Price 25 Cents SEPTEMBER 1926

THE Illustrated BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

N.S.E.

The Best Stories of the Open West

"Vanishing Herds", "Go Getter Gary", and "The Lost Frontier"

Also Clarence Herbert New, H. Bedford-Jones, Lemuel De Bra, Stephen Hopkins Orcutt & Others

$500 Real Experience Cash Prizes

SEPTEMBER 1926 THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE VOL. 43 No. 5

Raised My Pay 700%

This Amazing Book Showed Me How

This is Perhaps the Most Remarkable Book Ever Printed. It Has Proved the Turning Point in the Careers of Thousands Who Were Ambitious for Bigger Pay! If You Ever Aspired to Earn $10,000 a Year or More—Read It Without Fail

CAN you imagine how a man feels when his earning capacity quickly jumps 700% in a few months? Can you imagine how *you* would feel if your salary suddenly became *seven times* greater than ever before?

That is exactly what happened to O. A. Jones of Missouri, after reading the amazing book pictured above. Between its covers, he discovered something he had never even dreamed of before—a certain force that lifted him out of the routine rut and set him on the road to $10,000 a year!

Unusual? Not at all. This surprising book has done the same for hundreds of others. For example, A. H. Ward read it and quickly saw the way to increase his pay from $1,000 to $13,000 a year. F. Wynn of Portland read it and commenced earning $400 a week. C. V. Champion of Illinois read it and became President of his company at a salary exceeding $10,000 a year!

THE SECRET OF BIG EARNINGS

How did they do it? What did the book show them? Just this: Every one of these men realized that a knowledge of salesmanship and the *ability to sell* brings bigger rewards than anything else in modern business today! But until they saw the contents of this book—"Modern Salesmanship"—they had no idea that they, *too*, could win quick success through salesmanship. They believed that this golden field of endeavor was forever barred to them. But they were wrong—and this unusual book opened the way to the success that they had formerly despaired of attaining!

SALESMEN ARE MADE—NOT BORN!

Yes! Any man of ordinary intelligence can become a successful salesman! Just as you learned the alphabet, you can master the secrets of selling as taught by the National Salesmen's Training Association.

Reason it out for yourself. Salesmanship is governed by rules and laws. There are certain ways of saying and doing things to make men act as you want them to: certain ways of getting exactly what you go after! Once you have mastered these fundamental rules, your success is governed only by your energy and ambition!

BIG DEMAND FOR TRAINED SALESMEN

City and traveling sales positions are open in every line all over the country. For years, thousands of leading firms have called on the N. S. T. A. to supply them with salesmen. Employment service is free to both employers and members and thousands have secured positions through this service.

FREE TO EVERY MAN

If I were asking two or three dollars a copy for "Modern Salesmanship," you might hesitate. But it is now FREE. I cannot urge you too strongly to take advantage of this opportunity to see for yourself what salesmanship has done for others—and what the National Salesmen's Training Association stands ready and willing to do for you. No matter what your opinion is now, "Modern Salesmanship" will give you a new insight into this fascinating and highly-paid profession.

Mail the coupon now!

NATIONAL SALESMEN'S TRAINING ASSOCIATION
WORLD'S OLDEST AND LARGEST — SALES TRAINING INSTITUTION

Dept. M-76, N. S. T. A. Bldg.
Chicago, Ill.

National Salesmen's Training Association
Dept. M-76, N. S. T. A. Bldg., Chicago, Ill., U. S.

Please mail me FREE your illustrated book, "Modern Salesmanship" and particulars of membership in your association and its Free Employment Service.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____

Age _____ Occupation _____

THE BLUE BOOK

KARL EDWIN HARRIMAN, Editor
DONALD KENNICOTT, Associate Editor

Cover design: Painted by Lawrence Herndon to illustrate "Vanishing Herds"

A Stirring Short Novel

Short Stories You Will Remember

THE CONSOLIDATED MAGAZINES CORPORATION, Publisher, The Blue Book Magazine,
36 South State Street, Chicago, Ill.

LOUIS ECKSTEIN
President

CHARLES M. RICHTER
Vice-President

RALPH K. STRASSMAN
Vice-President

Office of the Advertising Director, 11 West Forty-second Street, New York City, N. Y.
R. M. PURVES, New England Representative, 80 Boylston St., Boston. LONDON OFFICES, 6 Henrietta St., Covent Garden, London, W. C.
Entered as second-class matter July 24, 1906, at the post office at Chicago, Illinois, under the Act of Congress of March 3, 1879

MAGAZINE

SEPTEMBER, 1926

Special Notice to Writers and Artists: Manuscripts and art material submitted for publication in The Blue Book Magazine will only be received on the understanding that the publisher and editors shall not be responsible for loss or injury thereto while such manuscripts or art material are in the publisher's possession or in transit.

SUBSCRIPTION PRICE: $3.00 a year in advance. Canadian postage 50c per year. Foreign postage $1.00 per year. Subscriptions are received by all newsdealers and booksellers, or may be sent direct to the Publisher. Remittances must be made by Draft, Post Office or Express Money Order, by Registered Letter or by Postage Stamps of 2-cent denomination, and not by check, because of exchange charges against the latter.

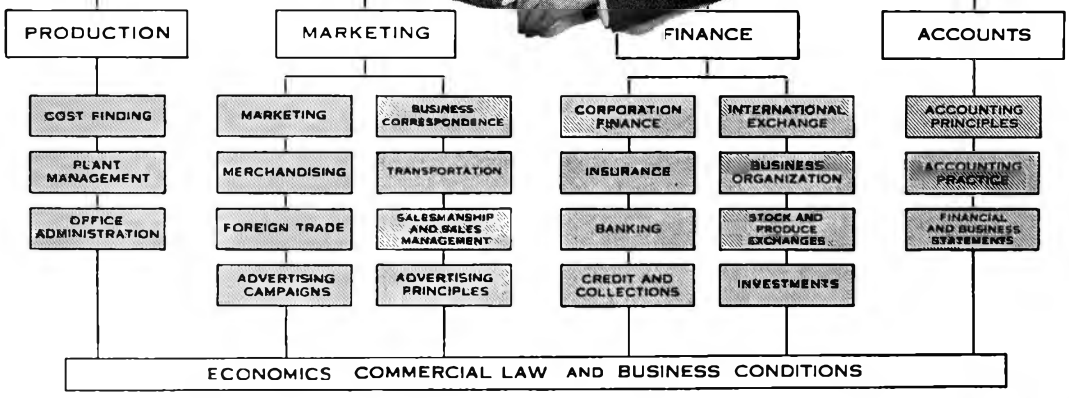
IMPORTANT NOTICE: Do not subscribe for THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE through an agent unknown to you personally, or you may find yourself defrauded. Many complaints are received from people who have paid cash to some swindler, in which event of course, the subscription never reaches this office.

THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE is issued on the first of the month preceding its date (September issue out August 1st), and is for sale by all newsdealers after that time. In the event of failure to obtain copies at news-stands, or on trains, a notification to the Publisher will be appreciated.

Advertising forms close three weeks prior to the time of issue. Advertising rates on application.

Which of these is *your* blind spot?

Modern Business is divided into four fundamental phases: Production, Marketing, Accounts and Finance. The business man who knows only one of these departments is seriously, even hopelessly, handicapped. Look over the graphic chart below. Which of its divisions represents *your* blind spot?



To successful men only—

THIS page is addressed exclusively to prosperous men. It will not interest failures.

How much did you earn last year? Is your present salary what you are worth? Have you reached the limit of your ambition in the salary you are getting now?

These three questions every man must answer for himself. The point that stands out is this: If you consider yourself worth *more* than your present salary, there must be some reason why you are not being paid what you are worth.

What *is* the reason?

Look at the chart above, then ask yourself this vital question: "Do I know the fundamental principles of the job of the man in the office next to mine?"

Suppose you are a sales manager. Do you know the principles of production, of accounting, of finance? Could you take charge of your company if the chief executive were called away?

One great difference sets the Alexander Hamilton Institute apart from all other educational organizations. They have courses; the Institute has only *The Course*.

It has no course in salesmanship, yet the knowledge and methods of the greatest sales managers are in the Course. It has no course in banking, but you learn all you need to know about how to deal with banks and how to establish a line of credit for your business or for yourself. It has no course in accounting; but the biggest men in accounting have contributed. Its effect, in a word, is *not* to make you a better specialist in any one of the major divisions of business, but to give you a working knowledge of the principles and methods of *all* divisions—the kind of knowledge that fits a man to meet any problem and, while employing specialists, to lift himself above them as an executive.

And the proof of it all is that 32,021 corporation presidents and business heads are numbered among the Institute's 250,000 successful subscribers. Writes Charles E. Murnan, President of the Mello-Glo Company, of Boston: "I would advise any man to take your course, even if he had to borrow the money to take it."

The whole story is set forth fully in the "most famous little business book in the world," "Forging Ahead in Business." This book answers all your questions; it is free; you can read it in a single evening. *If you want to make more money*, send for it via the coupon below, and settle once for all the question whether *The Course* is *the* course for you.

