible saber-teeth of the timber-wolf.

She might snarl, or she might disappear, but Buck intended to make friends. He forced through the fern-brake and sprang upon the snag.

It was a hundred feet along the trunk to where she stood. Buck faced her way instantly, expecting to see her leap down and fade into the forest.

She did break her pose. But instead of fleeing, she sat upon her haunches and fastened her slanting eyes consideratively upon him.

That action spoke volumes. Her feminine curiosity was up. She was ready to parley, to skirmish with him, to be friends.

THAT sun sank upon a glorious day—a day wilder, greater than those in the past in which Buck had led daring forays, spilled noble blood, even the blood of man. But the following morning the sun arose upon a changed world. The blonde she was gone.

They had run playfully for miles the day before, and all the wilderness world had worn for Buck a new glad look. In the night they had frolicked, leaping shoulder by shoulder through the cool moonlight; and when Buck had run too close, the wolf had nipped him in play.

Theretofore life to Buck had been a series of problems to solve. When hunting was poor and his blood beat slow, life dragged; when he led his wolf-pack straight to the kill and tasted the living blood, his own pulse raced and the precious moments fled. But here was something greater than killing. The blonde wolf was exquisite poetry. To look at her was poetry; to run beside her was poetry; to feel the playful nip of her teeth was well-nigh madness.

And now, strangest of all her strange actions—she was gone. While Buck napped, she had stolen away, leaving no trail that he could follow. With teasing cunning she had traveled through the spotted forest on the dead remains of the forest that had stood a century before—the huge burned cedar-snags lying almost end to end in the gulleys. She had set a task for Buck, leaving him to follow to her country. But to Buck, with his nose that could not smell, the task was almost hopeless.

HE circled and searched. Nowhere could he find sign of her trail, except where it led to a white trunk near where he and the wolf had crouched. On this trunk he leaped. Which way along it had she gone? Buck nosed the fronded ferns swarming beside the tree. Whatever secret of the wolf's passage clung to them defied his eyes. The common power of all the four-footed killers to read such signs, the power that solved their problems and made intelligence unnecessary, Buck did not possess. As he faced one way and another on the rotting log, struggling to determine which way she logically would have gone, he felt hopelessly handicapped.

At length he decided. She had fled from him, and so she must have returned whence she had come. Buck had come from the coast country. He ran the length of the snag, leaped to another and headed toward the higher ranges inland. His mate had come down from those mountains; back into her country she expected him to follow.

On all the snowfields, when he reached them, he found strange wolf-tracks. None of them had been made by the wonderful she.

Inside him a terrible longing burned, urging him on, ever on. Somewhere his mate ran alone, unable to understand why he could not readily follow. Trail after trail Buck nosed impatiently, but none of them held identity for him.

Save for a single pair Buck saw hunting, the wolves who had made the many tracks in the snow seemed to have disappeared. On every mountain-side he looked for his mate, but on none of them did he find her. The way of wolves in hunting Buck knew better than the wolves themselves, for he had been forced to study the process out; but their ways at mating-time were mysterious and illogical and beyond his ability to conceive.

The lone pair of mountain wolves he saw taught him a new respect. While scouring a gulley, they jumped a cottontail. One wolf gave chase, and one waited quietly at the starting-point. Yielding in fright to its childish instincts, the rabbit swung on a great circle and approached the starting-point again. When it passed, the second wolf sprang, missed, and took up the chase. Crouching in the snow, the first wolf panted and rested.

The relay chase went for several laps. Always the rabbit, flashing like a streak of light, ended its great swing at the same point, and always a fresh wolf waited there to take up the chase. Buck whined at the stupidity of the rabbit. Why did it not alter its course? Buck resolved never to run away from danger and then run back into it. Also, Buck wished he had a running-mate to help him catch rabbits.

In the end, after all its desperate exertion, the rabbit died on the spot where it had first fled away, and the wolves tore it to pieces and left a few smears of red on the snow.

In his interest in this killing, and in his great worry, Black Buck forgot his usual cunning. He forgot to guard the quarter into which the wind blew from him, carrying the news of his presence to all the wilderness dwellers behind him. That was how the cougar of the mountains, a lither cat than the cougar of the coast, crept so close upon him. The slightest of crunching sounds behind him brought Buck back to his senses. He whirled, slid out his tongue and laughed at the stalking cat.

The cougar was caught crouched out, two limbs forward, two back. Humor was not in his make-up. He was caught dead to rights while stalking, and this he furiously resented. His sober, puffed face did not show his fury, but in his opalescent eyes it glinted, and Buck marked it well.

For moments, while Buck sat on his haunches and silently laughed, the cat crouched as if frozen. Then it turned aside and stalked away. Buck added insult to insolence by carefully walking along behind his new-found enemy. But when a thicket was reached, Buck loped away. He knew that the cougar, after leaping thrice his length from a limb, lands with disconcerting impact.

WITH dusk there came to Buck the call, the silent, insistent call. It whispered across the snowfields, and in the larches murmured, always just ahead. Long before a sound reached him, he was answering this many-noted cry, loping out of the salal and chinquapin and upon a high mountain. Somewhere his mate was awake and stirring, wondering why he had deserted her; and with her stirring, confidence and power returned to Buck.

At last, when dark had fallen, a faint far howl arose, a wolf-plaint with a magnificent quavering minor note never uttered by the hunting wolf:

"Eeceah*ah*-ow-*ow*!"

Buck ached to answer it. But the longing for voice that came up in him out of a generation ten thousand years dead could not find utterance in his poor dog-throat. A time or two he barked, and then ran in his long smooth stride.

He found himself following a narrow ledge above a cañon. His caution was thrown to the winds. He did not pause to question the trail. All he knew was that it led to her. As he crept around a boulder on a precipice, he remembered his new enemy, the mountain cougar. Ere long there must be a settlement between them. This, the country of his wolf-mate, was now his country. Its residents must acknowledge him.

The ledge crossed the spine of a mountain and ended on a rough slope. Below on the slope the tops of impenetrable thickets of vine-maples waved to and fro, and before the thickets was the stub of a lightning-struck spruce. On this sat a wolf, a lone she-wolf, who pointed her nose to the stars and quavered out the call that had set his veins pounding.

A few moments after the call had ended, Buck crept down the ridge, his throat trembling. He had lost this glorious creature because he could not trail by scent; but now, wandering into her country, he was being drawn to her side by her own call. Buck did not hesitate as he trotted down the slope. He had been given an insight into the fierceness of the mountain

wolves. He knew that they were many. Also he knew that the great Oregon timber-wolf, largest of all canines, esteems as a delicacy the flesh of dogs.

The annals of the West contain no instance in which a single dog, in fair fight with a timber-wolf, has killed his enemy; cases where two trained hounds have killed their wolf are rare. But neither do the annals of the West contain reference to such a dog as Black Buck. His one hundred and fifty pounds of hard muscle gave him a thirty-pound advantage over the largest wolf. Crafty and courageous as were the wolves, Buck's craft and courage had been drilled by necessity into steel-trap deadliness.

He knew that the wolves, like the cougar in this new country, must be taught their place. But the blonde she was his friend. With her beside him, Buck would fight the world.

He descended the lonely slope and came to the stump. Setting his forelegs against it, he gave a low bark. The she put her muzzle down to his.

A moment later Black Buck, ruler of the Yachats, received the surprise of his life.

THE empty hillside seemed to vomit wolves. From all sides they leaped upon him. While the sorceress on the stump conducted ancient rites, they had been sitting in groups and singly among the thickets. Black Buck was an interloping dog. Before he knew it, he was knocked down and slashed by many teeth.

He made a mighty bound and shook himself free. He was fighting for life—and for possession, which lent a zest he had never tasted before. He remained cool and cautious, cool as a steel trap that does not snap until its victim is within sure reach, and then snaps to kill.

He fought his way to the broad stump. Its bare roots, large as lowland tree-trunks, formed sideguards for him so that he had only the front to defend.

The white wolves lost their ardor for rushing him in masses. They tore to pieces their own dead, and sat just out of Buck's reach, considering the situation and waiting. That is the best thing the timber-wolf does—he waits. By harrying and by waiting, turn about, he drags down the wild stallion ten times his weight, and the vicious wild cow. The wolves sat in a circle in front of Buck, panting, licking their wounds—and waiting.

Buck looked for his mate, upon whom he had bestowed all the loyal affection he had to give. She had not made her way to his side. He wondered if she had been pulled to pieces, and as he wondered, his mane bristled. He snapped in and out at a wolf who had strayed too close, and the wolf, knocked down and his throat slit open, was lost as the pack swirled over him.

Buck was a dog, and because of his loneliness the strong affections of the dog were doubly strong in him. He would fight to the death for his mate or for his running pal. He knew that the wolves of the Yachats were fierce killers, but what he did not know was that they typified the old relentless code of might—that they grew and mated and died in blood and in anger, without a softening touch of sentiment or play. Buck, the dog, was ready and glad to fight them all for his mate, and he could not understand that she would not fight for him.

The wolves were tentatively pushing him, keeping his fangs busy, when he saw the she. The silent snap of teeth went methodically on as he eagerly watched her. The truth slowly came to him.

She moved in the fringes of the pack, sometimes watching Buck in a disinterested way, but always moving when his eyes caught hers. She was neither anxious for Buck's safety nor for the safety of the pack-leaders who fought him. She seemed to be puzzled, but not concerned. And she stayed on the fringes of the fight.

Buck saw again the delicious frolic of the day before. He sought her in the strange mountains, crisscrossed with countless tracks, and he heard her call from afar. He remembered trotting down the slope to her, blind in his nose to the lurking wolves—to be set upon by these, her brothers. To Buck she was a traitress.

Buck went mad. He leaped out among the wolves. He reared his massive trunk above them. Each throat that flashed at him from the mass he caught in mid-air and ripped. The long fangs that fastened on his flanks he crushed between his longer fangs. He came to his feet in the thinning mass and slashed right and left. Each leap knocked a white wolf down to die or to drag himself away. Buck stopped, shook himself, slashed at a tawny creature who edged near him, and trotted up the slope, leaving his blood for the coyotes to follow—across the ridge and onto the

ledge, on his way back to the Yachats coast and the empty cabin of the master who alone had loved him. . . . .

As Buck trotted onto the ledge, his brain seethed with crude pictures. He imagined himself running with the tawny she-wolf, and at such times came to himself to snarl at the memory. This would result in a rage in which he felt his teeth fastening on the she's soft throat. He had followed her into a great fight, and he would have been glad—if it had been her fight also. But to her it had not mattered who won that fight. Even Buck's example of fidelity had not seemed to change her wolf heart. She had simply slunk around and puzzled upon it.

The cougar did not fool Black Buck. He saw the cat, but did not stop. He would not be driven back to the traitress. The cougar was flattened on the boulder at the point on the precipice where Buck must creep carefully past. The cat had been on Buck's trail and the wind had told him in time that Buck was returning. The wind had told the cougar this, but it had told Black Buck nothing. He was close to the cat before he saw it.

Buck was weak from loss of blood. The cougar was in position to spring on him at a place where he could not dodge. But Buck, the lover in scorn, was in a mood to toss the fight away. Often he had outwitted and robbed the cougars in his own country. They had located game, and he had stolen ahead and made the kills. Now a cougar perched on a rock and waited to kill him. It was the cougar's turn.

As in a daze, Buck saw the cougar leap. Making his usual miscalculation, the cat landed in front of Buck, and sprang again.

And as he sprang, something tawny flashed past Buck. It reached its mark—the cougar's throat—and the two beasts fell writhing.

Aroused, Buck sprang in. But before the kill was made, the cougar's claws had ripped and slashed the thing that would not release its clamp upon his throat.

The rest of the night Buck stood guard. And as he dreamed his crude dog-dreams, he saw the cabin of the dead master. The master, Buck knew, would have welcomed his loyal mate. There he would take her, as soon as she could stand upon her legs. Meantime Buck guarded and dreamed, and answered the whines from the mutilated mass of flesh beside him, the blonde she of Yachats.

The Strange

A Complete Novelette

CHAPTER I

"WHAT'S the matter, Isabel?" Isabel Penfield stopped toying with the ears of the Alsatian police dog beside her, looked up and made a fairly successful effort to smile.

"Nothing very much, Doctor. Only—I'm frightened a little—about Alan."

"What's the conceited scamp been doing now?" Dr. Freeland demanded.

"He—he wants—" She seemed to have difficulty in stating her case, and the old physician stated it for her:

"He wants to marry you? That's all right; anybody would. He isn't trying any cave-man stunts, is he?"

"No," said Isabel, laughing.

"Shouldn't think he would, while Cap's around." This with a glance at the dog, who pricked up his ears and thumped his tail on the floor in recognition. "Doesn't Alan know you're engaged to John?"

"Yes, but—he persists in thinking that the engagement was arranged by our parents, and doesn't count. They did want it, but—" She paused, flushed and then went on defiantly: "We've ratified the

Case of Alan Corwin

By George L. Knapp

arrangement. Alan wont see it that way. He—insists that John has no—right to me, as he puts it. I told him I had some rights in the matter myself; and for a moment, I thought he would strike me. He didn't, though."

"Nice behavior for the man who's supposed to be John Fairchild's closest friend," commented Doctor Freeland. Isabel took up the word eagerly:

"Doctor, that's just the point I want to talk to you about. I believe Alan hates John, hates him bitterly. It sounds silly, but I believe it's true. I've felt for a long while that it hurt Alan's vanity to have John helping him so many times. He thanks John, of course, and he's really returned the favors to some extent, once or twice, but—I'm sure he hates John, just the same."

"You'll be a psychologist, if you don't look out, young lady," warned the doctor. "When was this interview at which Alan lost his charming temper?"

"Yesterday. He called me up this morning and wanted to come over to see me this afternoon. Then—I wish I'd thought twice before doing it—I wrote him a letter and sent it by special messenger."

"Telling him what?" asked the practical physician, as Isabel paused in her story.

"Telling him that I loved John Fairchild, and meant to marry him, and that I wouldn't marry Alan Corwin under any conditions," said Isabel. "And—I'm afraid. Not for myself—he'll be disagreeable, but he wont hurt me. I'm afraid for John."

THE DOCTOR'S laugh rumbled out, frank and satisfying.

"That's the last thing you need worry about, Isabel. John's safe. Alan isn't going to shoot him from ambush, and if he doesn't do that, he can't do anything. John could break Alan in two; John has more money and a fifty times better standing in the community than Alan ever will have. His egotism may make an unpleasant scene or two, but that's the worst you have to expect. Poor Alan—always his own worst enemy!"

"His only enemy," corrected Isabel.

"I gather you haven't spoken to John about this?"

"No. I hate to shatter his faith. He's been standing up for Alan so long that it's come to be a habit. School, college, business, over in France—and I know Alan

hates him for every favor. I must tell John very soon, though. You think it's foolish, Doctor, but—I'm afraid."

"Of course, you've said nothing to your father?"

"If I had, you'd have heard the explosion, clear here! Dear, peppery old Dad! He simply can't abide Alan."

"Did Aunt Nellie hear the interview?"

"No, but she's down on Alan too. She tried to tell me a dream about him this morning, but I dodged it. You are my only confidant, Doctor."

"And I'm not much good, eh? Well, here's a piece of sound advice. Suppose you and John get married, right away."

"You think that—"

"Would tie Alan's hands? Certainly. I think he's helpless now, but if you want to make sure of it, there's the plan. Let me suggest it to John."

"All right," said Isabel with a little flush. They rose together, and he took her hands.

"Go back by way of the office, my dear," he said, "and have John take you out to lunch. I may say a word to him before you get there." She nodded, stood on tiptoe to kiss him, and left him looking after her with affectionate eyes. Of all the numerous "kids" he had helped bring into the world and watched over to maturity, there was none of whom he was fonder than Isabel Penfield. If she had a rival in his regard, it was the "six feet of common sense" whom she was to marry.

CHAPTER II

IF Dr. Freeland could have looked into Alan Corwin's law-office, he might have changed his mind about the absence of danger. Corwin sat alone, staring fixedly at the wall. He sat rigid, with military erectness, but the fingers of his right hand drummed softly on the desk at his side. By almost any signs that would be put into words, he was calm; yet a child would have known that the man was in a savage temper. It would have taken an older and shrewder observer to see that his anger was not so much controlled as concealed, that even here, in the privacy of his office, he was wearing a mask; but the fact, once grasped, was plain enough. His black eyes now and then broke their steady stare to give lightning-like side glances toward the door or the desk; there were twitchings of his lips which seemed the suppressed beginnings of a snarl; and even the involved rhythm of his drumming was instinct with menace for some one.