Alexander Hamilton Institute

Executive Training for Business Men

IN CANADA, *address the Alexander Hamilton Institute, Ltd., C. P. R. Bldg., Toronto*

IN AUSTRALIA, *the Alexander Hamilton Institute, 11c Castlereagh Street, Sydney*

Alexander Hamilton Institute
650 Astor Place **New York City**

Send me at once the booklet, "Forging Ahead in Business," which I may keep without obligation.

Signature .....
Please write plainly

Business Address .....

.....

Business Position .....

THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE
Vol. 43 SEPTEMBER 1926 No. 5

The Magic Art

"FICTION," wrote a noted author, "is the magic art of giving life to inanimate things and illuminating dark facts with imagination. Americans who go to London always feel at first that it is hardly more than a series of illustrations to Dickens' novels. And the people are his creatures. The Tower and the Abbey remind them of novels they have read. They do not see mighty historical personages like Sir Thomas More and Lord Bacon and John Bright haunting the streets. They see *Micawber, Pecksniff, Pickwick, Peggotty, Barkis, Sam Weller.*

"In Paris the towers of Notre Dame remind them of Victor Hugo's *Hunchback.* On the Waterloo battlefield they seek the sunken road which never was, according to some historians, but which can never be forgotten. They look for the characters of Balzac, De Maupassant and Eugene Sue.

"In Florence they flock to the place where the heroine of Dante's three-volume novel in *terza rima* walked in fiction as she never walked in fact."

SO too with present-day fiction such as you will find in the following pages: The events of a story, illuminated by the author's imagination, are more exciting than any but the most extraordinary happenings of real life; the fictional characters are more interesting than the real folk about us; and the scenes of the different tales are infinitely more varied and picturesque than the scenes of our everyday lives.

In this issue, for example, consider what stirring events are tellingly described in Jay Lucas' swift-moving and authentic novel of cowboy life "Vanishing Herds," in H. Bedford-Jones' intriguing detective story "Five Years After," or in Stephen Hopkins Orcutt's splendid sea-story "A Ship Must Pay Her Way." See what interesting acquaintances you will make in Calvin Ball's quaintly humorous "The Bug in the Bonnet" and in Clarence Herbert New's "Free Lances in Diplomacy." What striking scenes you will visit, moreover, in William Byron Mowery's fine drama of the North "The Deadfall," and in Robert Ames Bennet's vivid Western novel "Go-getter Gary."

NEXT month likewise you will have excellent cause to rejoice in this magic art of fiction. For in that number will appear a remarkable collection of stories by writing-folk who have real creative imagination. Specially notable are Lemuel De Bra's fine short novel of the East and West "Evil Treasure;" the first of a deeply interesting new series by H. Bedford-Jones, "The Trail of Death;" George Allan England's grimly dramatic "At Plug 47;" a conspicuously excellent example of Stephen Hopkins Orcutt's stirring "Tales of the Merchant Marine;" a delightful humorous story by Calvin Ball; a vigorous story of the Free Lances in Diplomacy by Clarence Herbert New, and many other stories of the sort that make the art of fiction so important to us.

—*The Editors.*

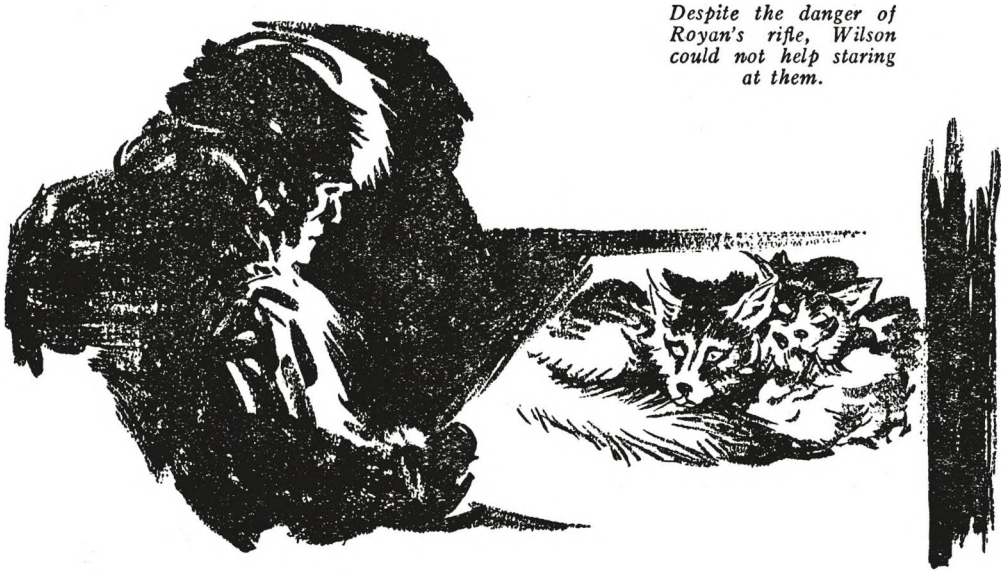
Photo by International Newsreel.

"Unlike all the other broncos Gary had seen mounted, Gentle Annie never stirred even after he swung up into the saddle and found the off stirrup with his right foot.

"This, then, was the joke. They had given him a dead one—a horse too old to move. Well, at least he would go through the motions. He jerked on the reins and dug his heels into the spiritless mare's flanks.

"It was as if he had touched a match to a bomb."

To accompany "Go-getter Gary," beginning page 16



Despite the danger of Royan's rifle, Wilson could not help staring at them.

The Deadfall

By WILLIAM BYRON MOWERY

Illustrated by William Molt

This fascinating drama of the snowbound "strong woods" is by the man who wrote "The Loon Lake Patrol," "Red Heritage," "The Hand of Manitou" and other stories of real distinction.

BEHIND the cherry-red stove in the far corner of the trading store, "Sour-luck" Lors Wilson was sitting against the wall, thinking. His pipe had gone out; the trapper sitting beside him had given up trying to be sociable. To the hum of voices, the laughter and the yarn-spinning, Wilson paid no attention.

He was busy going over his scheme step by cautious step, to make sure there would be no slip-up that night.

A tall, powerfully built man of thirty with black hair, black eyes and features handsome enough, Lors Wilson could easily have been attractive in appearance. But his face was covered with a week's stubble of beard, his fur clothes were soiled and greasy, his shoulders sagged; he looked gone to seed generally. A sour-luck scowl turned down the corners of his mouth, as he stared through the fog of smoke and unseeingly watched the crowd.

Two dozen men were gathered that evening in Simon MacGillivray's trading store at Lac aux Cygnes Settlement. It was Christmas Eve—a time which the Strong Woods trapper tries never to spend at his lonely cabin in the bush.

From their fur paths in the Athapascan wilderness of stream and lake and heavy forest they had come in for a day or two of human jollity—a sort of hitching-up of belts for the long solitary months until April. They had brought in peltry to trade with MacGillivray, and tall bush-yarns to trade with one another, and a huge appetite for company and cheer.

There were five Athapascan Indians, silent and dignified, their coppery faces breaking into friendly smiles when some trapper thumped them on the back. There were half a dozen saucily-dressed *mêtis,* descendants of those fur *voyageurs* of other days who had taken Athapascan maidens for their "wilderness wives." There was a Mounted policeman, conspicuous in scarlet tunic and blue trousers—a horseman without a horse, as the Indians called him.

There were a dozen other white men, from strapping youngsters to grizzly heads; all of them smoking, laughing at each other's horse-jokes, and arguing heatedly about the best way to make a fox-bed or to build a deadfall for thieving wolverines.

The weather had been right for good catches—intense cold to prime the fur, and not much snow, so that the animals could run freely. Three of the latest comers were still trading at a counter which rarely heard the chink of money. As they spread out their packs, MacGillivray blew on the furs, tossed them under the counter, and reached down the goods the trappers wanted, saying:

"Your bill comes to three marten an' a weasel, Sam. Ye want th' rest o' your tuck put to your credit, b'y? Good. Ye'll hae a handsome account come spring. Carcajou, your footin' comes to five mink, twae fox an' a muskrat. I'm puttin' th' rest to your credit, son. Boyd, ye hae been extravagant—ye owe me a pole-cat on that bill o' your'n."

BEHIND the stove Lors Wilson scowled in a dull, jealous anger as one by one that evening the men thumped down their valuable packs. Of all those twenty-odd trappers he alone had brought in next to nothing. It was another example of the sour luck that blighted everything he tried. In his belief, his short fur path and carelessness in running even that, had nothing to do with his slim tuck of peltry. It was just his damned sour luck!

Simon MacGillivray, with his canny faculty of striking off a man's peculiarity, had given Wilson his nickname, as he had rechristened most of the trappers thereabouts. It struck off Wilson's sour, unsociable disposition, his jealousy of others who seemed to fare better than he, and his self-pitying belief that he was somehow singled out and hounded by evil fortune.

There had been other days for Lors Wilson, days of young ambition and power and pride in himself—perhaps too much pride and self-esteem, for out of the knowledge of his powers grew a feeling of superiority toward other men. Then when he did not "get on" as fast as he wanted to, he began to ascribe it to bad luck. Little by little this whole baneful complex, which MacGillivray dubbed "sour-luck philosophy," grew upon him till it had a stranglehold.

The pity of it was that a man of splendid abilities should be so utterly ruined by a mere false idea. It paralyzed his old-time ambition, for what was the use of fighting against luck? It vitiated what once had been a good set of brains; it drove him from pillar to post, away from the one profession he was fitted for, and away from the woman who might have saved him from himself; it soured him against everybody and everything. Step by step it undermined his moral code, until his whole degradation came to a head that Christmas Eve in the plot he had concocted.

The door slammed suddenly open and the man he was plotting against stepped into the trading-store. He was of Wilson's height and build, but a year or two younger, freshly shaved, with brown hair cropped close. A *ceinture fléchée* like those the *métis* wore, was thrown over his shoulder and wound like a sash belt around his waist. There was a purposeful thrust to his lean jaws and about him a crispness like the tang of the north wind outside.

To a stranger both Alan Royan and Lors Wilson would have stood out from the rest of the crowd in the store. The others were ordinary men—the great happy run of humanity, content with trap-line and gold-pan. But Royan and Wilson were of the type which has to be achieving something or be miserable.

On Ile Outarde, a big wooded island a mile out in the lake, Royan had a fox-farm, where the freedom-loving animals could roam free in summertime and get full benefit of the north wind in winter. The farm, at first the joke of the trappers, was now the pride of Lac aux Cygnes Settlement—since that day a month ago when Royan came back from Winnipeg with certain momentous news.

As the newcomer closed the door behind him and peered through the haze of smoke, the whole room seemed to tense and stiffen. Sentences broke off in the middle. The laughing stopped. The trapper sitting beside Wilson sidled along the wall bench till he was protected by the stove. Three *métis* standing near the door edged off several steps, to be out of the path of flying bullets.

Every man there knew what had occurred a month ago: of "Sour-luck" getting drunk, trying to make rough love to Margery Grantham, and getting a thrashing at the hands of her fiancé. Some of them had heard Wilson say what was going to happen when the two met again.

"Heard you wanted to shoot me, Fontaine. I'm putting my gun up so you'll have to start trouble with bare fists."

Wilson looked up and saw his enemy, but failed to draw. It did not suit his purpose to get himself hanged in order to wipe out the humiliation. There was another and a better way—the scheme he had been perfecting for the last month.

ROYAN must have felt the tautness, and known the reason, though he did not glance toward the stove. To the "howdy" of the trappers he nodded cordially, and shook hands with several he had not seen since fall. Before stepping to the middle of the room where Simon MacGillivray was, he slipped a hand into his jacket pocket, brought out an automatic revolver, and laid it down upon the counter.

"Heard you wanted to shoot me, Fontaine," he said to one of the *mêtis*. "I don't want to be shot and I don't want to have to shoot anybody. I'm putting my gun up so you'll have to start trouble leg to leg with bare fists. *Kumtux?*"

Fontaine grinned as he realized the words were meant for Wilson. The tension in the room broke; the talking and laughing started again. Royan handed a list of articles to MacGillivray and leaned against the counter.

"Carcajou" Jinks sat down on the bench near Wilson. Presently he observed to another trapper: "What's th' matter with Royan, Sam? Looks almighty glum 'bout something, he does."

"He does that," Sam agreed. "Aint talkin' or cuttin' up a-tall. No life to'm tonight. Looks like his best girl told 'im to go to Guinea. I wunner what's come over him?"

They "wunnered" back and forth for a couple of minutes. To himself Wilson grinned. He too had noticed Royan's gloom, and of the whole roomful he alone knew the reason.

Once more the door opened. Margery Grantham, daughter of the Indian agent at Lac aux Cygnes, came in on an errand of mercy.

She was a girl of nineteen, slender, graceful and dangerously pretty. The biting north wind had reddened her cheeks, and her furs glistened with particles of wind-driven snow. Born and reared at Lac aux Cygnes Settlement, save for her years of school outside, she had developed self-reliance and a "mind of her own"—which showed in the sparkle of her eye and the imperious toss of her fox-fur capote.

There were several girls at the settlement, but to the trappers and prospectors thereabouts, Margery Grantham realized the ideal of young womanhood; hers was

the one name that never was mentioned in their jesting talk with one another.

At her entrance the rough jokes and stories were bitten off abruptly; the *haw-haws* quieted down, and the weather suddenly became a topic of grave importance. The young trappers straightened their vests and gallantly dragged off their beaver hats to her, and the older men watched her with something like the faithful homage of Duke, the big leader of her four-pup team.

"Mr. MacGillivray,"—she spoke to the trader, but her words were meant for the other men too,—"I need some one to help me. Dad is east at Three Spurs laying down a quarantine. I just got word of sickness in the Chippewyan camp eleven miles west of here. I need some one to go with me to the camp and then come back here for medicine and supplies. My dog team is outside, ready."

Eyes turned toward Alan Royan. The silence itself was a question. Why on earth hadn't she asked him, her fiancé, to take her? And why on earth didn't he speak up and claim the trip as his especial privilege?

But Royan said not a word, and Margery Grantham was not even looking in his direction.

The canny old Scot was the first to see that something had gone sadly agley between the two.

"Whae'll go wi' Miss Margery?" he asked, to break the questioninng silence. "If he'll be missin' a few hours o' jabber here tonight, *she'll* be missin' Christmas Day itself, puir lassie!"

At least a dozen men volunteered. She asked "Carcajou" Jinks to go with her and turned toward the door, drawing on her fur gauntlets as she waited for him. Royan started, as if to speak to her or follow her out, but checked himself and leaned against the counter, his face a picture of misery he could not hide.

Watching the whole play from behind the stove, Wilson chuckled softly to himself. The first half of his scheme already had carried. For he had seen, when she drew on her gauntlets, that she no longer wore Alan Royan's ring.

Three hours later Wilson was crouching in a juniper covert at the edge of the lake, a rifle-shot west of the tiny settlement. From time to time he rose and looked across to Ile Outarde. His moment had not yet come, for a light still twinkled in a window of Royan's cabin.

During the Chippewyan Moon-of-Hardening-Ice and Hoar-Frost, Lac aux Cygnes had frozen solid to three feet and more, but the northwest wind had skirled the light dry fall of snow off its bosom. Under the pale cold light of the stars and the thin slice of moon riding overhead, it lay before him like a Titan's dark-silvered mirror, silent and glistening. Through the stately spruces and the fluttering paper-birches that fringed its shores, the steady wind whistled shrilly, rising for brief moments to the howl of a blizzard.

It was past eleven o'clock when the cabin window out in the lake was suddenly darkened. Wilson waited a quarter-hour longer, then rose, stretching his cramped, chilled limbs and stamping his feet.

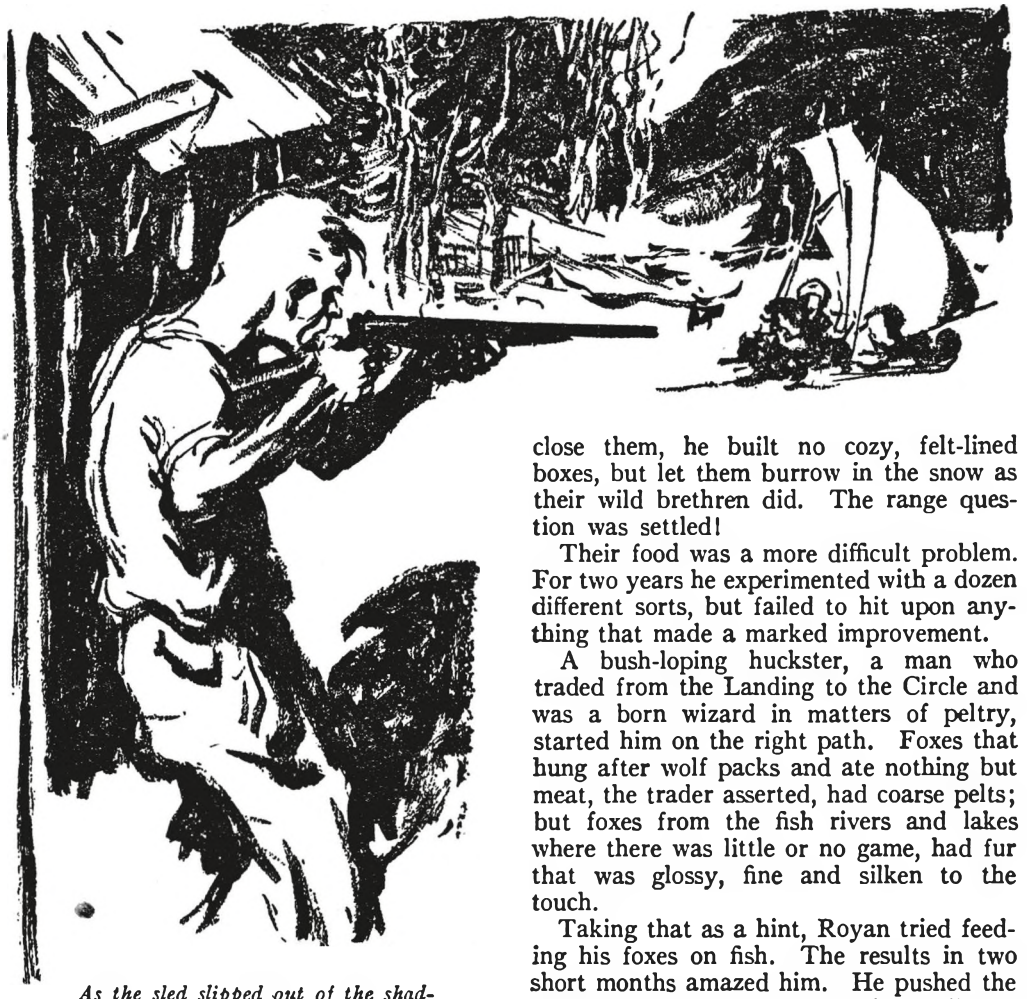
From its hiding-place in the junipers he lifted out a twelve-foot *komatik*, a narrow, flexible sled mounted on runners of hickory heart and fitted with two tan-colored sails —a leg o' mutton mainsail and a smaller spanker. It was rigged with lines for deft maneuvering. Its nose-lead was worked by a swivel bar in front of the rider's seat. Its brake was an iron hook with needle-sharp point, which tore a deep line in the ice when the brake-lever was pushed down.