An interruption roused him—a disreputable but profitable client, Mellis by name, whom Corwin had cleared from the well-grounded charge of dealing in contraband drugs. The man gave evidence of having come on important business, but he did not state it. He sensed the storm raging behind the sallow mask, asked a couple of trivial questions, and withdrew. Corwin followed him to the door, spoke to the girl in the outer office, locked himself in and sat down to his silent drumming again.

Isabel's letter lay open on his desk. Her picture, the eyes dancing with mischief, instead of clouded as Dr. Freeland had last seen them, stood near it. Farther back was the photograph of a man in football costume, with stalwart frame and frank, forth-right-looking eyes, and a tangle of curly hair. This was John Fairchild, Alan's closest friend but his successful rival, the man whom Alan now hated with the greatest bitterness he ever had felt—and he was rather famous as a hater, too.

Corwin turned to his desk, picked up his friend's picture with a soft, deliberate movement that somehow suggested the clutch of a strangler, studied it for a full minute; then with a negative shake of the head he put it down with equal softness, and took the letter. This detained him but a moment; he threw it down, rose, paced the office three or four times and seated himself again.

"Deliver me from my friends!" he quoted aloud, and the malignity he had been hiding flashed out, the mask dropped, and anyone who knew him could have followed his thoughts.

John Fairchild was his enemy. True, Fairchild always had been kind to him, had defended him when others criticised, fought his battles in school, helped him out of scrapes in college, loaned him money, thrown him legal business. Fairchild had been a loyal friend in the training-camp, a rock of support in the brief but feverish season overseas. But all the time he had been a foil and a reproach to Alan Corwin.

"He's made small of me!" muttered Corwin. He had heard a Southern mountain soldier use the words to explain a savage assault on a comrade. "He's made small of me."

It was true. By the simple process of being big himself, John Fairchild had made

small of Alan Corwin. John's generous kindliness had thrown the lesser man's self-seeking petulance into sharp relief. John's sound sense made the other's brilliancy seem petty. Alan had been decorated for valor displayed in getting his company—with John's help—out of a tight place which a little foresight would have avoided. John had not been decorated, but he did his full measure of work and was described by his general as an officer who never wasted a man. Isabel was right. Alan hated John; and Alan Corwin, with his hatred at this pitch, was a dangerous enemy for anyone. He knew as he sat there that one of the chief motives of his life had been his desire to outdo John Fairchild; and now—

"By God, I'll beat him this time!" he exclaimed. He caught up Fairchild's picture, crumpled the slight frame, tore the photograph across, crushed the pieces and flung them in the farthest corner of the room. For a moment he stood glaring; then the mask came over his face again, and he went out.

CHAPTER III

HONK! *Honk!"* The horn sounded time after time before Corwin noticed it at all, and then only to curse the noise. Then he heard his name called, and looked up. John Fairchild was signaling him from a touring car across the street.

"Come on and go for a ride!" called Fairchild, moving ahead to the crossing. Corwin swore to himself, opened his lips to shout refusal, changed his mind and started across. This might be a good time to pump Fairchild, if nothing more. Not till he reached the car did he see that his rival was not alone. Dr. Freeland was sitting beside him.

"Pile in, Alan," commanded Fairchild. "We're going out to the Institute Hospital; Dr. Jimmy's got something to show us about Johnson. I was going to your office when the Doctor saw you mooning along."

It was too late to turn back; besides, Johnson had been in Alan's company, and he was expected to show interest. He did so, cursing mentally the demands of fool philanthropists who compelled sensible people to waste time on underlings. "What's happened to Johnson?" he asked. "Not worse, I hope."

"Better, from what Jimmy says," returned Dr. Freeland, for Fairchild was paying strict attention to the wheel. "He seems to think he has scored a triumph, so we're going out to see. By the way, we're all bound to secrecy.

"All right," said Alan. The subject bored him already, but offered a ready change. "That dope-fiend still with Jimmy at the hospital?" he demanded.

"Don't speak that way, Alan," said the old physician in mild reproof. "It isn't Lee's fault. Yes, he's still there, and with Jimmy to oversee him, he's one of the finest operators in America."

Corwin only grunted in answer. The traffic jam thinned, and Fairchild spoke over his shoulder, eyes still at the front:

"What were you grousing about when we tooted for you, Alan?"

"How did you know I was grousing?" came the sharp retort.

"Oh, you looked as if you were having one of your nice, quiet hating spells."

"Perhaps I was," said Corwin. Fairchild, occupied with a crossing, did not notice the peculiar tone of the reply. Dr. Freeland did, and his brows drew down in a quick movement as he stared at the speaker and remembered Isabel's alarm.

Once out on the West Drive, with a reasonably clear field, Fairchild gave the engine gas till the indicator showed just one mile less speed than that sanctioned by law, and held the car at that pace for mile after mile with scarcely a quiver of the needle. He was a driver with whom the most nervous people felt safe. His big hands looked able to twist the wheel out of its socket, if need arose; and more comforting than his strength was the assurance of his watchfulness. There was no tension, no strain about his pose; he bore his part in the scattering conversation, but he was driving first and talking afterwards, and it was clear that nothing escaped him. There were several cars nearer the scene, but it was Fairchild's horn that roused a careless nursemaid whose charge had toddled to the curb and was stepping down into the street. She swooped on the young adventurer with an insane shriek.

"If people will trust their brats to hirelings—" remarked Corwin acidly.

"Why, people who aren't hirelings must watch out," said Fairchild, waving his hand at the nursemaid as they swept by. In a few minutes more they were climbing the grade to the Institute Hospital.

The two ex-officers made a notable contrast as they stood for a moment before entering the building. Corwin was of moderate height, but Fairchild was inches taller and far sturdier. Corwin was immaculate in dress and retained something of the military bearing; Fairchild was easy-going in clothes and attitude. Corwin was dark, with sallow skin and blue-black hair that gave plausibility to the tradition of an Oriental strain in the family; Fairchild had the hazel eyes and chestnut hair typical of that mixed breed called Anglo-Saxon. The contrast between the two men went much deeper than appearances. Corwin had more intellect than character; in Fairchild, solid character ruled an intellect much keener than it usually got credit for being. Perhaps I can sum it up best by saying that you instinctively compared Corwin to some member of the cat tribe, varying from a black panther to a domestic tabby, according to his mood and your measure of acquaintance with him; Fairchild quite as naturally suggested a dog, a shaggy sheepdog, for example, with something of the mastiff size and grip to him, a creature to be trusted to the uttermost.

CORWIN stood aside with a bow to let Dr. Freeland enter first. Fairchild put a helping hand under the older man's elbow coming up the steps. James Emory, wonder-worker of the Institute Hospital though still in his thirties, and known to them all as "Dr. Jimmy," was in the hall to greet them.

"What's this about Johnson?" demanded Dr. Freeland.

"I think you'll find him improved, at least," said Emory, with an enigmatic smile. He was boy enough—artist enough—to love a dramatic display of his powers, and had no notion of spoiling the scene he had prepared by talking about it.

"If you've cured that leg in this time, you've performed a miracle," said Freeland as they entered the surgeon's private office.

"See for yourself," said Emory. "Here he is."

The door opened, and Johnson approached them, walking with a cane. He knew all present, and his hand flashed to salute as he recognized his former captain. Corwin answered negligently.

"These gentlemen want to see that damaged leg of yours, Johnson," said the surgeon.

"All right," returned the man obediently. He leaned his cane against the wall, dropped the loose hospital pajamas, and stood barelegged for inspection.

"Sit down, man, sit down!" exclaimed Dr. Freeland. Johnson did so, and the old physician, his face showing profound surprise, knelt before him to study the outthrust limb. When he saw it last, the bones of the lower leg were like rotten wood, splinters of them were working loose and coming out through open sores every day, and no treatment seemed to help. Now the entire space from knee to ankle showed sound and firm, though marked by scars. The doctor glanced at the other leg, then stooped to look more closely, started up, took the man by the ankles and brought his feet together. He held them thus for a full minute, glancing at each limb in turn, put them down gently and turned to the surgeon.

"It's a most amazing case," he said. "I congratulate you, Jimmy—and you too Johnson."

"Purty near's good as new, aint it?" said the man.

"Just about," said Freeland, smiling. At a nod from the surgeon, Johnson drew on his pajamas and went out. Dr. Freeland waited till the door closed, and his first question mystified his non-medical hearers:

"Does he know?" This with a jerk of the thumb in the direction Johnson had taken.

"Doesn't even guess," said the surgeon, smiling.

"Good—don't let him know," said Freeland. "How on earth did you get your material?"

"Well, first, what on earth are you savants talking about?" demanded Fairchild, grinning. "Take pity on two poor dubs, and let us in on the secret. We wont peach."

"Why,—this is very confidential, of course,—I've grafted a new leg on Johnson in place of the one the shell smashed. The two ex-officers looked blank incomprehension at the statement, and so the surgeon repeated it. "As for the material, that was a stroke of luck. You remember those yeggs that broke jail a few weeks ago, and how one of them was run over and smashed by an auto? That happened a quarter of a mile up the road here, and they brought him in, head crushed, back crushed, unconscious, not a half-hour of life in him, but his legs all right. I didn't

shorten his span any, but Lee and I took his leg and put it on Johnson, and it's grown fast."

"Graft on a human leg!" exclaimed Corwin, stupefied.

"Why not?" said the surgeon. "Carrel grafted on a dog's leg, years ago, and several of us have done the same thing since. A man is much easier to work with than a dog."

"The real difficulty was with the blood-vessels, wasn't it, until you invented that absorbable button for uniting them end to end?" asked Dr. Freeland.

"Yes," said the surgeon, "that simplified matters. It has enabled me to do something else, too. Wait."

HE took up the telephone and asked for Dr. Lee. In a few moments Lee entered. He was a tall, gaunt man, with clean-shaven face, long hands, long arms, long legs, a parchment skin, and fever-bright eyes with pinpoint pupils. That he was a user of drugs could not be doubted by anyone who had the slightest knowledge of the subject, but as one looked at the fine features and patient hopelessness of his face, the term by which Corwin had referred to him seemed inexcusably brutal. He greeted the visitors, and his face lighted for a moment as he saw Dr. Freeland, who rose to shake hands with him.

"Lee deserves more than half the credit for Johnson's case," said Emory, "—as well as for the one I want to show you now. Is there anyone you can send for Tony, Lee?"

"I'll get him myself. Magno's here, by the way."

"Is he? Can you keep him out of the way till Tony comes, and then send him in?"

"Yes, I'll manage it."

He withdrew. Soon an interne entered, leading a dog of mixed breed in which mastiff seemed the dominant strain. Dr. Emory took him and unfastened the leash. "Look out for squalls," he said to his guests. "Down, Tony."

Tony was quiet. In a moment the door opened, and Dr. Lee ushered in a middle-aged Italian, who bowed to the surgeon, but had no time to speak. The dog gave a bark and sprang at him. The Italian, starting back in surprise and alarm, slipped and fell. Fairchild sprang to seize the dog, but the surgeon intercepted him, exclaiming:

"Look! Look!"

Fairchild looked. The dog was licking the Italian's face, barking joyously, wriggling from nose to tail, giving every sign of a glad reunion with a beloved master. The man, his fear overlaid by surprise, sat up and tried to thrust back the eager animal. Dr. Emory spoke:

"Here, Tony! Here! Down!" The dog subsided, and the Italian struggled to his feet.

"Tony?" he said, pointing to the animal. "You calla heem Tony?"

"Yes. We couldn't save your Tony, so I got you another one. How do you like him?"

"Deesa bigga brute?" inquired the Italian. "How he know me?"

"I told him about you," said the surgeon, laughing.

"What else he know?"

"Lots of tricks. Try him."

The Italian tried him, and at each performance of the animal, the trainer's wonder grew. Here was a dog who did exactly what the previous Tony had done. After the third or fourth exhibition of this uncanny wisdom, the man stopped, crossed himself and faced the party.

"Smart, alla right. Devil smart, too. Signor—"

"You can't have him unless you promise to treat him well," said Emory sharply.

The Italian looked at the dog, then at the surgeon, then round on the group and so back to the dog once more. He needed such an animal. It was a prize to find a creature that fitted so exactly in the dead Tony's place. He was afraid, but economic determinism triumphed.

"I take him. I treat heem alla right." He spoke of compensation, which was waved aside; he expressed his thanks, which no doubt were sincere; but as he went out with the eager dog, he voiced his real feelings:

"Ah!" he said. "I no lika deesa business!"

"JIMMY!" exclaimed Dr. Freeland, "did you transplant the brain from his dog into this animal?"

"Lee and I did together. What do you think of it?"

"As a stunt, it's marvelous, but it makes me afraid!"

"Why?"

"I don't quite know. Will you do it again?"

"I think not. The operation was under an anesthetic, of course, but the knitting of the nerve-trunks seemed extremely painful, I don't know why. The poor fellow howled, and I didn't dare give him morphine."

"If I said that the pain was nature's protest against too great an interference with her rules, you'd say I was an old fogy, I suppose?"

"Not that, but a little old-fashioned, perhaps," returned the surgeon, smiling.

"But, good heavens," exclaimed Fairchild, "is a creature's entire personality lodged in the brain?"

"Just about, among the higher animals," said the surgeon. "In a man even more so than in a dog. It doesn't matter whether you hold that personality is manifested through the brain or created by the brain, the connection remains the same. If you put the brain of an ignorant plantation negro in the skull of a Harvard professor, the creature which the outer world took for the professor would talk an Africanoid dialect and be afraid of ha'nts. The white man would furnish the house, but the negro would inhabit it."

"You couldn't do it with a man, could you?" asked Corwin.

"Certainly, if I had the chance," answered the surgeon. "Of course, I never will get it."

"Thank heaven for that, Jimmy!" remarked Dr. Freeland, earnestly. "Nature made the body a pretty fair index to the brain. Change the signs, put a rascal's instincts back of the face of an honest man —why, lad, it would be a conspiracy against the human race!"

The surgeon laughed. Corwin looked bored. "I think the rascals are the interesting people, Doctor," he said, with the superior air affected by pacifists and sophomoric critics. Fairchild rose suddenly, stood listening a moment, then opened the door. "Here's something a blamed sight better worth while than an argument on anatomy," he said, and stepped into the hall. A phonograph somewhere near was playing a superb record of César Franck's "Panis Angelicus."

Corwin swore under his breath, and then resumed his pose of superior tolerance. "What John hears in that sappy stuff is beyond me," he remarked; but John paid no heed. He stood motionless till the music ended, then turned back into the office with a long breath.

"That makes me feel better," he said. "Shall we go?"

But Dr. Freeland wanted to wait for a talk with Lee, and would go downtown by another route when his talk was over. The younger men left without him.

CHAPTER IV

CORWIN had made up his mind to force the issue with Fairchild, and asked if they could not drive on for a chat before turning back. Fairchild answered with a cheery "Of course," and headed up the steep, curving road beyond the hospital. The powerful car made little of the grade, but John jerked his thumb at the steep slope at the side, and voiced his protest against carelessness. "Ought to put a high parapet on this road," he said. "Car might go over there some day."

Corwin did not answer. They reached the level ground at the top, and John gave Alan a friendly pat on the knee. "Fire when you are ready, old man," he said. "What is it?"

"It's about Isabel," said Corwin without hesitation.

Fairchild's look showed little of the surprise he felt at this announcement. "That's a subject that interests me," he said. "What about Isabel?"

"Do you think it fair, John, to hold Isabel to that old arrangement made between her parents and yours before either of you could have seriously thought of marriage?"

John slowed down, tossed away his cigar, and looking straight ahead, asked:

"Fair to whom, Alan?"

"Fair to Isabel, first of all?" returned Corwin. "After that, is it fair to others?"

Fairchild's jaw set for a moment in a rather grim line, and then relaxed.

"Suppose you say just what you want, Alan."

"I want an even start," said that consummate egotist; "—or as near an even start as I can get. I love Isabel too—a great deal more, I think, than you do. I want this French matrimonial arrangement called off, let each suitor start fair, and may the best man win."

It was as Isabel had said; John had formed the habit of taking care of Alan Corwin. With any other man, even John's good temper would not have permitted the discussion to last another moment. But

the habit was strong. He only asked, in a voice carefully controlled:

"Did Isabel tell you to say this to me?"

"No, of course not. But she feels bound by the old agreement."

"Did she say so?"

"Not in so many words."