From mast to runners the *komatik* was Wilson's own handiwork—a craft of slim, graceful beauty and the speediest sled, by easy odds, that ever skimmed across Lac aux Cygnes.

Setting it to the ice and holding it lest it dance away from him, Wilson reached into the covert with his other hand and drew out a wire cage a couple of feet square and covered with gunny-sacking. He fastened this on the *komatik*, stepped on, took his seat, and unfurled the sail. The canvas bellied out, the *komatik* glided from the shore, and darted like a great-winged bird for the western tip of Ile Outarde.

EIGHT years before, Lors Wilson and Alan Royan had been partners: running the same fur path in winter, following the same river drives two hundred miles south of them in spring, and threading the endless *bois forts* waterways in summer, hunting for pay color. Then something strange got into Royan's blood —a dissatisfaction with that purposeless, unsettled life; and their paths pronged thereafter.

With an idea in his head, and a determination not to waste any more of the



As the sled slipped out of the shadows, a rifle cracked.

precious years, Royan settled at Lac aux Cygnes and began the hazardous work of fur-farming. He had neither money, foxes nor experience. The beginning of his ranch was humble indeed—a wolf-proof chicken yard at the edge of the settlement, and a pair of flea-bitten crosses which "Carcajou" Jinks trapped alive and traded to him for a rifle. However, he had luck with their first litter; he dug out a den of patches that same spring, and in a year's time owned breeding stock to work with.

In methodical, scientific fashion he set himself, then, to solve the problem of why "farmed" furs are usually so notably inferior to those caught wild. To his thinking the problem boiled down to range and food. He moved to the big wooded island out in the lake, where for seven months in the year his animals roamed through a natural habitat of brush and rocks and trees. When the lake froze and he had to enclose them, he built no cozy, felt-lined boxes, but let them burrow in the snow as their wild brethren did. The range question was settled!

Their food was a more difficult problem. For two years he experimented with a dozen different sorts, but failed to hit upon anything that made a marked improvement.

A bush-loping huckster, a man who traded from the Landing to the Circle and was a born wizard in matters of peltry, started him on the right path. Foxes that hung after wolf packs and ate nothing but meat, the trader asserted, had coarse pelts; but foxes from the fish rivers and lakes where there was little or no game, had fur that was glossy, fine and silken to the touch.

Taking that as a hint, Royan tried feeding his foxes on fish. The results in two short months amazed him. He pushed the experiment even further, trying different varieties of fish, till he discovered that a certain oily-fat, banded perch which swarmed at the mouths of the lake creeks, was a jump ahead of even trout or whitefish.

With range and food settled, he gave all his attention to breeding for good markings—an easy task already worked out by other men. He began to sell pairs of his pretty animals to fur-ranchers on the Outside. Among those who knew a splendid fox when they saw it, the animals from Lac aux Cygnes were a revelation. Prizes were won at several small exhibitions by the pairs which Royan had sold.

Orders, inquiries and flattering requests for information from the big ranches began to roll in on the monthly mails. "A Royan fox" began to mean something in fur-farming circles—an animal of rugged, wild health and fur that was a miracle of beauty.

Then came the certain momentous event

toward which Royan had pointed all his labors for three years. Saying nothing at Lac aux Cygnes, he slipped away one early November day with an innocent-looking box in his canoe, leaving his island ranch in charge of "Carcajou" Jinks.

When he returned, weeks later, he released the astounding news that the peak and climax of all his work and study—a magnificent pair of matched silvers—had been entered in the world-wide exhibit at Winnipeg, had won the International Grand Prize, and that he had refused twenty-five thousand dollars for "the most beautiful pair of foxes on earth."

It was this grand-prize pair that Wilson meant to steal that night.

For many moons his jealousy of his former partner had been gnawing and cankering and slowly turning into intense dislike. Royan's marked coolness toward him, his refusal to keep on lending money, his sharp language several times when Wilson staged a drunken spree at the settlement, had fanned that dislike into an open, avowed enmity and had focused Wilson's general bad temper upon Royan in particular.

The fight and the thrashing were the climax—the match to the powder of Wilson's hatred.

True to his sour-luck philosophy and his feeling that he was better than the men he rubbed elbows with, he thought Alan Royan was a mere plodder, a man without courage, imagination, or sensibilities, who owed his sudden prosperity to sheer good luck dogging him faithfully as a shadow. That was what hurt the worst—for a man of smaller caliber to out-distance him so utterly!

AS Wilson neared the western tip of Ile Outarde, he pressed down the brake and snubbed the speed of his *komatik*. Cautiously, keeping in the fringe of spruce shadows, he skirted the south shore for a quarter of a mile, till he saw ahead of him the black squatting outline of Royan's old cabin and beside it the stark, gaunt framework of the house which Royan had started to build for his home with Margery Grantham.

He stopped the *komatik,* pushed it into a juniper thicket, caught up a sack and started for the fox-pen a bow-shot from the cabin. Before climbing the first high fence he crouched for twenty minutes in a banksian clump, watching and listening.

This was the first out-and-out criminal thing he had ever done; it felt queer to be a sneaking robber. Besides, if Royan caught him at the theft, he could expect to be shot in his tracks.

Hearing nothing, he stepped out, climbed the wire fence and dropped softly inside. A dozen or more foxes stopped their frisking and watched him, grouped in a circle twenty yards away. He crept silently up the enclosure to a small inner pen where Royan kept his pair of beauties by night. Listening at the gate and hearing nothing from the dark cabin, he entered the small pen.

The pair of silvers had scooped out a small burrow in the snow. Shielding the spot with his body, Wilson snapped on his flashlight, to be absolutely sure he was getting the right ones. One glint of the yellow pencil shone upon them, but there was no mistaking that magnificent pair—so beautiful that his heart missed a beat as he gazed at them.

They were snuggled in the burrow with their dainty noses tucked away into their thick brushes. Tame as kittens from Royan's gentle handling, they looked up at him curiously, blinking their flaming oval eyes at the light.

Despite his need of haste and the danger of Royan's rifle, Wilson could not help staring at them for a few seconds. Their jet-black fur gleamed with the warm, rich iridescence of a shining oil. The long king-hairs were spread through the peltage like filaments of silver. The silver markings, reaching halfway down their backs, were penciled exactly alike, as true and beautiful a match as if a master artist had designed one pattern for them both.

After a few moments Wilson thrust in his hand and patted the head of the black prince. The vixen nuzzled his wrist with her sharp nose and whined for a tidbit. Wilson lifted her out and slipped her, unprotesting, into the bag. The black prince followed. They struggled a bit and clawed at the gunny-sack, but he quieted them with a little patting.

Tying the bag and catching it under his arm, he left the pen and started for the lower fence.

Though they were quiet enough around their owner who fed them each day, the foxes in the outer pen were not nearly so tame as the pair of grand prizes. When Wilson was within a few steps of the lower corner, a skittish vixen ahead of him, imag-

ining herself trapped in the angle, let out a sharp yap.

It was all that was necessary to create a sudden panic among the half-wild animals. Yapping, barking, they shot back and forth and around the pen, leaping against the wires and raising a pandemonium.

In two jumps Wilson reached the fence. Holding the sack in his teeth he climbed up, slipped through the strands of barbed wire, dropped outside, and leaped into the shadow of the banksian.

The cabin door was flung open. Royan came running out half-dressed, but with his .303 rifle in his hands. He stopped a moment, looking at the pandemonium in the enclosure; then jumped through the gate and ran straight for the inner pen. Wilson heard an oath and saw him stand there for a stricken moment, a black looming figure against the snow. Then he ran back toward his cabin.

Wilson rose and ran for his *komatik*. He dared not hide in the timber, for Royan would follow his tracks. The *komatik* would be seen as it left the island, but that could not be helped now. Royan could not recognize it and could never catch him with a slower sled.

He reached the *komatik* and tumbled the pair of silvers into the cage. As the sled slipped out of the dark fringe of shadows a rifle cracked up at the cabin, and a bullet whizzed over Wilson's head. He crouched lower and loosened all the canvas.

The belt-gun slid to Royan's feet. "Now put the silvers on my komatik. Then we'll add up our ciphers."

The gun did not speak again, but glancing back at Ile Outarde fading into the darkness, Wilson saw a white-sailed *komatik* gliding out from the wharf below the cabin and skimming after him in grim pursuit.

FOURTEEN miles southwest across Lac aux Cygnes a dozen wide-mouthed creeks came in from a water-logged muskeg country. Safety lay in that maze of channels, lakes and rivers. They were all blown free of snow; all were sure avenues of es-

cape, once they were reached. A *komatik* could dodge up any one of the dozen. A few twists and turns, and the pursuit would be hopeless, for an ice-sled leaves no more tracks than a canoe.

Wilson had thought beforehand about the possibility of a pursuit. Behind the stove in MacGillivray's trading room he had mapped out the rivers and river-widenings he would take for thirty miles before swinging back east to his trapping shack.

He had made a hiding place for the foxes near his shack in case suspicion fell upon him; and he knew an outlaw trader —a "permit" peddler and Indian sharp— who would give him nearly a third of their real value and ask no questions.

If he escaped!

The *komatik* under him was scudding straight before the wind. Lithe and flexible as a snake, it took the tiny frost ridges and ice seams with hardly a tremor. Its hickory-heart runners, smooth and hard as ivory, struck up a steady crooning cadence as the sled passed entirely out of the island windbreak and caught the wind, full strength.

But the *komatik* behind, invisible except for its white sails, somehow did not seem to be losing. Again and again Wilson glanced back at it anxiously. It seemed to hold its own; seemed at times even to be creeping up on him. Perhaps it was rigged differently from what it had been last winter—what if Royan had struck a combination of sail and runner that beat his own?

A panic grew upon him. If Royan overhauled him there would be no indecision! They were alone out in the middle of the dark lake. Royan could stand off beyond revolver range, kill him with the rifle, shove him and his sled under the ice, and who would ever know a whisper of it? It was a carcajou act—this theft of a man's priceless animals; and carcajous were shot on sight. Wilson knew that he himself in a similar circumstance would show no mercy.

It was only in his fears that the white-sailed *komatik* gained; in reality it was falling yard by yard behind, unable to match the terrific speed of the craft ahead. At the end of five miles Wilson realized he was going to win, and his faith in his *komatik* came back. The sled behind him had lost nearly a sixth of a mile. It was carrying too large a spread of canvas for its length and span of runner. Whenever the wind rose fitfully and savage gusts struck it, it bucked and swerved, while Wilson's craft hurtled over the ice as if hit by a club.

In three more miles the white sail was all but out of sight. But still it hung on grimly. In another mile, when Wilson looked back, he could not see Royan's craft at all.

He looked back seldom after that, giving all his attention to the route ahead. Low in the southwest a dim black line marked the forestry of the shore. It was scant four miles as the teal flies, but nearly six as the *komatik* would have to travel, for a straight shoot to it was impossible. Two miles off the shore lay a barrier of thin ice. The lane was four or five miles long but only a few hundred yards wide, marking the place where at extremely low water a granite backbone stood up out of the lake.

For some strange reason this stretch hardly ever caught over except for a thin treacherous glaze at night. Stranger still, in the clearest, coldest weather the ice was thinnest. A roving geologist once tried to explain something about the sun's rays and the crystal water, and the massive rock just beneath; but the Athapascans explained that the granite reef was the backbone of a monster whose hot breath kept the ice from forming.

A mile away from it Wilson leaned his weight on the left runner and swerved the *komatik* sharply south. It was a part of his plan to head straight for the treacherous strip and then swerve sharply around it. He figured that Royan, in his vengeful pursuit, would forget about the peril and plunge straight into it. If he did, the chances were good of his speed taking him fifty feet before he broke through to his death. The chances of his skimming clear across were literally one in a hundred.

It was a trap of diabolic shrewdness— that playing upon Royan's desperation; the most cunning deadfall that Wilson in all his life had ever laid.

AS he rounded the southern end of the strip and veered west diagonally toward the first of the muskeg creeks, he kept glancing back along his route, watching for the white sail he knew could not possibly be within a mile of him. Above the croon of his *komatik* he listened, an ear to the wind, for a yell betokening that Royan had forgotten the perilous strip. He saw or heard nothing but the moon glistening

and the whine and whistle of the wind.

The creek mouth swam toward him. The brake hook scraped a long white line in the ice as the *komatik* slowed to enter.

With Royan's pair of magnificent silvers all his own now, with the memory of Margery Grantham in the trading store still vivid in his mind, he laughed aloud at the crushing completeness of his work that night.

In the very middle of his laugh he choked back an oath.

Lurking in the shadows of the creek mouth scarcely a hundred yards away, his eyes caught sight of a white-sailed *komatik,* awaiting him.

With a lightning kick at the brake and a lunge upon the left runner, he tried to whirl his sled and head it south to the open lake again. But he was too close. At point-blank range a rifle barked in the shadows and a bullet screamed past his ear. He knew it for what it was,—a warning,—for Royan was no bungler with a gun.

The reef lines dropped from his nerveless hands. He slumped down in his seat, quivering, cursing this last stunning blow of his evil luck. Gently the craft glided up and ran its nose against the bank a few yards from the white-sailed *komatik.*

Royan stepped toward him, rifle against his hip.

"Toss your belt-gun on the ice, Wilson," he bade, a snick of steel in his voice. "Don't try to shoot—your hand is out tonight."

The belt-gun slid to Royan's feet.

"Now put the pair of silvers on my *komatik.* Then we'll add up our ciphers."

Wilson stumbled to the sled with the cage, and turned again to Royan. The latter did not speak.

"Don't be all night about it!" Wilson growled, raising his head. "Why didn't you pot me that first shot, instead of dragging me in to crow over me?"

Royan wetted his lips.

"I guessed it was you, Wilson—over at Ile Outarde. I *knew* it was you when your sled drew out of sight out on the lake."

"Your damned luck!" Wilson snarled. "That's how you got here and caught me."

"Luck? I cut across that strip of scum ice, that's how! If *you'd* had the nerve to try that, you'd be skipping up one of these creeks now."

Wilson started as if hit a blow. He swiped a hand over his eyes.

"You—come—across that strip—of scum ice?"

"You'd have escaped if I hadn't!"

There was a moment of silence, Wilson staring at his captor and the gleaming rifle-barrel.

"Go ahead!" he snarled. "A man who'll take a hundred to one chance with his own life, he's got the right."

"But you're going to say first that it wasn't luck."

Wilson did not answer at once. He was cursing his own cowardice, realizing that Royan, in walking boldly into his trap, had starkly proved himself the better man.

"It wasn't luck," he admitted finally. "I didn't have the nerve. You did."

"It's been that way all along, Wilson," Royan went on. "You've whined about luck, when it wasn't luck. You've got abilities enough, or did have before this bug started on you. You were born with a timber eye. With a good cruise you'd make a mark at estimating. Two or three steady, hard-working years with a company like the Lanewell-Akers, and you'd be somebody—or might have been before you started whining about luck. You're going to see that too—before we add up our ciphers."

WILSON hung his head; he did not want Royan to see his quivering features. In the clear light of Royan's act he had to admit that his philosophy of evil luck broke down for once. But to own that his downhill trail and all the wasted years and now this miserable failure even to be a thief could not be chalked up to malicious luck, but to his own shortcomings as a man—that was too bitter a dose to swallow! He kept a stubborn silence, waiting.

"We'll add 'em up now, if you've thought it over," Royan said tersely. "You expect me to shoot you. That shows you've got some lingering sense of justice anyway. But I'm not going to. It wouldn't pay.

"I could shoot you and shove you under the ice,"—he echoed Wilson's very thoughts of half an hour ago,—"and nobody'd be the wiser. But it would stick in *my* memory! I couldn't associate with my conscience as friendly as I do now, and you're not worth that price! I could drag you back to the settlement and turn you over to the Mounted. But somebody else would pay heavy for that. I'm talking about Charlotte Irvine.

"A couple of weeks ago she wrote to me

and asked about you. I haven't answered yet, haven't worked up nerve to tell her you're a bush-sneak, a pink-eye guzzler. I'd rather shove you under the ice than write to her and say I turned you over to the Mounted because you were a sneaking carcajou! So I figure the best way out of this for other people, and the worst way for you, is to just let you go. Now get!"

Kicking the belt-gun toward him, Royan turned, pushed his sled out on the ice, stepped on and started toward the lower end of the dangerous strip. Sagging down upon his own sled, Wilson watched him veer and tack against the adverse wind till the white sail was swallowed up in the darkness.

For half an hour afterward he sat there silently, fighting against the re-surging impulse to pick up the belt-gun and use it on himself. At the thought of Royan sparing his wretched life,—handing it back to him in a circumstance when he himself would have shot his enemy without hesitation,—he saw how Royan towered over him. All his old, sustaining conviction of superiority was blasted. His sour-luck philosophy deserted him—he saw himself a thing of mud.

What was ahead of him? All his old wretchedness, but now without even the comfort of blaming it on evil fortune. *"The worst way for you"*—in his black misery he realized the truth of those words! Royan had read his misery; it was Royan's revenge.

His anguish was too keen to last long. Gradually he came out of the abysm of soul, where a lesser man would have stayed; because he did have courage, he faced the bitter truth about himself and fought manfully against the phantoms of despair and self-destruction.

For another half hour after he hurled the belt-gun away from him as far as he could throw, he sat silently on his sled, mentally building a goal for himself, and gathering the strength of purpose and resolution to attain it. Rising finally, he shook himself like an aroused bear, his face set toward the great timber limits to the south.