"In any words, Alan?" John thought he had brought the matter to a focus, but the nimbler brain evaded the issue with a flank movement.

"I am not hiding behind Isabel's skirts, John," said Alan with an air of exasperated virtue. "I am speaking on my own authority, and asking you for what I consider fair play. Your father and Isabel's planned your marriage before she was out of short dresses or you out of knee pants. Your father is gone—I felt I had lost the last grown friend who understood me when he died; but Isabel's father lives, and has kept the plan alive—he's always had a prejudice against me. The only course I had was to come to you. I must say you haven't made it easy."

"I hadn't noticed any embarrassment on your part," said John, with sharper sarcasm than he often permitted himself. He raised his hand in signal to any car behind, turned out of the road, and stopped.

"You've a wrong idea about some things, Alan," he said, quietly, though there was no lack of decision in his voice. "A little thinking ought to put you right. My father was past sixty when I was born; I was only fifteen when he died. He couldn't have ordained our marriage, you see. As for Isabel's father, I've heard you say that she winds him round her finger, and it's true. Her mother died before my father did. My mother lived long enough to get my cable after the Armistice, but she was always your friend, as you know. I'm reminding you of these things to show you that it was impossible for Isabel's parents and mine to arrange our marriage if we hadn't agreed with them."

"You don't deny that the arrangement was made?" interrupted Corwin.

"I don't deny that our folks wanted us to get married, and said so, rather early. But neither Isabel nor I ever thought of their wishes as binding. We were pals from our kindergarten days. I fought her battles just as—"

"Just as you did mine?" said Corwin with a sneer, as John stumbled for a word. "You needn't remind me of it. I know how the ledger stands."

"You make it hard to talk with you and keep one's temper, Alan," said John. "I had no idea of reminding you of an obligation. I mean to say that Isabel and I liked each other as children, and the feeling has grown. Perhaps the talk of our parents gave me an advantage, but if so, that can't be helped now. The engagement is of our making, not theirs, and I shall not make a move to break it. If you want to ask Isabel to break it, I sha'n't stop you."

"You wont?" The sneer was a little too pointed this time.

"I could stop you very easily, Alan," said John. His big hand dropped on Alan's slim wrist, and though the touch was gentle, it was the gentleness of padded steel. John went on:

"Isabel has made her choice, and I don't think she wants to change it. If she does, it's her right, but she'll have to say so herself. You get a little wild, sometimes, Alan. You've made yourself believe you've got a grievance, but you haven't. Besides, I know you. If you were to marry Isabel, you'd be weary of your bargain in half a year. You want things only until you get them—I've watched you. Now, I think we'll go back to town."

HE turned the car and started back. Alan Corwin, baffled and raging, sought round and round the subject for a new opening, and found none. In desperation he repeated his former attack.

"John, I insist that you call off that old parental arrangement and start over."

Even John's good nature might not have been proof against this preposterous demand; but he had himself well in hand, and he was profoundly sorry for anyone who could not marry Isabel Penfield, and he recognized the old, familiar note of hysteria in Corwin's voice. Unluckily he took the old, familiar way of dealing with it. "There, Alan," he said, putting out his hand. "We wont talk about it any more now."

"We wont?" Corwin fairly shrieked the reply. To be patronized, as he considered it, by the man he was trying to browbeat and bully was the last straw. Caution was gone, the last rag of regard for consequences vanished. "We wont talk about it? By God, we will, and we'll do something about it, too! You needn't think you can ride over me with your money and your big fists, damn you! We'll settle this right here!"

They had just started down the hill above the hospital as Corwin sprang up, clutching at the wheel with one hand and reaching for his hip pocket with the other. The sweep of a big arm flung him back in the seat and clamped him there so tightly that he could not draw his automatic, but the momentary shift of John's eyes and Alan's drag at the wheel brought disaster. The car went over the edge, tipped, tottered and then rolled crashing down the steep hill.

Corwin heard the shriek which testified that their misfortune had been seen. He saw the windshield shiver into javelin heads at the first crash—one of them cut his face as it passed. He felt a terrific shock near the base of the spine as the car rolled over him, but as he came uppermost again on the turn, the arm that was holding him went limp, and he drew up his right hand without thinking what it contained. There was another shock, followed by a burning pain through his body; the car rolled on without him, and then came blankness.

CORWIN struggled back to consciousness with a stinging sensation on his tongue. Aside from that, he seemed disembodied. Dr. Emory was stooping over him.

"Listen, Captain Corwin, can you understand me?"

"Yes." His mind was clear, but he felt very tired.

"You and Fairchild have been close friends all your lives?"

"Yes." It was none of this meddler's business, anyway.

"You grew up together; you know all his friends well—all?"

"Yes."

"Captain Corwin, listen carefully: is there any reason why you should not take Fairchild's place and carry on his work?"

A dim adumbration of what the question meant reached Corwin's consciousness, and he fastened to the chance like a leech.

"None whatever," he said faintly. "Is—he hurt?"

"You are both hurt. Your body is a wreck. Your back is broken—your pistol went off, and the bullet pierced both kidneys. Captain Fairchild's body is unhurt, but a piece of glass has driven in above the left eye, and torn the whole front of his brain to bits. His mind is dead; if his brain heals, the shrinking scar-tissue will kill his body. You saw what I did with the dogs. Shall I do it with you?"

"You mean?"

"Put your brain in his skull, yes."

"Do it."

"Do you give me your pledge to live his life, honorably and fairly?"

"Yes, of course. Do it."

"I may fail, and there may be very great pain?"

"Do it. Give me his body and I will do his work. I—I loved him. Quick!"

Almost with the word he caught the whiff of ether, and then, for an indefinite season, he knew no more.

CHAPTER V

CORWIN'S next sensation was one of vague discomfort. He did not locate it, did not know whether it was mental or physical, did not think about it at all. The lower, more basic brain-centers, last to lose their grip and first to regain it, did not bother about distinctions between body and mind. They registered discomfort, and nothing more.

The uncomfortable feeling became stronger, and was not constant. There was some implication here which troubled him; but at first the gradually waking higher cells could make nothing of it. Then after several lapses into complete unconsciousness, a word struggled up out of some black void—time. That was it. Time was passing, and the discomfort was growing worse. And these intervals—there were many of them before he could define them, even by a word, but at last it came—*sleep*. He was uncomfortable except when asleep. He would go to sleep.

He did so; at least, he lost consciousness. When he awoke again, the discomfort was stronger still. He was lapped in a blanket of tingling sensations—this idea did not frame itself in words, but he forbore to search for them. Something else was troubling him even more, and he fumbled dumbly for an indefinite period before he could get a handle for it—*light*. Flashes of light were stabbing him, and the tingle had become a burning. He found the word for that now, but he could not follow it out. Sleep—let him sleep.

There was another spell of unconsciousness, which perhaps was slumber—another and another, before he awoke with a goodly share of his mind ready for work. The flashing and burning distracted him, but a word which he had been seeking now came

readily—*space*. It no longer seemed important. Something had happened, something that explained all this discomfort and burning. Fairchild—yes, he hated Fairchild, but he was getting at it, now. Fairchild, quarrel,—the cause of the quarrel did not come to him,—accident. People suffered after accidents, but that was not it. Suddenly out of the void came the surgeon's questions, and his own imperious reply, and a sickly sweet smell; and then, before he could fuse these images into one, they disappeared in blankness.

They must have pieced themselves together while he was unconscious, for he understood them perfectly when he next awoke. He had told the surgeon to put his brain, Alan Corwin's brain, in the body of John Fairchild. This must have been done. Then this pain, and the light that seemed intolerable, and the roaring noise that he now catalogued for the first time, must be the result of that transplanting. A dog had howled. That had something to do with the matter—he did not know what. The main thing was that he, Alan Corwin, was taking possession of the body of John Fairchild, and the body was protesting against the demoniac seizure. Even as he recalled the phrase, a terrific pain struck him so fiercely that he lost consciousness again.

For a season thereafter Corwin's life consisted of periods of intolerable agony, interrupted by spells of partial or complete unconsciousness. He did not tell himself that his arms, legs or body hurt—*he* hurt; he was one vast, frightful pain. He lost thought of time. He ceased to count. He did not know whether there were ten such alternations of pain and sleep, or a hundred.

Then came another variation. He woke with a feeling that he had been unconscious longer and more completely than usual, and that some change had happened in the meantime. He pondered idly for a time before realizing what it was; the pain was less. It had sunk to a tingle again. His arm—the right one?—was bothering him, and there was a numb prickle that seemed to come from his thighs. The fact lay idle in his consciousness for a spell; then he grasped its meaning, and felt the first throb of doubt. Had he a body again, or not? Those grisly war-stories of men who complained of pain and cold in amputated limbs came to him. Was he in similar case, or had he really arms and thighs? Had the nerve-trunks knitted, or—

He was breathing! Columbus never made a more important discovery. He tried to hold his breath, but that was beyond his power. The nerve-wires had knitted enough to tell him that he had a chest and which was rising and falling in even movement, but would not transmit the order to halt. The flashes of light had ceased to trouble him, but he could not see. The buzzing and roaring were less, but he listened vainly to catch an intelligible sound. It was hard work, being a supplanting demon. He would go to sleep.

HE slept soundly for hours. When he awoke, his mind was a blank; then this very blankness began to have a meaning. He sensed this, vaguely at first, then more directly, and began to fumble for the explanation. Was he dead, a mere disembodied spirit? He rejected that notion without knowing why. Was he—even as he sought to frame another guess, he caught the truth. He was not in pain. The nerve-trunks had joined; the brain of Alan Corwin had taken possession of the body of John Fairchild, and the composite being was whole again!

He felt an exulting assurance on this point, and then, contradictorily enough, sought to test it. The first trial succeeded; he could hold his breath for a few seconds. The second failed; he could move his eyelids, but could not see, and the effort brought back those flashes of light that had stabbed him so cruelly before. He dropped that experiment and tried to move his arms—John Fairchild's arms, he corrected himself. He failed again, but the difficulty seemed outside his body. Very well, could he move the fingers? He could; and for minutes he lay in infantile content, opening and closing his hands. He tried to move his feet, but could not tell whether he managed it or not. He paused, trying to devise a new test, and there came an interruption.

Up to date all his sensations save two had been within the body he had taken for his own. Something was restraining his arms, and something was blocking his eyes. Now came a sensation from without. At first it was merely a curious vibration, a rather pleasant jarring. Then he recognized it as sound, yes, musical sound; and it ceased to be pleasant and became charged with some disagreeable recollection. It grew louder, clearer, more distinct, sweeping in rhythmic waves into his conscious-

ness; and suddenly, though the lips of John Fairchild did not move, the brain of Alan Corwin registered a petulant curse. Why did he have to be wakened by the tune which the hated Fairchild had paused to hear with delight, the sappy "Panis Angelicus?"

He wanted to weep in sheer self-pity. The emotion was too much for him and he dropped off to sleep again.

AT Corwin's next awakening, he was still without pain, though there was a tingling sensation in one thigh—yes, the right. His toes felt uncomfortable too, but not seriously. He drew a deep breath, and noticed that his mouth was open. He tried to close it, found that he could do so, and could move his tongue—found also that he was atrociously hungry. He renewed his experiments with the arms; they tried to answer his will, but were manacled in some fashion. So were the feet. What did they mean by tying him this way and letting him starve? A vague groan escaped him and received instant answer.

"Are you awake?" His suspended breathing must have been taken for an answer, for he heard light footsteps, and then the same voice, a little farther away, said: "Captain Fairchild is awake." "Always Fairchild," he thought petulantly, and then remembrance came so suddenly that he gasped. He was Fairchild now, and he must play his part, or the supplanting demon would be detected and driven out, and—

Reassuring, competent fingers dropped on his pulse, and Dr. Emory's voice said:

"Captain Fairchild, can you hear me?"

"Um-m-m!" It was the nearest he could come to speech, but it sufficed.

"All right; don't try to talk. See if you can squeeze my finger."

He put a passionate desire into the grip.

"Fine! The nerve-trunks have knitted splendidly. Now, if you are hungry, squeeze again."

The fingers closed so tightly that the surgeon laughed aloud.

"You're all right. Now, see if you can swallow."

A few drops of liquid touched his tongue, and he swallowed them without difficulty. At first he only sensed that they were wet, then that they were warm, then that they had a taste, a good taste. He drank eagerly till the supply ceased, and the surgeon's voice said:

"Now to sleep again. Perhaps tomorrow you can talk."

CHAPTER VI

NEXT morning, when asked how he felt, Corwin answered: "A—ight." It was his first essay in speech in his new personality, and filled him with pride.

"That's fine," said the surgeon. "Any pain?"

"Nuh!" It was really less articulate than that, but it served. Dr. Emory spoke in a lower tone:

"Miss Penfield is here to see you. Can you remember that you are Captain Fairchild if I let her come in for a moment?"

His voice was grave, but the false Fairchild did not notice this. He had not thought of Isabel since the accident, but the news of her presence filled him with exultation. Isabel would be his now. He cleared his throat and spoke, struggling painfully for control of his tongue:

"I—ember. Shuh— in."

"Don't try to talk," the surgeon warned him.

She came so quietly that the impostor, wrapped in his exultant egotism, did not hear her till she spoke. "John," she said softly, and touched his hand. He gripped her fingers as hard as he could and wrestled with his tongue again. "Belle!" he said, and felt her start; Alan often called her that. "Is—bel," he managed, recognizing his blunder. She dropped on her knees beside the bed and kissed his lips.

"Oh, John!" she said. "I'm so glad! I mustn't talk to you, and get you excited; but it's you, it's you, and you're getting well!"

Probably any other man in the city would have felt shame to cheat such wholehearted love as spoke in every tone; but the impostor gathered the pilfered affection to himself, and gloried in it. He returned her kiss fervently if awkwardly; then: "Good-by till tomorrow, dear heart!" And he heard her go out.

HE slept nearly the whole day—they had to waken him for meals—and put in an unbroken twelve hours that night. A whole series of days and nights of the same character followed, save that Isabel's visits were longer, and each time she came, he said a few more words. They had taken

off the restraining bandages, and though his eyes were still covered, it was with a thin pad, through which he could distinguish light. Strength and confidence were flooding into him with every hour of rest; he did not realize that the real trials might be ahead. The pain that had wracked him was no more than a memory, and he chuckled at times to think how easy the demoniac seizure had been accomplished. Then came a day on which Dr. Emory said:

"I think, Captain Fairchild, that you can stand a thorough examination now, and perhaps a little talk afterwards."

"Sure," said the false Fairchild promptly.

The surgeon first darkened the window that the light might not be excessive, and then uncovered the injured man's eyes. A very few moments made it certain that the optic nerves, at least, were knitted fully. The interloper could see, with both eyes or with either, and with both halves of each eye. He could tell such colors as could be used fairly in a test in the dim light, judge distances fairly well, respond in all ways as if eye and brain had been born together. The surgeon passed to other matters.

"Now we'll give you a general look-over," he said. He stripped the patient, tapped his reflexes, tested the command of each separate group of muscles and the response to touch. The left foot was not yet under perfect control, and there were parts of the back where even a sharp prod from a needle caused no sensation whatever; but the result, all things considered, was marvelously perfect.

"Tired?" asked the surgeon, when he had made sure of this.

"No," said the false Fairchild. "What else?"

"Nothing else in the testing line. I want to talk to you about—other things."

THE man on the bed was silent, wondering, and for the first time in many days, a little afraid. The surgeon was frowning and perplexed. "Captain," he said after a pause, "we've taken a big responsibility on ourselves already. I don't think we should make it any bigger."

"Do you want me to die?" demanded the impostor.

"No, no!" exclaimed Emory, laughing at the tragic tone. "Not at all. I want—here," he said, changing horses in his speech. "When I proposed that operation, I didn't know that the real Fairchild was engaged to be married. I don't think you've any right to carry out that engagement."

"How can I help carrying it out?" asked the false Fairchild after a pause.

"Not easily, I admit. But I think you can find an honorable way to do it, if you want to."

"I don't want to," said the man, abruptly. "But I couldn't if I did, and there's no reason why I should. Listen, Dr. Emory: It was a neck-and-neck race between—the other man and myself, which should have her. He won—" And unseemly bitterness was creeping into his voice, and he had the wit to stop, get control of himself and go on in a more gracious way. "He won, and he deserved to; he was the better man. But I know I could win her now if I had my own body. Why should this body be a handicap, and bar me?"

"I DON'T like deceiving a woman, in any way," said Dr. Emory. He saw the difficulties, and he was not nimble enough in argument to meet the clever pleader who was confronting him, but his instincts were sound. "I don't mind your stepping into the other man's business and property; you've promised to use them honorably, and of course you will; besides, you sacrificed some property of your own. But the lady—we've no right to dispose of her, Captain."

"But Doctor, I can't back out," insisted the false Fairchild. Opposition had roused his desire for Isabel to the fighting pitch, but he was battling with all the canniness in him. "What on earth could I say? What excuse could I give? How could I help acting like an intolerable cad—unless, of course, we tell her the truth."

"She wouldn't believe it, if we did," said the doctor. "I see the difficulty; but at least, there mustn't be any hurry. Let the lady have plenty of chance to get acquainted with the new Fairchild. Has she noticed any change?"

"No."

"I've made things easy for you," said Emory, not realizing that he was giving a weapon to a man who would have no scruples about using it. "I told them—Miss Penfield and her father—that there were some memories which you probably never would recover, and others that would come back slowly. The scar over your left eye helps to make that plausible."

"Thank you," said the impostor, seeing his advantage and determining to make the most of it.

"Dr. Freeland has been out to see you every day," went on Emory.

"Does he know?" asked the false Fairchild quickly.

"Not a word. No one knows but myself, Dr. Lee and Miss Lang, the nurse. We got along with one nurse, partly because we happened to be short but more to narrow the circle and make sure the secret wouldn't leak. I've a notion that Dr. Freeland wouldn't approve the experiment."

"He's an old fogy!" exclaimed the impostor impatiently.

"In some ways, yes, but he's the kindest and fairest man I ever knew. He pulled Dr. Lee out of the pit, and got me to give him a chance here, and nobody ever made good any finer."

"He still takes dope, doesn't he?" asked the false Fairchild.

"A regular ration, which we've found it impossible to reduce. But so long as we keep him from getting any more,—and it's very rarely that he feels the call for more,—he does superb work. You wouldn't be talking to me now if it weren't for his skill, and he wouldn't be alive if it weren't for Dr. Freeland. I think the old gentleman's here now."

"Send him in," said the interloper. He knew the old physician's kindness—none better; and he knew, too, that this kindly, gentle helper was uncommonly difficult to deceive. But there was no chance that he could hit on the truth here.

"John, boy," said Dr. Freeland, "you've been imitating all the seven sleepers at once. How are you this morning?"

"Feeling fine." It had been the real John Fairchild's stock response to such a question. Freeland sat down on the bed, took the big hand in both his own and petted it, soothingly. Even so had he petted the hand of Alan Corwin once, when that boy, then sixteen years old, had fallen sick while his flighty mother was away on some wild goose chase. The memory was almost too poignant to be endured.

"You're pale enough to interest the ladies, and that scar over your eye is going to be a fine beauty-mark. I might call you the Balafre, if he weren't such a scoundrel. Odd, but it gives you something of the dark look that Alan had, sometimes. Poor Alan!"

"Poor Alan," repeated the man on the bed, with different meaning but entire sincerity.

"Some day you must tell me about the accident," said Freeland. "It's rather puzzling to some of us. Well, I wont keep you awake any longer. Good-by, my boy."

He released the hand he was holding, caressed the sick man's forehead, and went out.

CHAPTER VII

WAKING early next morning, the interloper determined to try his control of his new habitation. Placing both hands cautiously, he raised himself to a sitting posture. It was easy, but for a moment it caused such dizziness that he expected to fall. This passed, and he looked about. The knobs in the bedclothes which marked the position of his feet seemed farther away than was right, until he remembered that John Fairchild topped Alan Corwin by fully five inches. He glanced around at the room, an unusually pleasant hospital room with a vase of roses on the little stand by the window. Even in the subdued light, he could see that they were the rich red tone that the real Fairchild had loved so well, and he growled petulantly. Roses were too common, too bourgeois to interest the supplanter; he wanted something more *outré*, and if ordinary folk found it a bit repellant, so much the better.

He rubbed the newly healed scar on his forehead to allay a slight itching, and as he replaced his hand on the bedclothes, noticed it with a start. How big and strong it was—the kind of hand that could crush the life out of an enemy, if the owner willed! He had seen it bend pokers and straighten horseshoes and tear decks of cards; he had seen it last when it flung a furious pigmy back into a seat, and pinned him there helplessly until released by the overturning of the car. Was this hand really his, after all? Would it obey its new master, or betray and crush him? Like all selfish egotists, he was profoundly superstitious at bottom; and this thought was so disquieting that he sank back in bed with a groan.

Two hours later, Dr. Emory found him still glooming.

"How's the grip this morning, Captain? Ouch! Now the other—go slow, man; my hands are my fortune! How is the head?"

"All right."

"No aches or pains?"

"None to speak of."

"Good! I think you can sit up a little tomorrow." The interloper answered with a crooked smile:

"I sat up this morning."

"You rascal! How did it go?"

"All right. Dizzy for a while, but that passed."

"What are you so glum about, then?" asked the surgeon. He closed the door and went on in a lower tone: "Are you worried over what I said about getting married?"

"A little," returned the false Fairchild. He had not thought of the subject that morning, but it was as good an evasion as any.

"There's no need of worry. If the lady is suited with the new Captain Fairchild, after a reasonable acquaintance with him, I'm willing to act as best man. All I want is to insure fair play. Now—" he reached for something on the stand at the head of the bed—"take a look at yourself."

"No, no, no!" exclaimed the interloper, turning away and shutting his eyes. "I don't want to look! Take it away!"

"You're not disfigured," said the surgeon.

"I don't care! I don't want to look! Take it away!"

"I've taken it away," said Emory, replacing it on the stand. "But see here, Captain, this wont do. You must get used to your new face. I realize that it will be something of a shock, but the longer you wait, the greater that shock will be. After all, it wont be a strange face to you. It is that of your dearest friend."

"I know I'm foolish, but I can't help it, just now," returned the impostor, opening his eyes. "As soon as I'm out of bed, I want to take a look at myself, all over I'm trying not to see even my hands until then."

ISABEL came an hour later, and her arrival lifted the man from his gloom—for a time. It would have been a strange man indeed, whom Isabel Penfield could not cheer. With her sparkling black eyes, olive skin, red lips, broad forehead and slightly end-up nose, she was extremely good to look at; and her frank, boyish comradeship made her the best of companions. Also it was clear to the most casual inspection that she was deeply in love with John Fairchild, and the impostor masquerading in Fairchild's body was not above securing love by false pretenses.

"Do you realize, Isabel," he said, "that this is the first time I've seen you since the accident?"

"I do." She smiled; then her face went grave. He thought she was going to ask a question, but she only said:

"That terrible accident!"

"It was—rather bad," he agreed.

"It might have been worse," she answered.

"Yes, we both might have been killed."

"Or the wrong one might have been killed," she said gravely. Once more it seemed as if she meant to ask a question, but once more she changed her mind and merely smiled. He felt worried and aggrieved.

"What do you mean by that?" he asked.

"I mean that if anyone had to go, we're all glad, and I most of all, that it wasn't you."

So that was the way she felt, was it? Willing, nay, eager that Alan Corwin, with his great abilities and unusual nature, should be slain as a sacrifice to save the fathom of commonplace clay that was—that had been—John Fairchild. That was her return for Alan Corwin's passionate love! A cold anger began to grow in him, overlaid for the time by his ever-ready self-pity.

"I see," he said. "Poor Alan!"

"Yes, poor Alan! But his only real troubles were of his own making, John. They were the natural result of his disposition."

"Isn't that rather ungenerous?" he returned. The phrase was one which the real John Fairchild had used frequently, and which Alan Corwin in his proper person never used at all. Isabel smiled at the well-remembered words, and could not know that they were a mask.

"Perhaps," she said. "Truth is ungenerous, sometimes." Then, sensing his distaste for the subject, though never dreaming the cause, she brought up another topic:

"Aunt Nellie was coming with me to see you today, but some one of her mystical societies cast a shoe or staged a lecture or something, so she had to postpone it. You know how seriously she takes such things."

"I know," he said shortly. He considered Aunt Nellie the most tiresome person in the world, but for all that, her constant patter of supernatural matters impressed

him. Isabel laughed reminiscently, and went on:

"The day of the accident, she had a vision of you. You were going under a dark cloud, and she will have it you're there yet."

"She's always—been given to visions."

The pause and change of voice showed that he meant to say something else. Isabel did not know what, but she could not help seeing that he was depressed, and when it became evident that her efforts could not enliven him again, she left. The impostor turned his face to the wall and meditated on the folly and uncharitableness of the world toward its men of genius.

THAT afternoon Corwin was permitted to stand and take a few steps, carefully guarded. The next day he did the same, and the next he crossed the bedroom unaided. The following morning a large standing mirror was brought in, placed near the window, and Dr. Emory said:

"Sure you don't want me?"

"No," said the impostor. "I—I'd rather be alone, the first time."

"All right; no one will come for an hour, unless you ring. You wont find the ordeal a hard one. I'd give a good deal for such a physique, myself."

The false Fairchild nodded and smiled, waited till he was alone, then slipped out of bed. Carefully averting his face from the mirror, he moved to a chair at one side, where he could not see his reflection. His steps were noticeably better than the day before, but he was not thinking of them. He was half remembering some lines of poetry—Kipling's, were they not?—about the queen who could not face her looking glass. Isabel was fond of quoting them and so he supposed John Fairchild had learned them; and since he was John Fairchild now, he must learn them too. At every turn something tried to force him into the mold of the personality that was gone, and he ground his teeth.

"He's making small of me still," he muttered.

He took off his pajamas, and steadying himself by the chair, shut his eyes, stepped before the mirror, and opened them.

For a moment his stare was uncomprehending. He knew what he should see, could have given an accurate description of the face and figure of John Fairchild; but to see that face and figure thrown back at him from a mirror fairly stupefied him for a moment. This huge, stalwart man, with a fresh scar over one eye and a bandage still perched turbanwise on his head —what had he to do with these? The broad chest, the mighty arms and thighs, seemed to mock and dwarf the personality that ruled them. Alan had envied John Fairchild his physical strength a thousand times, but possession of that strength brought a sense of unreality rather than of satisfaction.

He roused himself, and began to study this new house of his spirit, smiling crookedly at the phrase. He was looking at curly brown hair, instead of straight black; the forehead was broader than that to which he was accustomed; the eyes had the frank, forthright look which he remembered—and despised. They were hazel eyes too, and he wondered how any woman could admire them. The stubble of beard was thicker than he remembered, and lighter even than the brown hair. The mouth seemed to have a habit of smiling; the strong chin held no menace; the whole head, poised on its white column of a neck, was that of a man who had looked upon the world and found it good.

Everything about this creature in the glass was frank and aboveboard, "obvious," with no shadows of concealment or half-lights of intrigue. And the new owner of this face and body, loving devious ways from the cradle, would have to content himself with the insipid life that had satisfied John Fairchild, outwardly, at least, or meet the wondering wrath of the community. Nay, there might be more direct penalties. He glanced at the wrists, which a duelist might have envied, and the hands whose grip was like a vise; and the superstitious fear of these hands came back with such force that he turned abruptly away, gathered up his pajamas and crawled back into bed.

CHAPTER VIII

CORWIN was glum all that day. The surgeon spoke prosaically of digestion, but for once he was wrong. The impostor had wakened suddenly to the fact that there were real dangers and difficulties connected with his course; and always a creature of extremes, he overrated them now because he had ignored them before. He was depressed as well as angered, too, by the annoyances, the confining limits of

his position, the fact that he was expected to carry out the traditions of conduct which the real Fairchild had established. That vanished rival was still "making small" of the creature who had inherited his place and body. Besides, the very worst and most callous human being likes to inspire a little regard on his own account, and the false Fairchild was made to feel every day that he was accepted, honored, loved solely because he was supposed to be the real Fairchild, and that Alan Corwin had been regarded almost everywhere with varying feelings of dislike and distrust.

He wondered darkly how long it would be before the surgeon learned the real state of affairs between Corwin and the friends of John Fairchild. Penfield and his daughter were strangers to Emory; Dr. Freeland was an old and close friend, but he had a genius for holding his tongue; and though he never trusted Corwin, always had been kind to him. On the face of things, there seemed little danger, but the impostor was afraid. He did not know of his real safeguard—namely the fact that James Emory was so specialized and absorbed in his profession that his purely human contacts were casual and fragmentary to a degree.

Penfield breezed into the room next morning, cheery, affectionate, talkative.

"John," he declared, "it's a sight for sore eyes, the way you're improving."

"It doesn't seem overrapid to me," said the impostor, trying to choose words that would sound in character, and succeeding so well that the old man laughed.

"Bless the boy! You're no more impatient than we are, John. You're coming home with us the minute Dr. Emory will let you leave. He's awful finicky about you, and of course he's right. The men at the factory have been asking about you every day."

"Tell them I'm very much obliged," said the impostor as Penfield paused.

"I will. They all like you, John, and I'll be mighty glad to have you back on the job, where you can help keep things level. . . . . Why, what's the matter?"

"You mustn't count on me—too much—for a while," said the false Fairchild, moistening lips that suddenly had gone dry. Here was another ghastly trap opening before him. He took refuge in the plea of lapsed memory which Dr. Emory had supplied. "You know—my head was messed up a little, inside," he went on, again making an effort to choose Fairchildian words, "and I've forgotten some things. It must seem very strange to you, but—I can't remember the foreman's name."

"Not strange a bit," was the answer, though a barely perceptible pause belied the hearty words. "Name's McAndrews. You used to call him the hymn man, after 'McAndrews' Hymn' in Kipling—you remember? Then when we went to making stuff for the Allies and he cleaned up the chaps that were trying to burn us out, you called him the he man. It's all right; things'll come back in time, and if they don't, you can learn 'em over again. You remember about the smash-up?"

"Oh, yes," said the impostor, and then went cold all over; for Penfield shut the door, and standing with both hands on the bed, asked:

"How did that happen, John? They can't make me believe it was just an accident. You're not the sort of driver that has accidents. Alan's pistol was out, too, lying near him when they picked him up. Had you been quarreling?"

"N-not to amount to anything." He dared not make his denial too positive, lest it should prove that some one had seen and heard something significant before the crash.

"I should say it amounted to enough!" said Penfield grimly. "You're trying to shield him, John. I believe he drew that pistol on you!"

THE old man straightened up as he spoke, else he would have felt the impostor shiver. But in spite of its terror, the nimble brain back of John Fairchild's honest forehead was racing at top speed, and Penfield's words gave the harried man a clue. He would be magnanimous, and cover his rival's fault with the mantle of forgiving silence.

"You're imagining things," he said, trying to speak lightly. "I wasn't shot, and —Alan's dead, you know."

"And a good job he is," was the emphatic reply. "You're protecting him, and it's just like you, but he hated you. Oh, I don't expect you to admit it, but Isabel says so too. He was a bad egg if ever there was one. Now, I've been talking too much, and here comes Isabel to arrest me."

The door opened, and Isabel crossed quickly to the bedside. The impostor caught her hand as a drowning man might clutch a rope, then partly controlled himself as her father spoke from the doorway:

"John Fairchild, you've offended me! You haven't called me Father Tom once!"

"Father Tom!" said the impostor as naturally as he could. "Don't be cross, Father Tom!" But as the door closed, his nerve gave way, and he clung to Isabel as a frightened babe clings to its mother.

"Oh, Isabel, stick by me, for God's sake, do! Don't fail me! I'll go mad if you fail me! I thought I was all right, but—I can't remember lots of things, and folks will think I'm crazy! Stand by me, please! You wont throw me over, will you, just because I forget things and—and seem different, some ways?"

"How can you ask?" she answered, putting her arms around his neck and kissing him. "There's one way to reassure you. Have you forgotten the license we got just before the accident?"

"I had forgotten it, yes," he answered, as though he remembered when it was called to his attention. He had not the remotest idea what she meant.

"I took it home, you remember, and it's there, all ready for use. We can be—married this morning, if you wish!"

One half the impostor's mind cast itself back on the trail, explaining events in the light of this newer knowledge and finding new causes of hatred and self-pity as it went. The other grasped the amazing refuge offered him. To get married now, before any slip betrayed him, before some babbler warned the surgeon, who surely could not remain ignorant much longer—what a heaven-sent opportunity!

"Would you, Isabel?" he almost gasped.

"Of course," she said simply. "Wait."

She left the room, and ten minutes later came back. "I telephoned Aunt Nellie," she said. "She's bringing the license and the clergyman. Then I caught Dad before he left and telephoned Dr. Freeland. They'll be here soon."