"I'll go!" he said in a voice strange to his own ears. "But before I do, I'll go north to the Chippewyan camp—that Grantham girl will still be there. I'll tell her face to face who started that lie about Royan and the Indian girl. If I've got backbone to do that, it'll show there's a chance for me yet!"

Go-getter Gary

By ROBERT AMES BENNET

When an Eastern gunman went to Arizona to recover from a bullet wound, he ran into a situation that brought his shooting skill in great demand. . . . . You will find this picturesque and swift-moving novel of exceptional interest.

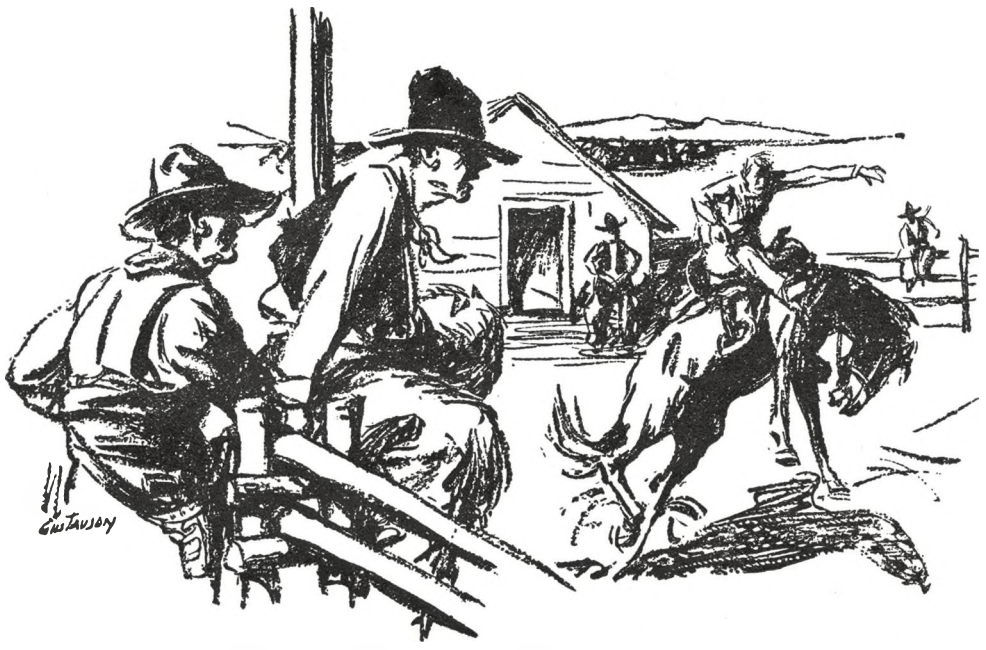
Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

IN the whirling cloud of its own dust the westbound train screeched to a stop at the desert water-tank station. From the steps of the rear Pullman a porter hopped off with his stool to swing a pair of new suitcases down upon the sand. He reached up to steady the descending passenger.

The early morning air on this Arizona tableland was still crisply cool, and the rising sun flooded its beams over all things with a deceptive golden glamour. For the first time in months Gary Owen drew a deep breath. His thin lips quirked in a half smile as he glanced about him.

The little red station to his left, over near the water-tank, was like hundreds of others along the railroads. His glance that way showed him only the shirt-sleeved station-agent and another big-hatted hick easing down a small trunk from the baggage-car.

But around to the right his keen eyes widened in an interested stare. Between the crooked mesquite trunks of the corral back of the siding and cattle-loading chute,



Gentle Annie seemed literally to blow up. By sheer accident he was not thrown.

he saw half a dozen horses snorting and plunging in wild fear of the train.

On the opposite side of the corral was a big square adobe building with a flat dirt roof. Except for the narrow slits in the walls, seven or eight feet up from the ground, it looked like the lower story of one of those queer Indian tenement-house towns he had seen in New Mexico. Perhaps it was the Hatten ranch-house. It and the little station were the only buildings in sight.

AN "Excuse me, sah," from the porter brought Gary's glance around over his shoulder. The darky had gone back to fetch out a lady's handbag and suitcase. Behind him in the vestibule Gary glimpsed the ruddy-brown hair of the little lady who had taken Lower Seven at Albuquerque.

He had never before met a girl easier to look at—nor a friendlier one. Without even waiting for advances on his part, she had made free to advise him that Arizona was better than the California coast for a cold on the chest.

But now, at sight of her in the vestibule, he hastened to catch up his suitcases and start off across the rails of the siding. He knew an honest girl and a real lady when he saw one. She had meant only to give a friendly tip to a sick man. What if she should get the mistaken idea that he had guessed this was her station?

He started away at random until he saw her turn toward the station. That was his cue to head for the adobe. He was rounding the end of the big corral before the train pulled out.

The near view of the adobe building showed no other openings than the high little slits on the wall facing him. But when he rounded the corner he saw a horse-gnawed old hitch-rail and opposite it a small doorway. Though no one was in sight and no horse stood at the rail, the door of iron-bound planks was half open.

Gary dropped his suitcases, entered the low opening through the thick wall of mud bricks, and found himself in an old-time saloon that had been turned into a store for ranch supplies. The far end of the fine old mahogany bar was heaped with boxes of canned goods and some smaller boxes. The brass floor-rail had been mashed and broken, and bullet-holes in the shattered glass of the ornate mirror told of the last time that a bunch of rollicking cowboys had painted the town. Or perhaps the holes had been made by stray shots during some desperate gun-fight.

Gary saw no one in the cluttered room. Not even a near-beer barkeep stood behind the scarred mahogany, where bottles

and dishes showed that some sort of refreshments were still served. But the sound of a hoarse voice came from the inner door at the far end of the bar.

Whoever was in that room might give him the information he wanted, thought Gary, so he quietly advanced between the piles of kegs and bales and boxes. The inner door stood enough ajar for him to see a double bunk built against the left wall, and a cheap glass lamp smoking at the side of a battered old faro table. A slight pull on the door widened the opening enough to show two young men seated at opposite sides of the table. Between them lay the cards of a hard-used poker deck.

The player facing the door had wavy yellow hair and a handsome oval face that at first glance appeared very attractive. Gary's sharp eyes, however, were quick to perceive the smallness of the scarlet-lipped mouth and the cynical look of the dark blue eyes. In the next glance he noted that the rumpled hair of the other player was the same ruddy brown as that of the girl from Lower Seven. The fellow's head and shoulders had sagged forward dejectedly.

The blond player was folding a written sheet of paper. He started to shove it inside his plaid silk shirt, but paused to slide a square whisky bottle toward his muttering companion.

"Aw, forget it, buddy—forget it! Be a sport. Who was it was dead set on playing?"

"That's the hell of it!" The ruddy-brown head sagged still lower. "I'm a gambling fool—but you let me. Cleaned out—and Connie coming home!"

The cynical blue eyes flamed with a sudden ardor. The pouting scarlet lips curved in an eager smile.

"Brace up, old man. You've still got a chance to get back at me. What d'you say to another go? If you win, all that you've lost is the pot you rake back at one haul—cows, cash and water-hole."

"What! You'd— But I'm cleaned out. You know it. You know I've staked everything 'cept my shirt."

"Not by a little bit, boy. There's one thing left. I don't have to remind you how much I want Connie. If you'll—"

"Connie!" The loser hurled the whisky bottle to the floor and reared up on his stocky legs, shaking with liquor-hazed fury. "You slicker! So that's why you've played me for a skinning, is it? Think I've got so low down I'll gamble for my sister, do you? Well, you've got another think coming, you yellow hound. I'll show you!"

The hand of the threatener moved around toward the big automatic pistol holstered at the side of his low-hung cartridge belt. Another big automatic flipped from under the winner's left armpit.

"Don't be a plumb crazy fool, Jack. I don't want to have to plug you for nothing. You got me wrong. It's not a bet—it's a square deal I'm offering. All you've got to do is get me in right again with Connie. What you say will go with her. The day she takes me, you get back your checks and bills of sale."

"No!" shouted the brother. "I'll come clean with her. You sha'n't get her. I'll see you in hell first!"

The blond winner's eyes flared with hate.

"You'll be first to get there, you squealer! Hurry up—I'm waiting. Shuck it!"

GARY had already drawn back a step. There was not a split second to lose. He strained his bullet-punctured lung in a quick cry: "Hey! A lady— Anybody at home? Lady out here looking for her brother."

The lie turned into truth. From the outer doorway came the voice of the girl herself: "Oh, thank you. Jack must have overslept."

"Thought I heard some one talking, miss," replied Gary, slipping between the boxes, away from the inner door and toward the girl, before her eyes could adjust themselves to the half-gloom of the store.

Not a single shot roared in the bunk-room. The angry quarrel had stilled to a dead hush. Gary's lips quirked with satisfaction. His call had been just in time to nip fast those crooking trigger-fingers.

The girl was blissfully unaware of how far more she had cause to thank him than she realized. She gave him a friendly nod, and shrilled a mock alarm:

"Hi—hi—hi! Stampede, Jack—stampede! R-r-roll out, cowboy!"

The door of the inner room jerked around. Through the opening sprang the blond young man, eager-eyed, flushed with ardor, smiling. He showed not the slightest trace of the deadly quarrel with her brother. His tall body bent toward her with a graceful deference that would have warmed the heart of almost any girl.

"Connie!" he greeted. "I'm sure in luck!