His answer was inarticulate, and perhaps the better for that. They waited, the impostor trembling all the time lest the surgeon should come up, be apprised of the plan and make objections. This did not happen. In a half-hour or a little more, Dr. Freeland arrived. Two minutes later Aunt Nellie entered the bedroom, shaking her gray curls, which she still wore in the fashion of a past generation, and handing over the license to Isabel.

"You're under a dark cloud still, John," she said. "But I'm given to hope this may lift it."

"Dr. Emory is busy in the operating-room—will be till twelve o'clock," said Penfield. "Oughtn't we to wait for him?"

"No," said Isabel, reading aright the appeal which she saw in the bridegroom's eyes. The impostor, relieved himself, lightened the slight tension with a jest.

"Poor old bachelor!" he said. "I don't want to make him too jealous."

It was a simple ceremony, quickly performed, but the circumstances made it impressive. Dr. Freeland's eyes were moist as he kissed the bride, and when Penfield gave the pair his blessing, his voice was husky. The minister presented his report for the bridegroom's signature. The interloper took the pen, put it to the paper, then dropped it and his face went white.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed in a low tone. "I can't write!"

There was awed silence for a moment, but Dr. Freeland spoke cheerfully. "The *agraphia* persists, does it?" he said. "That's nothing; I've been letting Jimmy do the thinking on this case or I'd have expected it. Make your mark, John."

"Why not copy your signature?" asked Penfield. "I've got that report of yours here—took it home to study last night."

He presented the last of several sheets, one which contained only two or three lines of typewriting and the bold signature, *"John Fairchild."* The supplanter took it. The others turned to listen to the minister's story of another hospital wedding at which he officiated; but Freeland looked quietly to see how the bridegroom came on with his task, and what the Doctor saw startled him.

The man was not copying the signature in any ordinary sense. He was drawing it, as a skillful forger might do, beginning at the end and working back. It was a difficult job; he was doing it extremely well—and the Doctor could not remember that John Fairchild had that much artistic ability. Alan had, but not John. Seeing was believing, of course, but the old physician felt oddly troubled.

CHAPTER IX

FEW human beings have the communal conscience which by rights might belong to the ant, and feel remorse at any action which goes beyond accepted practice or thwarts the public will. A wise clergyman once remarked that he never

knew a man to show deathbed repentance for slipping dutiable goods past a customs inspector. Unless his acts result in some definite trouble for some one, the average man does not feel the need of repentance —at least, in the absence of publicity. But every man who has undertaken to chart a new path of conduct for himself learns that conventional codes, with all their absurd trimmings and reasonless taboos, still embody a mass of human experience which it seldom pays to despise.

Dr. Emory's action in transposing brains did not trouble his moral nature a whit. Why should it? He had no doubt that it was illegal; but the law, as such, meant nothing in his scientific life. He had saved one personality instead of suffering two to be snuffed out, and believed he had done a good deed. There was nothing, at first, to tell him that the personality he had saved was evil; and having seen Alan Corwin get his decoration for valor, Dr. Jimmy was prepared to believe the very best of his patient. But when he came down from the operating-room to find that this patient had disregarded his injunction, and hastened a marriage which by every rule of decency and fair play should have been postponed if not prevented, the surgeon was in a fine wrath.

The impostor met him cannily. It was not his cue to make the surgeon angry enough to disregard consequences, or convince him that his duty required him to speak out. Therefore the false Fairchild admitted his wrongdoing, but excused it by his love of Isabel and his utter lonesomeness. He was perfectly willing to appear somewhat weak, and did so. He was so humble and contrite and withal so unsatisfactory that the surgeon, baffled and sore but with the first flush of his temper gone, flung away and told the story to Dr. Lee. The uncannily bright eyes watched Emory with an unwinking stare till the recital was finished, and then the tall man said:

"I might have known he'd do that."

"Why do you say that?"

"I've been hearing things. Dr. Freeland dropped a word that means a lot, coming from him—"

"He'd find a good word to say for the devil," said Emory sulkily.

"Yes, he's even said some good words for me. Well, he dropped something that showed he was sorry for Corwin, but didn't think him much of a loss. Then Miss Lang,—who's been away, nursing her mother, you know,—she wrote one of the girls that she would have something to tell you and me about one of our patients. I've a guess that means Corwin."

IT was the kind of comfort in which Job's friends dealt so largely, but the surgeon could not better it. He had a warning sense that this trick marriage was a sign of more moral delinquency than appeared on the surface; but proof was lacking, and even if it were present, what could he do?

One result of the wedding was to get the impostor away from the hospital somewhat earlier than would have been the case otherwise. He had been told that at least three weeks more must pass before he could go home, but when he brought up the subject again, ten days after the marriage, the surgeon assented at once. He would not neglect his patient, but he was secretly glad to get rid of him.

Before the hour for his departure came, the interloper wished he had suggested going at least the day before. Miss Lang had returned the previous evening, full of family confidences and gossip concerning the "late" Alan Corwin—to find that, as she put it, the mischief was done, and the false Fairchild married to Isabel Penfield. The news shut her up like a clam; she did not even report at any length to Dr. Emory; but the next morning, just before he was ready to leave, she marched straight to the impostor's room. Isabel was there, but that made small difference to Harriet Lang. Her lips were closed by the seal of her profession; she could not expose the man; but she could throw a scare into him, and she did.

"Good morning, Captain Jacob," she said in that sweetly icy tone which women use when they want to commit mayhem and are constrained to be polite instead. "I'm sorry I wasn't here in time for your wedding, but I've brought you a little present. I've put a mark in it at a place that will interest you, I think—though the first Jacob bought his brother's birthright, he didn't get it for nothing."

She held out a small Bible, bound in the usual flexible leather, with a bookmark showing near the front of the volume. Not familiar enough with Scripture to catch the allusion, but sensing her hostility,—as who would not?—the false Fairchild accepted the gift, murmuring a confused word of thanks, and Miss Lang departed. Isabel took the book, and found that the book-

mark was placed at the story of Jacob, and that the verses telling of the birth of Esau and his brother were scored with a red pencil.

"'Jacob, the supplanter,'" she said wonderingly. "What on earth does Miss Lang mean by calling you Jacob and giving you this?"

The word "supplanter" told what she had meant plainly enough, and the false Fairchild felt a little sick. "I can't imagine what she meant," he said weakly, —"unless," he added with a flash of inspiration, "unless she referred to you. She knew Alan quite well, I believe, and she may—perhaps she thought—"

He stopped as if embarrassed, and Isabel sniffed.

DR. EMORY said good-by in the upper hall. Dr. Freeland, who had come to act as medical attendant on the way home, waited in the car outside. Penfield and Dr. Lee steadied the supplanter down the steps. At the foot of them, Lee stifled an exclamation and turned back into the hospital without saying farewell. The departing patient climbed laboriously into the car, and as he settled back on the cushions, he saw the dope-runner, Dave Mellis, idling with careful carelessness down the walk.

"Come to bring Lee some dope," was the supplanter's mental comment. "Hope he gets enough to kill himself."

They reached the Penfield home without incident, and the chauffeur tooted the news of their approach. Aunt Nellie came out on the porch to meet them, Captain Jinks with her. Isabel, Penfield and the Doctor got down; then the chauffeur reached up a hand to help the bridegroom, but was rebuffed.

"I'm all right!" he exclaimed with pardonable petulance. He descended, cautiously but firmly enough, and Cap sprang forward with a bark of welcome. Here was the big master who had brought him over from France, and who, it seemed, was coming home with the mistress—Cap hoped he came to stay. The great dog bounded up with paws on the man's breast, reaching to lick his face—and then all at once checked himself and jerked back. He dropped on all fours and stood looking up with an expression of utter surprise, his lip lifted slightly over his long eyeteeth.

"Why, what's the matter, Cap?" exclaimed the supplanter. At the sound of the voice, the dog started forward again, but again checked himself, this time fairly in mid-air, and backed over toward his mistress, his eyes never leaving the false Fairchild's face.

"Cap, I'm surprised at you!" exclaimed Isabel. The dog acknowledged the reproof with a whine and a lick of her hand, but he went no nearer the supplanter. Dr. Freeland struck in to relieve a situation that was becoming awkward.

"Cap evidently doesn't care for antiseptics; he smelled too many of 'em in France. He scents something on John's clothes, I suppose. Lucky our own noses aren't so keen. Now, John, let's see if you can climb those steps."

He climbed them with little difficulty, and in congratulations on the feat, Cap's peculiar actions were forgotten for the time. But Dr. Freeland, coming away a few minutes later, found the dog smelling at the steps where the supplanter had climbed them, and wearing a look of almost superstitious bewilderment that was comic enough in an animal. Yet the old physician did not feel at all inclined to laugh.

"I wish you could talk, old boy," he said, "—or that I could smell," he added in shameless contradiction of the sentiment he had expressed so brief a time before. "You've got hold of something that's hidden from us, and I'd give a lot more than I can afford to know what it is."

PENFIELD called on the physician that evening, and after beating about the bush for a time, came out with the real object of his visit. "Doctor," he asked, "what do you suppose was the matter with Cap today?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," returned Dr. Freeland.

"He doesn't mind surgical dressings," said Penfield.

"I know it," returned Freeland. "I just said that to get things moving. Aunt Nellie was beginning to have visions."

"You benevolent old fraud!" remarked Penfield calmly. Then his brow furrowed, and after a full minute he asked:

"Doctor, do you suppose, if we had a sense of smell like Cap's, we could—detect the approach of insanity before it showed in other ways?"

"No," said Freeland. "At least, I see no reason to think so. What put that into your head?"

"John's different, somehow," said Pen-

field. "Isabel doesn't see it or wont admit it, but I do, though I can't tell what it is."

"Of course he's different," returned the Doctor. "Anyone is when sick or hurt. John had injuries and shocks which for days kept him unable to move a muscle. His brain has been injured, though apparently his reasoning faculties are not affected at all. He's had to learn to write all over again, and some of his memories seem gone clean away. Of course these things make a difference in his behavior."

"Well, that may be it," said Penfield. "Isabel thinks he's all right, only weak."

"I'll back Isabel's judgment against a dog's any day," said Dr. Freeland. Penfield laughed assent, then added:

"But Cap has pretty good judgment, too. He never liked Alan."

"True," said Freeland, and they both fell silent. Neither had the slightest guess at the truth; but the name, and the odd way in which it came to be mentioned, roused a subconscious instinct of warning in both men.

CHAPTER X

DR. FREELAND and the surgeon agreed that it would be unwise for the supplanter to undertake any traveling as yet; so after a couple of weeks of steady improvement, when his strength was nearly back to par, Penfield and Aunt Nellie went away for visits to friends, and left the young people to enjoy their honeymoon at home. It was a delightful arrangement, and for a time they enjoyed it to the full, undisturbed by Aunt Nellie's parting declaration that the dark cloud which enveloped John Fairchild the day of the accident was upon him still. A big, beautiful home, faultless service, a lovely wife and no responsibilities whatever—the supplanter's confidence came back, and his egotism waxed fat under such treatment.

Yet even in this halcyon time there were difficulties. He could see that Isabel missed something. He considered himself an expert lover and did his best to please, but the marriage of one personality could not fulfill the courtship of another. Isabel was careful to keep away from any subject which might test his memory, and accepted without question his pleas of forgetfulness, but it was plain that her honeymoon was not quite what she had hoped it would be.

Captain Jinks, too, was not satisfied, and his dignified disapproval and unanswered questing were not easy to bear with calmness. He never came directly to his new master if he could help it. Generally he lay at a little distance, studying the supplanter with big brown eyes that had a look of uncanny intelligence in them; and often, when the man was seated, Cap would come behind, and sniff silently at his leg or side. Most exasperating of all, the dog, in ways which no one could either describe or mistake, made it clear that he considered it necessary to remain on guard over his mistress when she was in the company of her husband. Not once during the honeymoon did he leave the two alone together except at Isabel's direct order; but the moment Penfield returned, the great dog, after an enthusiastic greeting, sallied forth to renew acquaintance with the neighborhood, thrash aspiring rivals who had grown cocky during his retirement, and in general make good his position as chief of that corner of the canine world.

Music was sometimes a cross and sometimes a comfort. The real Fairchild had loved music without any deep knowledge of it, in spite of a passable tenor voice and a compulsory acquaintance with the piano. He loved any ringing melody, had a strong liking for music of a religious character, and likewise for that of a lighter nature. He set Arthur Sullivan far above Debussy, loved Franck, Verdi, Massenet and even Donizetti, and loathed most of the so-called ultramodern school. Alan Corwin, on the other hand, had an unusual knowledge of and gift for music, but the curious twist in his nature showed here as elsewhere, and he affected the cacophonies of Richard Strauss and the caterwaulings of Scriabine. And now, as the supplanter sat each evening while Isabel, a real mistress of the piano, played Chopin and Beethoven, or turned to the phonograph and put on song after song from the older operas, he felt that the lot of a possessing demon was not quite so pleasant as might be imagined.

ONCE, alone in the living-room, Corwin sat down at the piano himself. The big fingers which he had learned to trust for rough strength were in the way here, but a few minutes with the scales helped their docility so that they performed better than they ever had done for their

original master. Mindful, at first, of his supposed character, he played a light, tinkly thing from Nevin, then a part of the twelfth nocturne of Chopin; then, forgetting himself, he began to pound out some of the weird chords of Schoenburg. He had gone only a few bars when some instinct warned him; he came to a stop with a fumble, shook his head mournfully, and turned to see Isabel.

"Why, John, dear, that's the best I ever heard you play," she said. "But where did you learn that last?"

"I used to hear Alan play it," he said. "Queer thing, I wonder what it is? I could play when I let myself go, but the minute I began thinking about it, I was lost."

She kissed him, took the piano herself, and for an hour played the old, melodious things which the real Fairchild had loved so well, and which the impostor regarded as old-fashioned and absurd. He wriggled and squirmed, but he could not protest.

CORWIN improved the opportunity to learn more of the business in which he would be obliged to take a hand. It surprised him to find that only twenty per cent of the stock of the company stood in John Fairchild's name. Penfield had nearly twice that amount; Isabel and Dr. Freeland each had a fair-sized block; and a number of employees, especially McAndrews, held smaller amounts. Fairchild's holdings were ,worth perhaps one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, paid him twelve thousand a year in dividends in ordinary times, and his salary as vice president was four thousand more—the Penfield Piano company did not run to extravagant salaries. It was a very comfortable estate; even with his lucky speculations in "war baby" stock, Alan Corwin had left less than twenty thousand dollars to some distant cousins whom he regarded with even more contempt than he felt for the most of mankind; but the supplanter felt a curious grievance that the fortune did not come up to his expectations.

It was a sample of Corwin's instinctive turning to underhand ways that even during the honeymoon he began a careful inquiry, not finished until months afterward, into the means taken to guard the affairs of the company from fraud. I do not think he had at this time any intention of committing fraud, but if he had any such idea, it was baffled. Matters had been very carefully arranged to avoid even the suspicion of wrongdoing during the minority of John Fairchild, and the system had worked so well that it was continued after the need for it had passed. It would be difficult indeed for even an inside swindler to make a haul at all commensurate with the risks.

PENFIELD came back in due time, and the supplanter found himself compelled to face active life. He dreaded it consumingly, but could find no excuse for idleness. He was as strong as a horse; in his previous incarnation, as he sometimes called it to himself, he never had dreamed of such power. Aside from an occasional headache, usually brought on by spells of brooding, he was perfectly healthy. Everyone was sure that steady work would be good for him. So once more acting, not as he wished but as was ordained for him, he went down to renew acquaintance with the factory. Naturally, one of the first men he met was McAndrews.

"Ye're lookin' fine, John," said the foreman, taking his hand with a quiet fervor which meant much from the self-contained Scot.

"I'm feeling well, too," said the supplanter. "You don't seem to have aged any, Mac." The foreman ignored the compliment, and went on:

"I canna tell ye, lad, how glad we are that ye're the one that came through. Say nothin' but good o' the dead, aye; but yon was a lucky accident in more ways than one. God bless ye, John, an' your wife with ye, an' send ye bairns as fine as yoursel's!"

It was a greeting that might warm any man's heart; but to the supplanter, it was gall and wormwood. Always, always, these dolts and blockheads and jealous simpletons were making small of Alan Corwin in behalf of John Fairchild. He ground his teeth together angrily, but the foreman did not notice, and Isabel called from the doorway:

"Come, John; let's go up to the roof."

He followed her, mechanically, but when they reached the roof and she walked fearlessly up to the low parapet, he stopped appalled. Here was another thing he had forgotten. Isabel spoke:

"Come see how funny the people look from here."

He covered his face with his hands and sat down. John Fairchild thought as little of heights as a steeple jack might, but Alan Corwin never had been able to look down from a lofty place. The supplanter shivered, but his genius for deceit came to his rescue.

"I can't!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "That roll, down the hill, you know. It makes me see it to look down." He added a furious curse at his weakness, which at least had the merit of sincerity. Isabel came to him motheringly.

"Poor boy! I don't wonder, not a bit! That must be a perfect nightmare to you; and you never say a thing, just grin and bear it. Come, we'll go down."

He had the wit to hang back, as though loath to admit defeat.

"I wonder if I'll ever be right again," he said in a low tone, as if hardly conscious that Isabel were near. "There's no danger—" he broke off, shook his head, looked at his wife and rose.

"I know now how Alan felt," he said. "I never did, before. Please don't tell Father Tom."

She gave the assurance readily, but she did not promise to keep the matter from Dr. Freeland.

A FEW days later came a special meeting of the stockholders of the company, of which he had been hearing at intervals since before leaving the hospital. He had made adroit inquiries and picked up all the information he could from minutes of previous meetings, but naturally failed to ask the one question needful. Penfield, as president of the company, rose to speak. He expressed the common pleasure that the young vice-president was ready for duty once more, and then took up the business of the meeting.

"You all know that when the Armistice came, the Government canceled its contracts with us and sent men to make an adjustment of compensation. They made their own estimates, taking account of the changes made in the factory to do war work, and fixed the sum to which we were entitled at a little over one hundred thousand dollars, a check for which was received some months later.

"I thought from the first that this sum was too generous, but waited until an important stockholder should return from the other side. He came, and I laid the matter before him. We agreed that many of the changes in the factory were to our advantage, even in our regular work. He then made a careful inquiry, and laid his report before me just prior to the accident which affected us all so keenly. I have had time to go over his figures since, and agree with them. The recommendation, which I indorse, is that we return to the Government"—he consulted a slip of paper—"$32,455."

"In the name of common sense, what for?" The supplanter had lost himself during the explanation, drawing figures on the blotting paper before him, but he roused in time to hear the recommendation, and his protest came with a blurt. It was received with a gasping silence which ought to have warned him, but the impatient recklessness that had cost his company so many lives in the Argonne hurried him on now. "Is anybody else giving back money to the Government? Not in a million years! Then why should we hand over thirty-two thousand dollars? If they've made a bad deal, let 'em sweat for it!"

He stopped suddenly. McAndrews' eyes were boring into his own. They shifted for a moment to the paper, then came back to his face. He pushed the blotter away so angrily that it fell on the floor, and as he did so, caught a glimpse of Isabel's face, blank with amazement not untinged by fear. Dr. Freeland spoke with a quick, enforced cheerfulness:

"This is a rotten deal we've given you, John, but we didn't mean to. I remember now your telling me how completely business details had gone out of your head. I don't wonder the plan seems crazy when you get it without any explanation." He came round the table, dropped one hand on the supplanter's shoulder, and reached the other toward McAndrews, who reluctantly put something into it. Penfield spoke:

"This is embarrassing, John, and I hope you'll forgive me. You're so well most ways that I—I forget. You worked out these figures and made this recommendation yourself."

The supplanter sprang up; a look of amazement swept his face, followed by a flash of fury, as he dropped back into his seat.

"I—I can't remember a thing," he said after a moment. "I'll have to take your word for it. Isabel, will you vote for me? You know what I ought to do; and"—he

managed a ragged smile—"I don't seem to know myself."

He scribbled a few words, stopped, regarded them for a moment with staring eyes, crumpled the sheet and put it in his pocket. Then, slowly and carefully, he wrote a proxy for his wife, signed it and hurried out.

CHAPTER XI

CORWIN neglected the elevator and tramped down the stairs, bubbling mutiny at every breath. These fine-haired people prated about honor and gave away money that anybody but a fool would keep, but they did not scruple to spring traps on him, and humiliate and make small of him. He hated them all. They were all like John Fairchild, curse them! They wanted to keep him in prison, and make him over into a commonplace fool. Well, he had foiled John Fairchild, and he would beat some of the rest of them before they were through.

He turned the wrong way on the second floor and came out at the side of the building where material was received. A motor truck was standing there, and its driver, a burly negro, was quarreling with the pony-sized receiving clerk. As the supplanter came out, the truckman spat the filthiest name he could think of at the clerk, and dared him to fight. The next instant the negro was lying in the alley with a hundred sparks dancing before his eyes. A hand like a steel vise closed on his collar and yanked him to his feet; another hand gripped his right wrist and pinned it behind him in the hammer-lock that means a broken arm if the victim struggles; and then he was propelled toward the street by a series of kicks that felt like the caresses of a pile-driver. At the sidewalk his captor turned him round, gave him a final booting that landed him in a tumbled heap ten feet back in the driveway, and spoke in the tones of one who aches to kill:

"Do whatever the clerk tells you; then get out and don't come back!"

The supplanter walked on without waiting to hear the comments of the clerk or the terrified whimper of the truckman. The exercise had made him feel better, and he knew his order would be obeyed. There was some comfort in being John Fairchild. One could sweep opposition out of the way by sheer strength. True, the real Fairchild never had done this—more fool he. But now his mighty muscles were subject to a brain that knew how to use them. If only he could keep them subject, if those terrible hands could be kept from turning on their master!

The superstitious thought made him pause in his stride, and looking up, he saw Dave Mellis on the other side of the street. Instantly the supplanter crossed in the middle of the block, came up behind the dope-runner and touched him on the shoulder. Dave wheeled with a jerk, and the bulge in his right-hand coat pocket looked too big for a fist.

"Good morning, Dave," said the supplanter quickly.

"Oh, good morning, Captain Fairchild; you startled me." The smuggler was relieved but puzzled, and the impostor made a quick decision.

"Where can we go for a talk?" he demanded. Dave's eyes opened wide in wonder and narrowed in suspicion.

"What about?" he asked.

"Dope, among other things," returned the false Fairchild. "Here's a restaurant that will do, I think." He guided the smuggler inside, piloted him to an empty corner table, and gave an order. Then:

"How's business now, Dave?"

"On the blink," returned Dave guardedly.

"You had a good trade when—Corwin got you out of that squeeze. What's happened to it?"

"Gone blooey," said Dave shortly. He was more puzzled at every word. Here was a man reputed to be of the most sensitive honor, talking as if he meant to horn in on the illicit drug business. Dave could use a partner just now, needed one badly, in fact; but this—

"Can't you get the stuff?" inquired the supplanter easily. Dave did not reply. "Or haven't you a safe place to store it?"

This touched the sorest spot of the trade, as the supplanter knew it would. It is easy—for one who knows the game—to smuggle cocaine, morphine and kindred drugs. It is easy to find customers for these poisons. But to store them where they will be accessible, and yet safe from the authorities, from needy addicts and from one's own fellow-crooks—this is not easy at all. If this man with a social position and a reputation for honesty would consent to act as receiver—

"How much do you know?" Dave demanded suddenly.

"All that Corwin could tell me," returned the supplanter. For once he was enjoying his inforced disguise.

"An' that was plenty," declared Dave with emphasis. "He was one wise guy, that chap. He could skin a live cat without lettin' it squeal, an' he surely charged enough for showin' the trick!"

"You don't want a man to help you for nothing, do you?" asked the supplanter, glorying inwardly in this sinister praise. "You know Corwin delivered the goods."

"He did—what was left of 'em after he'd got his slice," agreed Dave. "Say, what you driving at?"

"At a good thing, I hope."

"You don't need the money."

"I need something else, though. I need some excitement to make life worth living. After what we had over there, this peace business is too slow. There's no salt to it. I want something that's alive."

"Unh," grunted Dave noncommittally. He had heard that complaint before, had voiced it sometimes himself. He knew one chap, a disturber in camp, but a hero in the trenches, who had held up a bank single-handed, just to get once more the thrill of combat. Nobody would expect this big, handsome man to feel that way, but Dave reflected sagely that you never can tell. He took the plunge.

"I've got a bunch of gow," he said. "It's safe, but I can't keep going to it. The bulls would get wise; they keep an eye on me some, anyway. If I could find some one to store the lot for me an' slip me a bunch as I needed it, why, I wouldn't be stingy."

"You can't afford to be," retorted the supplanter. "Where is this dope?"

"What lay do you want?" came the counter-question.

"Fifty-fifty, at least. If you stall any longer or there's much trouble about it, I'll want more. Now, where is it?"

This time Dave told him—not directly, for the roundabout road was the only one which the dope-runner knew how to travel; but after ten minutes of questioning the false Fairchild had the facts before him, mixed with protestations for which he cared nothing and warnings which he was inclined to respect. He remembered that bulging pocket.

They separated, and the supplanter resumed his walk, better satisfied with himself than at any time since waking in his present character. He could run something of his own life, after all. These people couldn't make small of him altogether. And for the first time he began to speculate on going clear away, and beginning a career that would be his own, on the other side of the globe.

He might have been less complacent if he could have heard two conversations back at the factory. Penfield kept Dr. Freeland after the meeting, got rid of the others and then demanded:

"Doctor, what the devil did that mean?"

"Oh, nothing much, I suppose," returned the physician. He was weary of inventing explanations that did not satisfy himself. "Dr. Johnson says that a sick man is a damned rascal, you know. There's a lot of truth in it."

"Rot!" answered the peppery manufacturer. "John Fairchild isn't sick, and he couldn't be a damned rascal while he was in his right mind. What's happened to him? You say he isn't insane, but what is the matter?"

"I can't explain it, Tom, but you're making too much of it. We know he's forgotten a lot of things; so why be surprised if he forgets those that made him want to turn back this money?"

"No good," said Penfield, but he dropped the subject.

Down on the first floor, the undersized clerk was reciting the saga of the driveway to McAndrews. "He kicked him out to the street an' then kicked him back," said the clerk for the tenth time. McAndrews shook his head.

"That's the first time I ever heard o' John Fairchild hurtin' anybody or anything more than was needful," he pronounced. His mind went back to that sketch on the blotter which Fairchild had thrown to the floor, and which Dr. Freeland had confiscated. It was a well-drawn profile view of Penfield, and this was the first time McAndrews had ever known John Fairchild to do anything of that sort, either.

CHAPTER XII

DOUBTLESS it would have a good effect on wayward youth to say that the supplanter got into immediate difficulties with the lynx-eyed sleuths of the federal Government, but it would not be true. His cunning was too great, his

disguise in the body of an honest man too hard to pierce, and the poison itself too easy to handle. He secured the stuff without the slightest trouble, and stored it in a locked private closet at the factory. Peddling it out to Dave was not quite so simple, but it was managed. Generally the two men met in a movie show; they went in separately and came out separately, but sat near each other inside, and a package of dope passed one way and a package of bills the other. The authorities were giving only vague attention to Mellis since he was cleared, and of course they did not think of Fairchild in this connection at all.

But while direst suspicion was lacking, the supplanter was conscious of a change of attitude toward him. The atmosphere of confidence and affection which he had inherited from the real Fairchild, who had lived in it all his days, was giving way to one of doubt, worry and undefined distrust. He felt this and chafed under it, but he was helpless.

Oddly enough, one of the things that worried him most was the attitude of the dog. Here was a creature whose distrust was instant, open and avowed; and the supplanter told himself that this was a symbol of what would happen when the piffling humans around him knew as much as Captain Jinks—and he was right.

Human civilization is based upon the eye, which may be one reason why it cannot be trusted in the dark. Most animals build on scent. Cap's nose told him that something was wrong, that some unpleasant and dangerous change had taken place in the kindly master who brought him back from France; and he trusted his nose and was wise.

ONE day Isabel's father found her in tears, and when he questioned her as to the cause, she was too wretched to evade. A baby was coming to their house; and the father of that baby actually growled and complained when told of the expected arrival. Hardly had she spoken when Isabel was seized with fear lest her peppery parent raise a storm, but he kept still. The forbearance must have cost him a pretty effort.

He was not quite so self-contained when an incident happened at the factory. The supplanter was really doing his best there, but in spite of himself he managed to antagonize the men. One of them offended him in some trifling matter, and was discharged on the spot. There was no union to take up the case, but the other employees laid it before McAndrews, and asked that the man be taken back. The foreman carried the request to the front office, and met a prompt refusal.

"I fired him, and he's going to stay fired," said the supplanter.

"But, John—"

"You may call me Mr. Fairchild or Captain Fairchild. We'll cut out the 'John' business."

The Scotchman gave a long look which made the impostor wince. John Fairchild had sat on this man's knee as a kid, had listened to his stories and songs, loved him like a near and dear relative. It was a mistake to take the high hand with him now, but the supplanter was too stubborn to change. Penfield was exasperated.

"Oh, come, John!" he exclaimed. Don't act like a spoiled kid. Dan's a good man, and he didn't mean any harm. Take him back!"

"Nothing doing," said the false Fairchild sullenly.

"Then, by heavens, I'll hire him back myself!" shouted Penfield, springing up and shaking his finger at the sulky man. "I wont have the morale and loyalty of the force sacrificed to your stupid spite! I'll hire him!"

"Then you'd better buy my stock!" returned the supplanter quite as loudly. "You can't ride over me this way and get away with it! If that man comes back, I resign, and you'd better buy me out before I look for another market! You can't run over me! You might make it work with that damned fool—"

He stopped abruptly, caught up hat and overcoat and stalked out. He had started to say "that fool of a Fairchild," had stopped barely in time, and the narrowness of his escape terrified him.

IN the office he had left, the two men looked at each other, and McAndrews spoke.

"We'll have to take care o' Dan some other way, I'm thinkin'. We can't have this kind of a row, not now, anyway." He was thinking of Isabel, and Isabel's father knew it, and was grateful.

"What's the matter with him, Mac?" he demanded in distress. "He isn't the same person since the smash. It's John's body, but where in the world is John's nature? I can't understand it."

"The hands are the hands o' Esau, but the voice is the voice o' Jacob," quoted McAndrews. "I'm thinkin' that the folks in old times that talked about possession of devils was wiser than we've given 'em credit for. If the soul of that limb o' Satan, Alan Corwin, was in John Fairchild's body the noo, 'twould explain things better than I ever look for anything else to explain 'em."

Outside the door, the supplanter heard, shivered—and tiptoed down the stairs.

CHAPTER XIII

HE took the left-hand turning, as he had done months before, but this time by design, to avoid curious eyes in the front office. He reached the driveway unseen, stopped short, and dodged back into the building. Dr. Freeland was just going in at the front. This was an accident; there had been no time for him to come in response to a summons; but the supplanter felt the call most inopportune. The old physician's kindly tolerance and gentle helpfulness could not mask his shrewd, straight-thinking mind. He would forgive anything in the world save cruelty, but the supplanter knew that his conduct had been cruel to a degree—to the discharged man, to McAndrews, to Penfield, to Isabel, when she should hear of it. He turned, took the stairs three steps at a time, and hurried into the office he had just left.

"Father Tom!" he exclaimed. "Please forgive me! Bring Dan back and tell him—anything you please; I'll stand for it. I don't know what makes me have these blind rages since—lately. Generally, I keep 'em to myself, and you all think I'm sulking when I'm trying hard to be civil. I've been a brute, and I'm sorry. Please ask 'em to forgive me, doctor, while I go out and walk it off."

"God bless the boy!" exclaimed Penfield, throwing an arm around the young man and grasping his hand. "You don't need anyone to plead for you. It's all right! Go take your walk, and next time you feel that way, just tell Father Tom. It's all right, isn't it, Mac?"

McAndrews nodded, though his eyes showed that he had misgivings. Dr. Freeland had more. He reproached himself for lack of charity, though no man needed such self-discipline less, but there was something, something about the penitent outburst that was not like John Fairchild, and that brought up vaguely unpleasant memories of some one else.

The supplanter presented himself at dinner in a better humor than he had shown for weeks. Part of this was acting; he had gone too far and was trying to get back into favor; but more was due to an interview with Dave Mellis that afternoon. Dave had found the possibilities of the dope-running business greater than he could utilize alone, and approached the supplanter with an offer of partnership, which was accepted after drastic revisions. Mellis vowed that the supplanter was worse than a highway robber, and perhaps he was, but he had his way.