I know you'll let me explain about that hurt bronco. It was only—"

"Choke off, you liar!" shouted her brother.

HE lurched from the bunkroom, his fingers crooked, his mouth half agape. The girl stared in dismay at his haggard face and bloodshot, bleary eyes.

For the first time in months Gary drew a deep breath.

"Oh—oh, Jack!" she cried. "You've been drinking again."

"Sure," he agreed, and he pointed with a shaking forefinger. "Gambling, too—with Vance. He skinned me clean—hair, horns, hoofs and hide! Good as got my iron—cows and cash gone, the big hole, too."

The girl uttered a stifled little cry: "Oh-h, Jack!"

She turned to stare at the winner, her eyes ablaze with scorn. "You did that, Vance! Took advantage of his weakness!"

Yellow-haired Vance met the accusation with a show of indignant protest.

"There you go again, Connie! You'll hang me first; then you'll say it with flowers when you learn the truth."

"But Jack wouldn't lie to me. You've let him gamble with you. Don't tell me you haven't."

"What if I have? He was set on it. I had to do it to keep him from playing with Lobo Leet. You must have heard that Lobo is apt to throw his guns if he's had a few drinks and the cards go against him. I did my best by Jack, Connie. I wouldn't let Lobo sit into the game. And Jack's got to own up I wanted to stop, time and again."

"You did?"

"Yes. Why, I even offered to pass it all off as a joke and burn his checks. All the thanks I got for that was to have him call me a yellow quitter."

"Of course he would. Offer to treat him like a baby! Nothing could have made him more determined to keep on playing—and you knew it!"

The winner smiled appealingly.

"Oh, come now, Connie! I don't set up to be an angel, but I gave Jack a fair run for his money. I wouldn't have played him at all if he hadn't yellowed me into it. If you don't believe me, here's his bill-of-sale for the cattle and his contract to deed the water-hole. You can have them."

Jack shoved in front of his sister.

"No, you don't, Vance! Back off. We're taking no favors from you. Connie's not up for trade or sale."

Vance stood his ground.

"You see how it is, Connie. Worst grouch he's ever had. Wont even take a gift from his best friend. . . . . All right, then. I'll keep the cash to oil his fool honor. But the hole and cows go to you."

Jack started to growl a violent refusal. His sister gave him a shove that pushed him half aside.

"Be still. I can speak for myself. You've done your worst. This is my say now."

She threw up her head to give Vance her decision with the quiet finality of a sentencing judge:

"Whether or not it was true about that bronco, and whether or not it's been your fault about Jack, your name has come into it every time, one way or another. That's enough for me."

Vance looked incredulous.

"Why—why, Connie! I'd have bet my bottom dollar on your giving me a square deal. You can't mean to tell me different. Why, just because I've stood by Jack and eased him out of his scrapes the best I could, when I couldn't head him off from them—"

"Maybe you did *your* best," broke in the

girl. "I'm not saying as to that. But now Jack says you've stripped him, and he has at last broken with you. He's a gambling fool, but he's my brother. I'm siding with him. What he refuses, I refuse."

"But, good Lord, Connie, it's no joke. You couldn't run even a nester outfit without your water-hole. Every hole on the winter range will be blowing dust long before July, a dry year like this."

The girl's ruddy-brown eyes blinked, but her lips lost none of their firmness.

"I haven't lost my teacher's certificate, and Jack can earn his forty and found as a top rider. That's all. . . . . No, don't try to argue. It's settled now—for keeps. Good-by."

Vance either was a smooth actor or else he really loved the girl. She being what she was, Gary rather thought the latter more probable. At any rate, the losing winner drew himself up as if hit in the face, then turned away.

GARY silently slid on around the pile of crates behind which he had stepped when Vance rushed from the bunk-room. He had been out of sight of both men, and the girl seemed to have forgotten his presence.

His lingering had been only to make sure that Vance did not again pull his gun on her brother. But it was time now for him to fade out. She might think he had hung around to listen in on her family affairs. He paused to think things over. The affair was none of his funeral—but it was the first time he had ever seen the play of a real lady. The way she had thrown down Vance rather puzzled him. The man had the face and figure of a movie cowboy hero, and he had proved himself a real he-man. He had outplayed her brother at poker, had beaten him to the draw, and then had offered to turn back all his winnings. What more could a girl want in a man?

Her brother did not stack up so well, according to Gary's standards. True, he had refused to play the baby-act by taking back his losses. But he had let Vance dope him with drink for an easy trimming. Any fellow who gambled was a fool. Anyone who mixed drinks with his gambling deserved to be gypped. And any fellow who drank at all was apt to get the loser's end when it came to gun-play. Like gambling, gat-work called for a cool head and quick fingers.

Yet this Miss Connie had turned down the abler man and his winnings, to throw in with the brother who had let himself be cleaned out. The gambling boob was flat broke, without even a job. She would have to go to work teaching kids. Yes, a real lady was a strange sort of girl!

CHAPTER II

WHEN Gary at last edged through the deep outer doorway of the former saloon, the yellow-haired Vance had disappeared.

Gary again gripped his suitcases and headed for the railroad. But as he started to clear the corner of the big adobe building, his wary gaze caught sight of Vance and a still taller man, over near the little station. Though no one else was in sight, the heads of the pair were rather close together.

Gary stepped behind the corner to watch. Men do not talk in each other's ear just to pass the time of day. So far as he could see, Vance appeared to be giving orders to the other man. He pointed toward the adobe, shook hands as if clinching a deal, and went into the station.

The tall stringy man came toward the adobe, swinging his queer fur-clad bowlegs in stiff strides. Gary took up his suitcases and went to meet the fellow. He surmised that Miss Connie might like a little more time for the private talk with her brother.

As he neared the gaunt-faced leather-necked Westerner, his lips quirked. There had been nothing very noticeable about the dress of the two young poker-players except their side-tied neckerchiefs. But this stringy buckaroo more than fulfilled Gary's expectations of the wild and woolly West, all the way down from his snake-banded, steeple-crowned sombrero to the big Spanish spurs on his high-heeled boots. His coarse black mustaches curved out from the upper lip of his tobacco-stained mouth like the horns of a Texas steer. The open-top front-slung holsters of his two big old six-shooters were tied at the bottom with rawhide thongs to the goat-hair chaps.

But the deputy-sheriff's star on the front of the dirty flannel shirt checked Gary's intended inquiries. His half smile was being countered by the more open grin of the Westerner. The deputy seemed to see something very funny about the East-

erner's natty cap, his white collar, stylish tie, his fashionable baggy trousers, and the perfectly polished low shoes below the sheer silk socks.

But as Gary tightened his lips on his repressed inquiries, the fellow's muddy eyes hardened and his grin blackened into a scowl.

"Cough it up," he invited. "What yuh nosing 'round here for?"

Gary smiled and casually thrust his left hand into the pocket of his coat.

"Excuse me for living, Sheriff," he apologized. "I didn't take you for a grizzly bear."

"Huh? Say—I'm Lobo Leet. Get that? Give me any more yore lip, I'll bust yuh wide open."

"Oh, mamma!" murmured Gary. "And all I wanted was to ask him for the Hatten ranch."

"Huh, what you got to do with the A Bar U?"

"Nothing, Sheriff. No bars or bootleg for mine. I'm looking for the Hatten ranch. Is that it—that mud house?"

The two-gun deputy spat a streak of tobacco juice and sneered his contempt.

"Naw. That there's my store. Yuh're a sure 'nough tenderfoot. Dunno the A Bar U's the Hat-on. Yuh aint no friend of Austell's."

"Austell—that's the name," said Gary. "Mr. Austell, owner of the Hatten ranch. No, I haven't even met him, so far. But a man on the train told me Mr. Austell is looking for a—for an employee."

"Lord A'mighty," jeered the deputy. "He tol' yuh Austell'd take a dude on his outfit, an' yuh swallered the lie. Who was the joker?"

"Didn't ask his name. He was a big, fattish bald man—cast in the left eye and—"

"Sutton!" broke in the deputy, plainly puzzled. "Got off at the county seat, did he?"

"Can't say. It was somewhere back there, before I woke up this morning."

"Yeh—Sheriff Sutton. Yuh hang to it he tol' yuh to brace Austell for a job?"

"Yes. If that isn't Mr. Austell's ranch-house, you might tip me off where to steer for it."

THE deputy looked back toward the station, rolled his quid of tobacco, and eyed Gary again with doubt and suspicion.

"So you dunno where yuh're going, huh? Well—d'you spot that there nearest butte, out north here? The Hat-on headquarters is just 'longside it."

"You mean the little flat-topped hill with the red and white sides and the green bushes all over the top? Thanks," said Gary. He caught up his suitcases.

"Little hill—little hill—bushes!" repeated the deputy. "Say, dude, if they make 'em all green as—" He clapped a dirty hand over his grinning mouth.

"What's the joke?" asked Gary.

The deputy waved his hand apologetically and replied with sudden gravity:

" 'Scuse me, Mister. I done wrong, laughing. When yuh see Mr. Austell, tell him I headed yuh straight for his headquarters. Yuh cain't miss it—right out on the left side of that there little hill, like I tol' yuh. Hoof along fast as yuh like. This here's a free country, purty nigh last of the open range. Yuh wont run into no wires to hang yuh up. S'long."