He had about made up his mind to leave. The thought, toyed with for months, had become definite and guiding. He could not live up to the reputation of John Fairchild. He could not stand the steady, unexciting work; and the restraints and humiliations of his new position had become intolerable. But he had no notion of making a penniless exit, and since the factory could not be looted, he meant to gather money by other means. Some lingering instinct of decency made him feel, too, that he should stay until the child was born and the mother recovered; or perhaps that was just the excuse which he gave to himself when planning his dope-running.

Oddly enough, in all Corwin's speculations on the subject, he never thought of the plain, straightforward course of going to Penfield and Dr. Freeland, telling the truth, getting Dr. Emory to back him, and asking for his release. That was too obvious and commonplace to appeal to his oversubtle intellect.

AT last came the day for which he had waited. He was called home from the office and hurried to his wife's room, genuinely anxious—but he did not enter. Lying before the door was Captain Jinks; and as the man came up, the big dog rose with bristling mane and bared teeth, and warned him back. The supplanter stopped, started forward again, and again the dog rumbled an unequivocal veto. Dr. Freeland came out of the chamber and stood staring, then sought to intercede.

"It's all right, Cap," he said. "Let him in, old boy."

But Cap stood his ground and refused to budge. He knew that his mistress was

sick. Perhaps he understood the nature of her trouble, for more goes on in those shaggy heads than we realize. Anyway, she was ill, and this man whom Cap did not trust must stay out until the lady was well. Corwin's temper began to rise, but the doctor caught his arm.

"Go in through your own room," he said. "Don't quarrel with the old chap. He's doing the best he knows for his mistress. We'll go in through your room."

They did so, and the young man behaved like an exemplary husband. When Dr. Freeland came out a few hours later, leaving a sturdy boy and a delighted mother behind him, the dog was still on guard. The physician stooped over him.

"Cap, old fellow, isn't there any way that you can tell me what it is? No way at all? Well, we'll have to rub along, wont we? You'll do your duty—I wish I were half as sure of doing mine."

The dog licked his face but did not rise. The supplanter, coming quietly out of his own door, saw and heard it all.

CHAPTER XIV

BY the time Isabel was well, the supplanter's desire to leave had become a passion. His own name for the proposed departure was "escape."

He was in prison, he told himself, and would remain there as long as he tried to pass for John Fairchild. Public opinion, or rather public expectation, was a force whose power and pervasiveness he had never dreamed. He had looked to this reincarnation, as he called it, to give him the wealth and power he had lacked in his former estate; but the wealth was in such form that he could not use it, and instead of power, there was slavery. Everyone around seemed to claim a vested right to a certain behavior from John Fairchild, and he had to make good the claim. He could not choose a bit of music or a moving-picture show to suit himself; he must be careful of John Fairchild's taste in clothing and eat John Fairchild's meals. All the bizarre struts and poses for which his soul longed were taboo. The wheels of the commonplace had caught him, and unless he broke away, he would be ground to shreds in their cogs.

We must keep this in mind, I think, in judging his behavior. He was subjected to a strain that few natures could bear with credit, and that he was unfit to bear at all. His outward submission was compensated by blind inward rages, or clandestine adventures which need not be recorded, since they had no bearing on the outcome. Being compelled to act like a better man than he was made him feel like a worse one, which is an equation that no professional reformer understands.

Nor was it only that he was in prison. He stood in constant dread of something worse, of exposure. How this was to come, he never succeeded in explaining to himself. There was no direct evidence against him. Dr. Emory was pledged to silence; so was Lee, though the supplanter shivered when he thought of the supposed irresponsibility of that "dope fiend." Miss Lang he did not trust, but she would not speak while her superior officer kept still. Meanwhile, Alan Corwin was occupying John Fairchild's body, drawing John Fairchild's income, living—though this had ceased to give him the thrill of triumph he once felt—with the woman who had promised to be John Fairchild's wife. It seemed impossible to imagine a break in his defenses; yet there were days together when he thought of little else.

YET he did not leave, even at the self-appointed time; for a fear sharper if less disquieting than his vague dread of a catastrophe held him back; the fear of poverty. He had been born to penury, had felt some of its sharpest touches when a child, had climbed well above it by luck and effort, and would not, dared not, go back to it. As John Fairchild he had no profession. As John Fairchild he had forfeited the money he had gained in stock speculation. So, postponing though not abandoning the thought of looting the well-guarded factory or of compelling his father-in-law to buy his stock, the supplanter multiplied his deals with Mellis. The two of them had almost a wholesale business in the illicit drug-trade by this time, and the profits were prodigious.

There was a new grievance in his life, the baby. Aunt Nellie announced the morning after the child's birth that the dark cloud which had been hanging over John Fairchild was lifted, but the person masquerading under that name did not find it so.

In general young babies are human dumplings, with only vague resemblances to their ancestors; but there are exceptions,

and Penfield Fairchild was one of them. He bore a remarkable likeness to his father. His features, sketchy though they were, had the same outline. His ears were the exact shape of Fairchild's; his little arms had the same contour below the elbows. His hands and feet were miniature copies of his father's; his eyes opened in the same direct, forthright fashion, and though of the slaty color common in newborn infants, the light hair was a guarantee against their darkening. From top to toe, he was John Fairchild's baby; and the supplanter felt aggrieved, as if the man whose place he had taken had made small of him once more.

TO Isabel, the baby was a godsend, a gift that brought back all the gentle, lovable remembrances of John Fairchild, and thrust into the background the deficiencies of the person supposed to be John Fairchild now. It must be admitted that the person himself was thrust into the background likewise. Several million fathers have had this experience, and several million more will have it, and there is no sort of use in kicking against the pricks. Man made it the wife's job to look after her husband, but nature made it the mother's job to look after her offspring; and when nature and man clash, there is only one ending. It is much better to take a back seat as gracefully as possible, and wait for the young mother to realize that the husband and father still lives, and would like to be counted a person of some trifling importance at his own fireside.

I need hardly say that the supplanter did not look at matters in this philosophical light. In fact, he took the situation so badly that Isabel felt constrained to mention the subject to the doctor.

"He just hates the baby," she exclaimed with a muffled sob.

"My dear, that is your imagination," returned Dr. Freeland. "He's jealous of the baby; that is a very common occurrence; but as for hating him—nonsense!"

"I wish it were," said the young woman, putting the child in his buggy. "Dr. Freeland—" she added after a pause.

"Yes, Isabel," he said as she stopped.

"Nothing," she answered, shaking her head. "When I try to put it in words, I wonder if I've lost my senses. But it's true."

"Isabel, I can believe more impossible things than the Red Queen ever thought of. What's true?"

But she only shook her head again, and did not answer.

IN spite of the supplanter's apprehensions on other scores, he believed that he was playing safe in his illicit drug-traffic. His partner thought so too. Dave complained bitterly that he took all the risks and did all the real work, yet was obliged to divide with a man who did nothing but provide a storage place for the "gow," and hand it over to the distributor from time to time. The supplanter gloried in his advantage and insisted on his pound of flesh; and—then came the inevitable happening to show that his security was an illusion.

He brought a suitcase of dope to the office one day, just after closing time. Penfield had left, though as it chanced, he was still in the building. The supplanter was unpacking his unlawful treasure when the telephone rang. Careless through long immunity, he answered the call, and when the conversation ended, turned to see McAndrews just setting down one of the cans of opium.

"Put that down and get out of here!" he roared; and then, as McAndrews, startled but dignified, moved to comply, the supplanter added.

"What the devil do you mean, spying on me in this way?"

McAndrews halted near the door. "I had no mind to be spyin'," he returned, his native burr showing strongly, and his voice rasping. "I ask your pardon, but I was no aware ye were dealin' in secret merchandise. Ye should ha' warned me."

"What do you mean by that?" The supplanter's face was white, and his big hands were opening and closing in an ominous way; but Mac's blood was up too, and he scorned to flinch.

"I mean that I'm no accustomed to gear or dealin's round these pairts that will na bear the light!"

The supplanter charged like a mad bull. McAndrews was strong of muscle and long of arm, but he was a child compared to the rushing giant. A half-guarded blow cut open his cheek; another, smashing into his mouth, sent him down in the doorway; and as he gamely strove to rise, he was knocked flat again. He was vaguely conscious of an outcry, and then relaxed, senseless.

WHEN he revived, his face was wet, there was a sting of whisky in his throat, and Penfield was bending over him.

"My God, Mac!" exclaimed the old man. "What started this?"

McAndrews blinked a few times,—his eyes had escaped damage,—put up his fingers and jerked out a loose tooth, then looked up at his employer.

"'Tis naething ye need bother about," he said. "I've been here too long, I doubt me. I think the place belongs to me, an' get impudent wi' the young master. 'Tis time for me to go."

"But, Mac—" exclaimed Penfield.

"Dinna bother!" said the Scotchman shortly. He tried to shake his head, but it was aching too furiously for such treatment. Mr. Penfield's stenographer came in from the outer office.

"Dr. Freeland is here," she said. The physician followed her in.

"I dinna need a doctor!" cried McAndrews, but when he tried to rise, he staggered. "Easy, there!" exclaimed the doctor, catching his elbow and guiding him to a seat. A brief examination showed that the visible injuries were not serious.

"Are you hurt anywhere on the body?" asked the physician.

"No, no!" said McAndrews; and then, under the combined influence of the shock, the pain and the whisky, he clutched the doctor's arm, and poured forth his forbodings:

"Are ye a physician to souls, Dr. Freeland? Can ye exorcise devils? If ye can, your patient's the man that mashed me! Ye may call me a loon, but 'twas the soul o' Alan Corwin glarin' out o' the eyes o' John Fairchild when he rushed me! The fair body o' John Fairchild has become the habitation o' devils, an' the chief de'il o' all's the spirit o' Alan Corwin!"

"You may be right, Mac," said the physician quietly, and the agreement astounded the foreman more than any opposition could have done. "Now, how did this happen?"

The foreman told, choking back his excitement to make his tale sober and true. "I tell ye, I dinna know this minute what was in his damned cans! I'm no objectin' if a man wants somethin' better than home-made hooch! I'd like a taste mysel'. But to bash me up like that—John Fairchild never could ha' done it," he concluded solemnly.

"I believe you," said Freeland. He waved Penfield to silence, thought a moment, then spoke.

"Have you keys that will open everything in—John's office, Tom? Good! Let me have them. Miss Randall, will you stay with me? I want you to witness a burglary, and maybe act as a messenger. My bones are not very spry, nowadays. Tom, you take Mac home, and both of you keep still till you hear from me. No, I wont talk yet, not till I have something to say."

They followed his bidding. Left alone, the doctor and Miss Randall searched the office. The cans which caused the row were gone, but at the back of a locked drawer, they found forty papers of cocaine and four small packages of morphine. The doctor confiscated the lot, left in their place substitute packages of soda which Miss Randall brought from the nearest drugstore, put things as nearly as possible in their original condition, telephoned that he would not be home for dinner, and left.

CHAPTER XV

DR. FREELAND went into his office. It was deserted at this hour, and he wanted to be alone. McAndrews' impassioned declaration had crystallized something which the Doctor now knew had lain in his mind for weeks, and he wanted to examine it. He took a sheet of paper, and set down in his neat, precise handwriting:

The Present John Fairchild
Goes into furious rages over trifles. So did Alan Corwin.
Draws portraits of people round him when thinking or listening. So did Alan.
Dislikes children. So did Alan.
Is afraid on a high place. So was Alan.
Is harsh, cruel and of doubtful honesty. Alan was the same.
Is mixed up in illicit drug-traffic. Alan cleared a drug-peddler.
The dog hates him. The dog hated Alan.

He studied the list for a few minutes, and then it blurred as memories took shape before his eyes. He saw a returned soldier with a "new leg" taken from a dying brigand. He saw an Italian animal-trainer, frightened half to death at a strange-seeming dog that insisted on loving him, and that answered to the name and performed the tricks of his former pet. The man who had performed these miracles was the same one who had tended John Fairchild and Alan Corwin. Dr. Freeland reached for the telephone.

"Ah," he said, as he waited for the connection, "I no lika deesa business!"

He liked it less when he got to the hospital. Dr. Emory met him with righteous anger and deep worry in every line of his face, took him to the private office, and spoke abruptly without waiting to learn the older man's errand.

"Somebody's been trying to kill Dr. Lee," he said, "and very nearly succeeded. I've known for quite a while that he was getting more than his allowance of drugs. Last night he took an overdose, intentionally. We found him in time and brought him through, and this afternoon he told me the story. Somebody's been sending him morphine through the mails for weeks—no name, no message, just a little package of dope. He didn't take it at first, but then some came when he was overtired, and he did take it, and last night, he thought he'd gone so far he'd better end the whole business. That's what the fellow who sent it must have counted on, Doctor, and I think it's murder!"

"It's attempted murder," said Freeland, very gravely. "And the person you suspect is the one now called John Fairchild."

"Yes," said the surgeon grimly. "You've guessed it; I don't know how, but it's true. I've been a wise fool, Dr. Freeland, a man whose technique had outrun his philosophy; but I'm willing to pay forfeit. I'll stop that fellow now if I have to go to prison with him—it would serve me right if I did!"

HE told the story, with no attempt to evade blame, and repeating his willingness to tell it in open court, let the consequences be what they might. The old physician cut in on his self-reproaches.

"There, there, Jimmy!" he said, as if the world-famous operator were a troubled boy, to be soothed and helped out of a scrape. "Stop cursing yourself. I wouldn't have let you do it if I had been here, but good may come of it yet. Did you transplant anything except the brain?"

"No."

"You're sure, are you, Jimmy?"

"Good heavens, Dr. Freeland, would I tell you what I have, to begin lying now?"

"I believe you," said Freeland. "Cheer up, boy; good has come of it."

"You mean—"

"Yes." The Doctor's nod interrupted the question. "Now, just sit tight. I don't think anyone will question what you do, but if anyone does, don't answer. I can handle this business—but it will be a mess."

WHEN McAndrews fell, the supplanter stood raging over him for an instant, then whirled abruptly into his room. The cans of opium which had excited the foreman's curiosity were standing on the desk. He put them back in the suitcase, tried the drawers of his desk to see if they were locked, and slipped out of the side door. He could hear them fussing with McAndrews, hear his father-in-law's peppery swearing; but he did not stop. He hailed a taxi, gave a direction and flung himself back on the seat, cursing his luck, his associates, and at last his hands. They had played him false—he raised them and studied them curiously—but not quite in the manner that he had feared. The rages which were comparatively harmless in a slim man of modest strength were deadly when backed by such weapons as these.

His first halt was at a Chinese shop which had ordered the opium. He carried in the suitcase, bidding the taxi wait. The Chinese sucked his lips at the rashness of such a method of delivering forbidden goods, but accepted them and paid the required money. As the supplanter was about to leave, the Celestial made a gesture of delay, wrapped up a third-rate vase very carefully and put it into the suitcase. "Makee flont," he explained concisely. "So. Me take."

He carried the suitcase to the taxi and put it in, giving a last warning not to "bleak" the precious contents. The clever camouflage, invented and carried through on the spur of the moment, put the supplanter in a better humor. He drove to the apartment which Dave Mellis had taken since prosperity began to dawn on him, and leaving the suitcase in the taxi, went up with a quantity of morphine in a thick paper sack. Dave was at home, and his eyes narrowed at sight of his visitor.

"What the devil are you coming here for?" he demanded hospitably, as soon as the door was closed.

"To get rid of this," returned the supplanter, handing over the morphine. Dave took it, and gave him a long look.

"What's the big idea?" he inquired. "This aint in the game. Why don't you keep it at your joint till I want it?"

"Because hell's broke loose there," answered the false Fairchild shortly. He gave a sketchy version of the row, and Dave's look became colder and more hostile still.

"Did he pipe what was in the cans?" he asked.

"No. He couldn't. They were closed."

"Then what did you slug him for?"

"He made me mad," said the supplanter sullenly. Dave studied his big visitor a full minute before replying.

"Fist-fightin's a mistake," he said at length. "It leaves the other guy alive—an' sore. When I'm ready to soak a guy, there aint no comeback, see?"

"I see," said the supplanter disgustedly. He understood that Dave was trying to scare him, but did not suspect the reason, and was not impressed. "Put that stuff out of the way and get the kale," he commanded. "I can't stay here all night."

"I can't give you the money today," said Mellis, who had over a thousand dollars on his person at that moment. "I wasn't expecting you. You'll have to wait." He moved to the window, looked out for a few moments, then said:

"Stay here for a minute till I put this where it'll be safe."

He went out with the word. Dave had picked a luxurious flat, after the manner of prosperous crooks, but he had not wholly neglected the elements of his business. The janitor was a "hophead," a user of dope, and in return for a small amount of the poison, had given Dave the key to the basement. He slipped down there now, hid the morphine in a can of ashes that would not be emptied till the next day, and came back.

"I'll see you with the money next week," he said. The supplanter had doubts on that score, but did not mention them. "See that you do," he answered shortly, and left. He passed the night at a Turkish bath establishment, and after a late breakfast, started for home.

Dave Mellis passed the night momentarily expecting arrest. There is honor among thieves, no doubt, but the thieves do not believe it. They are looking constantly for the double cross, and in the long run seldom suffer disappointment. Dave fully believed that his partner had got in trouble, and squealed to the police; and was genuinely surprised when the dawn of a new day found him still free, and his flat unsearched.

CHAPTER XVI

PENFIELD had gone to the office early for a conference with Dr. Freeland. He had told Isabel of the row, and she was angry and amazed at the assault on McAndrews. Dr. Freeland's share of the story had not reached her. She was in the living-room, with the baby, of course; and when Cap gave a low growl and she looked up to see her husband entering, she had no thought of personal danger. The man noted her reproachful look, and advanced, sneering.

"Passing judgment on me, as usual, I suppose," he said.

"I'm afraid you've passed judgment on yourself, John," she answered. "Mac is old enough to be your father."

"He's old enough to mind his own business!" retorted the supplanter. "He got just a little of what was coming to him."

Even after a year and more of increasing disillusionment, Isabel was amazed at the brutality of the remark. It was unbelievable that John Fairchild could say such a thing. She had heard what McAndrews had said the night before, about demoniac possession and the transmigration of souls, and she did not wonder. Something of the same feeling had come to her more than once. John fairly looked like Alan, as he stood glowering there. The baby awoke, and announced that he was ready for lunch. His mother picked him up.

"Give him here a minute," commanded the supplanter.

"It's time to nurse him, John," said Isabel; but he reached out his big hands and took the child, who naturally raised a protest at this postponement of commissary activities.

"It's time to spank him!" said the supplanter in an ugly tone. "Shut up!" he added to the child, and when the order was not obeyed, gave the baby a sharp shake. Captain Jinks came to his feet with bared teeth as Isabel snatched the baby away.

"Give me that kid!" ordered the man furiously.

"Not while you're in your present temper, John," returned Isabel. She was pale, but with wrath rather than fright. The supplanter started toward her. Captain Jinks came between with a warning growl. The man kicked at him, and even as the dog avoided the stroke, rushed forward and clutched the baby's dress. Isabel cried out in the first real fear she had felt; and on the instant, there was a flash of dun-colored fur, and the supplanter dodged back, his right hand slashed to the bone. A roar, a savage snarl, the splintering smash of a chair that missed its mark, and Isabel fled with the baby, while behind her, tipping

over the phonograph, knocking vases from the mantel, slipping and tripping on costly rug and polished floor, wolf and cave-man fought.

A strong man, fighting coolly and prepared to take punishment, can kill with his bare hands the strongest dog that ever breathed, if they are in close quarters where the man can come to grips. But the big living-room was all in Cap's favor, his antagonist flinched at punishment and was anything rather than cool; yet the battle soon was going against the dog. Twice he slashed himself free after the man had secured a grip that a stancher fighter would have made decisive. Twice he was forced to take refuge under the grand piano until driven out by missiles. He had broken ribs and a smashed foot, and the struggle was all but over when Isabel, leaving Aunt Nellie with the baby at a neighbor's, came back to save her protector. She sent the man sprawling with an unexpected push, seized Cap's collar, and retreated. The supplanter reached the porch in time to see them going into the house next door.

He turned back, looked at the wrecked room, and groaned. He looked at his wounds, and his snarl was animal in its fury. Cursing under his breath, he wrapped his hands in clean handkerchiefs, draped his overcoat around his shoulders and went out. A passing taxi stopped at his hail, and Isabel saw him carried downtown.

DR. FREELAND'S telephone was ringing furiously when he reached his office after the conference at the factory. He uttered an exclamation of anger as the first words of the message reached him, but smiled before it was finished. "Don't worry about me," he answered. "Of course I'll attend to him. I rather fancy that is he at the door now." He hung up the receiver, called "Come in!" and as the expected figure appeared in the doorway, nodded and spoke:

"Yes, Alan, I was looking for you. Close the door."

The supplanter was too full of grievances and troubles to notice the name. He dropped his overcoat and tried to struggle out of his coat. The doctor helped him. Cap had given a grim account of himself; the man was bleeding from half a dozen hurts. The doctor laid out his dressings.

"Dr. Jimmy could do this better," he said, "but I don't think he'd care to attend to you again, Alan. Now—"

This time the name registered. The fury in the man's eyes was replaced for an instant by blank terror; then veiled as his instinctive cunning sought to cover up till he learned how much the doctor knew.

"Alan?" he said. "You mean John, don't you?"

"No, *Alan,*" said the physician, smiling grimly. "I mean you."

"Doctor—"

"I've talked with Jimmy, Alan. He told me the whole story; about Lee and all. I had everything else figured out before."

"You did, did you?" The hazel eyes were almost black with rage and fear. Dr. Freeland knew what McAndrews had seen the evening before. The supplanter studied the physician for a moment, and then said, in a tone all the more fearful for its calmness:

"Do you know of any reason why I shouldn't kill you?"

"None at all, Alan, except that you'd be hanged for it," returned the old physician placidly. "You can't reach Dr. Jimmy, you see, so it will do you no good to silence me. I've attended to that, and taken some other measures too."

"Written it down, I suppose, to be used against me?"

"Of course," said the doctor simply. "John wouldn't have guessed that, Alan. Now, before killing me, you'd better let me dress those bites."

The supplanter held out his hand. He winced and writhed as the Doctor worked, groaned now and then, but spoke no word. His storm of passion had left him strangely weary. The doctor finished his ministrations and took up the injured man's coat.

"Put this on, Alan, and sit down. I want to talk to you."

"Don't call me Alan!" he exclaimed peevishly.

"Would you rather I said Jacob?" asked the doctor. "That's what the nurse called you, but I think we'd better stick to your real name. Of course, you understand that you must go away."

"I'm willing," he answered shortly. He had longed and plotted for escape, but now that it had come, he seemed too tired to enjoy it.

"You will sign over the stock that stands in John Fairchild's name to the baby, with Isabel as trustee and guardian. Mr. Penfield will give you twenty thousand dollars, that being the value of your estate when you tried to murder John, and stole his

body instead. You are to sign a paper which my lawyer is drawing up for you, take this money, partly in cash and partly in a draft on any country you care to name, and take the next boat going in your direction."

"HOW do you know I will?" demanded the supplanter, sneering.

"Because if you refuse, you go to an asylum for the criminal insane. Don't make any mistake, Alan. You are netted. We can't prove your real identity without dragging in Dr. Jimmy, but we don't need to prove it. We can show that you are a criminal, a peddler of contraband drugs, and no jury in this city would believe John Fairchild could do those things unless insane. Your outbreak this morning clinches it."

The supplanter's mind was not working at its best, but he saw the situation. "Oh, I'll go, all right," he agreed. "You've got me, but it happens I was trying to get money to get away, anyhow."

"The money would have been ready any time you had asked for it and told the truth, Alan."

"I suppose, in your passion for morality, you are going to send Dr. Emory away too?" he sneered.

"I don't blame Jimmy, Alan. He was carried away by the enthusiasm of the artist, and you lied to him, and tricked him. I blame you. You tried to kill your friend, and then, when through your act he was helpless and unconscious, you stole his body. What use have you made of it, and the opportunities that went with it?"

"Not very good, I suppose."

"You cheated the surgeon who gave you this new lease of life by marrying a trusting woman under false pretenses, contrary to your promise to him. You have turned away the host of friends who loved John Fairchild, and consorted with a drug-smuggler. You assaulted an innocent old man, tried to kill a faithful dog, tried to murder the assistant surgeon who served you; but you have done something that almost makes amends. You have given John Fairchild a son. That boy is his, Alan, not yours. Your brain is merely a mutilation, a cancer in John Fairchild's body, and neither mutilations nor cancers are inherited.

"Nature is not mocked, Alan. She has her own ways of restoring the balance. That baby will bring a blessing on Jimmy's experiment yet."

"I hope he does," was the unexpected answer. "Tell Isabel—I'm sorry, wont you? Maybe I wont be so—so bad if I don't have to live up to somebody else's reputation."

"I hope that's true, Alan." The old physician's eyes softened as he thought—not for the first time—of the grinding test to which that ill-trained nature had been subjected, and grew stern as he remembered Dr. Lee and Cap and the baby. "Do you want to take your own name when you get abroad?" he asked.

"I think so. Here, Doctor—" His bandaged hand was clumsy, but he resurrected a thin book from the inner pocket of his vest, and gave it over. "There isn't much you don't seem to have guessed, but it's all written down there, and maybe you'll think kinder of me after you've read it."

THE departure of John Fairchild for Argentina was a nine-days' wonder. The family explained that his health had been undermined by the accident, and he needed a long sea-voyage which the baby was too young to share. Dave Mellis gave some cronies a different explanation; other people had other views, and were still airing them when a cablegram from Buenos Aires made the subject of surpassing interest for a brief space, and then quenched it forever. "John Fairchild" had died suddenly during the voyage and been buried at sea. Isabel wept a little when she read the message, and then turned to the one question that really mattered:

"Doctor, are you sure about the baby?"

"Perfectly sure, my dear," answered Dr. Freeland, as gently as if he had not replied to the same query fifty times before. "Here, young man,"—lifting the youngster from the rug where he was kicking up his heels under Cap's jealous guard—"you're the one certain winner in this game. Go comfort your mother—and see that you keep the habit!"

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"Shadows of Saffron"

By H. Bedford-Jones

YOU are to have a real treat next month. H. Bedford-Jones, the gifted author of "The Cruise of the Pelican," "Blood Amber and Jade," "The Junk of Laughing Girls," "The Second Life of M. the Devil" and many another swift-moving and colorful story, has in "Shadows of Saffron" written the most engaging novelette he has thus far produced. Be sure to read it, in the next, the February, issue of—

The Blue Book Magazine

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912.

OF THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE, published monthly at Chicago, Illinois, for October 1, 1921.

State of Illinois, } ss.
County of Cook, }

Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Charles M. Richter, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of The Blue Book Magazine and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 443, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are:

Publisher, The Consolidated Magazines Corporation.....1912, North American Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

Editor, Karl Edwin Harriman.....North American Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

Managing Editor, None.

Business Manager, Charles M. Richter.....North American Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

2. That the owners are: (Give names and addresses of individual owners, or, if a corporation, give its name and the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of the total amount of stock.)

Louis Eckstein.....North American Bldg., Chicago, Ill.
Estate of Louis M. Stumer.....North American Bldg., Chicago, Ill.
Benjamin J. Rosenthal.....North American Bldg., Chicago, Ill.
Stephen Hexter.....North American Bldg., Chicago, Ill.
A. R. Stumer.....North American Bldg., Chicago, Ill.
Charles M. Richter.....North American Bldg., Chicago, Ill.
Ralph K. Strassman.....33 W. 42nd St., New York City

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of the stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest, direct or indirect, in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

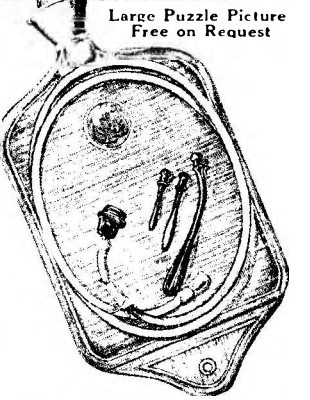
CHARLES M. RICHTER, Business Manager.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 23rd day of September, 1921.

[Seal.] LOUIS H. KERBER, JR.

(My commission expires Jan. 1, 1925.)

You Can Win $1000.00



Large Puzzle Picture Free on Request

ANSWER THIS PUZZLE—CASH PRIZES GIVEN

How many objects in the picture above begin with the letter "B"? For instance there is a boy, broom, basket, etc., and all the other objects are equally clear. See who can find the most. Fifteen cash prizes will be paid for the 15 best list of words submitted in answer to this puzzle. The person sending in the largest and nearest correct list of words shown in this picture starting with the letter "B" will win first prize; second best, second prize, etc.

Right after dinner this evening, gather all the members of your family together, give each of them a pencil and a sheet of paper, and see who can find the most "B-Words." We venture to say you will never have as much fun. You will be surprised to find how large a list of words you can get after a few minutes' study. Sit down and try it. Then send in your list and try for the big prizes.

Costs Nothing to Try —Everybody Join In

You don't need to send in a penny to win. This is an advertising campaign to increase the popularity of our Famous "No-Seam" Combination Hot Water Bottle and Fountain Syringe. As a reward for boosting our goods, we are making this special offer, whereby you can win LARGE CASH PRIZES by purchasing ONE or TWO of our "No-Seam" Hot Water Bottles.

OBSERVE THESE RULES

1. Any person residing outside of Minneapolis, who is not an employee of the W. M. Rubber Co., may submit an answer. It costs nothing to try.
2. All answers must be mailed by December 30th, 1924.
3. Answers should be written on one side of the paper only and words numbered 1, 2, 3, etc. Write your full name and address on each page in the upper right hand corner. If you desire to write anything else, use a separate sheet.
4. Only words found in the English dictionary will be counted. Do not use hyphenated, compound or obsolete words. Use either the singular or plural, but where the plural is used the singular can not be counted, and vice versa.
5. Words of the same spelling can be used only once, even though used to designate different objects. The same object can be named only once. However, any part of the object may also be named.
6. The answer having the largest and nearest correct list of names of visible objects shown in the picture that begin with the letter "B" will be awarded first prize, etc. Neatness, style or handwriting have no bearing upon deciding the winners.
7. Candidates may co-operate in answering the puzzle, but only one prize will be awarded to any one household; nor will prizes be awarded to more than one of any group outside of the family where two or more have been working together.
8. There will be three independent judges having no connection with the W. M. Rubber Co., who will judge the answers submitted and award the prizes at the end of the contest, and participants agree to accept the decision of the judges as final and conclusive. The following three registered Minnesota school teachers, now teaching in the public schools of St. Paul, Minn., have agreed to act as judges of this unique competition: Miss Mable Claire Kline, Miss Meta Goetsche, Miss Laura Johnson.
9. All answers will receive the same consideration regardless of whether or not a W. M. Rubber bag is purchased.
10. The announcement of the prize winners and the correct list of words will be printed at the close of the contest and a copy mailed to each person purchasing a Hot Water Bottle.

YOU CAN WIN $1,000

If your answer is awarded first prize by the judges, you will win $20.00, but if you would like to win more than $20.00, we are making some special cash prize offers during the Big Advertising and Booster Campaign, whereby you can win more than $20.00 by sending in an order for one or two of our "No-Seam" Hot Water Bottles.

Here's the Plan

If your answer wins first prize and you have purchased ONE of our $3.00 Water Bottles, you will receive $300 as your prize, instead of $20; second prize, $150; third prize, $75, etc. Or, if your answer wins first prize and you have purchased TWO hot water bottles (in all $6.00), you will receive $1,000 as your prize, instead of $20; second prize, $500; third prize, $250, etc.

Note the Low Price

Our "No-Seam" Combination Hot Water Bottle and Fountain Syringe is an excellent value for the money. Only $3.00 for the complete outfit, including all attachments.

Two Bags for $6.00

Our Guarantee

We guarantee our "No-Seam" Combination Hot Water Bag and Fountain Syringe not to leak. If the bag leaks, or the fittings here specified are imperfect, we will replace the bag free of charge anytime within one year.

THE PRIZES

Winning answers will receive prizes as follows:

	If no bags are purchased	If ONE $3 bag is purchased	If TWO $3 bags are purchased
1st prize	$20.00	$300.00	$1,000.00
2nd prize	10.00	150.00	500.00
3rd prize	5.00	75.00	250.00
4th prize	5.00	50.00	125.00
5th prize	5.00	30.00	75.00
6th prize	3.00	20.00	50.00
7th prize	3.00	15.00	40.00
8th prize	3.00	10.00	20.00
9th prize	2.00	10.00	20.00
10th prize	2.00	10.00	20.00
11th prize	2.00	10.00	20.00
12th prize	2.00	10.00	20.00
13th prize	2.00	10.00	20.00
14th prize	2.00	10.00	20.00
15th prize	2.00	10.00	20.00

In case of ties, duplicate prizes will be given.

W.-M. Rubber Co. 228 Sixth Ave.. North Minneapolis, Minn.

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