Gary nodded and started off across the sandy plain. There might be some joke in the situation that he had not seen. He felt sure, however, that the woolly deputy had not lied about the ranch.

Even if he had lied about the direction of the ranch-house, the little flat-topped hill looked only a short two miles away. To hang around the railroad might get undesirable action from the nosey two-gun officer. Gary did not believe in hunting for trouble. Also, if he lingered, little Miss Connie might think he was trying to crowd in on her party. He would beat it out to the hill, and if the Hatten ranch was not there, all he had to do was walk back.

This newly risen Arizona sun was already scorching hot, but the keen dry air of the tableland braced him like a tonic. He started off with a briskness that soon brought him to the nearest bushes. They were a scattered growth of the vegetable porcupines that had been pointed out to him from the train under the various names of yuccas, soapweed and Spanish bayonet.

He stopped to prick his fingers on the needle point of one of the leaves. The whole bush was a bristling mass of slender green bayonets, except the spike of creamy bell-flowers thrust up out of the center.

Yet the going was not so easy as he had at first thought. By the time he reached the far border of the bush field, his stops to rest had become more and more frequent. He had lost all his briskness under the steadily increasing heat of the sun. His arms felt as if they were being pulled off

by the weight of his suitcases. He could have sworn that he had come at least two miles, but the buildings at the railroad appeared to be less than half a mile behind him, and the little red and white hill looked no nearer than when he had started.

The conviction came to him that he was far sicker than he had believed. That doctor had not been guessing. But no grinning deputy sheriff should have the fun of seeing him crawl back to the railroad before more than starting a little walk like this. Not far ahead, a line of higher bushes slanted across the plain. A spurt brought him through a growth of tall grass, close to the tempting shade of those tall bushes. Suddenly he found himself on the edge of a cut bank. What he had taken for bushes were trees growing in the bottom of a broad gouge in the plain.

The gravelly cut looked like the bed of a river. He was even more thirsty than hot and tired. He edged along the steep bank until he found a break where he could slide down. A fluted postlike trunk covered with thorns, and a bunch of fairy wands tipped with brilliant red flowers, failed to hold his gaze more than an instant. He hurried in under the crooked trees. But their narrow leaves hung edgewise to the sun. They cast only a thin shade. And there was no slightest trickle or pool of water anywhere in the dusty bed of the great ravine. For half an hour or more he walked up the bone-dry channel without finding any pool or spring or even a seep spot.

A big cottonwood at last offered him real shade. He sat down to shake the sand and gravel out of his shoes and pick the burrs from his silk socks. His feet had begun to blister. His mouth felt as dry as the dirt on which he sat. He had to stretch out flat and rest quite a while before he could regain strength to go on.

AS he slanted across toward a break in the far bank of the arroyo, he heard a sharp dry whirr. Instinctive alertness darted his glance downwards. Hardly half a step in front of his foremost foot a coiled snake was swaying back its deadly head to strike at him. Its jaws gaped as wide and flat as the palm of an open hand.

Quicker even than the snake, Gary whirled forward the suitcase in his left hand. His right hand flipped into the coat pocket on that side. A pistol shot broke the hot stillness of the desert.

Gary stepped back and jerked the automatic from his pocket. But it was only to make sure that the shot had not set fire to his coat. He pinched the bullet-hole between thumb and finger, and replaced the pistol in his pocket.

CHAPTER III

SIX months earlier, Gary might have made the grade, suitcases and all. But the flu, followed by that bullet in his back, had left him with even less endurance than muscle.

The rest under the cottonwood kept him going only through the unbelievably bristly white-needled cholla jungle on the north side of the arroyo. When at last he won his way out of that thorny trap, he dropped down under the blazing sun-rays, utterly spent.

By the time he revived, he had come to realize he must cut the porter work. Even if he should now head back for the railroad, he would have to check his suitcases right here. He had gone the limit with them.

He opened first one and then the other. There was his Prince of Wales hat. Why had he not thought of it sooner? Its turn-down brim gave him a little shade for his sun-broiled face. He tossed the useless traveling cap over his shoulder. Remembrance of the kerchiefs worn by the Westerners brought out his own biggest silk one to cover the circle of burned skin above his wilted collar.

A pair of fresh socks replaced the tattered ones on his blistered feet. He took nothing more from his tastefully selected outfit of gentlemen's furnishings. This country called for hair pants and umbrella hats. It gave signs of resembling the place he had come from in one respect only—the need of gats.

In addition to his already full cartridge belt, he crammed into his pockets all the loaded clips they would hold. Then he ventured back into the cholla jungle just far enough to plant the suitcases out of sight.

Freed from more than half the weight of his baggage and the frightful drag of the suitcases on his arms, he started off again almost light-footed. A rise in the ground ahead had hidden his guide hill. When at last he came panting up through the gay sagebrush over the round of the long rise, the Christmas-tree bushes on the hill top

looked a little less tiny. He was really getting nearer.

Now he knew why they called this a desert. What wouldn't he give for a drink of water! Too late now to turn back—and that wabbly, mocking hill looked as far away as ever. The desert had got him. A stumble brought him to his knees. This was the beginning of the end. He knew it. All the more reason to keep fighting. He staggered up to drag on again, reeling, tottering, stumbling, falling. Each time he slumped harder and lay longer before struggling up once more.

"Think I've got so low down I'll gamble for my sister, do you?"

Another hour found him no longer able to get up on his feet. Between lengthening intervals of dazed stillness he crawled on hands and knees. A hoarse croak jerked his dizzy gaze upwards. Even the extremity of his thirst and exhaustion had not altogether dulled his innate alertness. A shadow swept across his face. Close overhead he saw a great bird swooping around in a narrow circle—a black bird with white-banded wings and red, featherless head and neck. The bird looked something like an eagle that he had seen at the zoo. . . . . No eagle was going to stick its claws into him and peck his eyes out—while he could twiggle a trigger-finger.

At the crack of the pistol the buzzard gave one convulsive flop of its broad wings and tumbled to the ground like a crashing monoplane. Gary did not follow the fall. His tightly narrowed eyes were peering up in search of other enemies.

High overhead he saw a second big black bird—and another—swinging around above him in wide circles. Beyond this pair others were swooping down out of every quarter of the cloudless sky—a whole flock.

The nearest pair were circling higher, as if frightened by the death of their leader; but—they did not go away. Though they were yet out of pistol range, he fired up at them wildly, aimlessly, until the automatic went silent. With the dry click of the firing pin in the emptied barrel the glaring sky above him went black. The pistol dropped out of his nerveless hand.

HE came to slowly. At first his only awareness was of a delicious drip of wet into his dry mouth. The feeling would have been heavenly had not the drip been such a tantalizing slow dribble. He could have drained a lake at one swallow.

Still hazy in his dim semiconsciousness, he heard a voice as delectably refreshing as the water:

"It's not just his thirst, poor boy! That couldn't have so used him up this soon. He's not well. I saw it on the train."

"Know him, do you?" replied a man's voice that was both sulky and impatient. "Rolled in on the train with you? Well, then, why not get a move on? If he's been out only since sunup, 'twont hurt to water him pronto."

Gary forced open his eyes to smile up into the pitying face of the girl from Lower Seven.

"I'll—take mine," he gasped, "any way —you've—a mind to."

At once, seeing that he was conscious enough not to choke, the girl lifted his head in the crook of her arm and began to give him sips from the mouth of her canteen. The man stepped around in front to peer down at him. His eyes, of the same ruddy brown as the girl's, were sullen but almost clear. Little trace was left of their blear from the night's drinking and gambling. It was her brother Jack.

"Where's your hawse?" he asked.

"Haven't any," replied Gary, between swallows. "Deputy sheriff showed me— the Hatten ranch hill. Looked so near —thought I could walk it."

"For shame!" exclaimed the girl. "Fifteen miles, and you a sick man! I'll tell Mr. Sutton what I think of his deputy's brand of humor."

"Sure—and start Lobo gunning for me," put in Jack. "That would be his way of returning the compliment."

The sister's eyes widened with dread.

"Oh, I didn't realize he was actually what he looks to be. But it's another reason for our going ahead as we've planned. You said Vance got Mr. Sutton to appoint him."

"Yes, he's Vance's man. So's Sutton, too, for that matter. Leastways, he wouldn't have been reelected if Vance hadn't rounded up a lot of drags and strays to vote for him."

"I see." The firm little chin squared itself. "So Vance wants to run the country as well as own it. We're well quit of him."

Her brother plainly found the subject uncomfortable. He turned his attention back upon Gary.

"You're sure-'nough green, trying to make the Hat-on afoot, with one lung and silk socks."

"I own up to the greenness and silk socks," admitted Gary. "But my breather is all right—only the bullet I happened to get through one side of it didn't help my flu cold any."

Jack glanced over at the dead vulture and then up at the scattering flock in the sky. "Well, maybe you're not so green as you look, buddy. You pulled a wise crack turning your popgun loose after that first shot. We'd seen the buzzards. Your fireworks told us it wasn't just a dying cow they were after."

"Yes, it was well you fired that way," said the girl. "No less fortunate that you must have got twisted and headed over here toward the wrong butte. It brought you far enough west for us to hear your shots."

Gary was still too sick and weak to be able to hide his disappointment.

"Wrong?" he muttered. "Headed over here? Then you're not—your brother is not Mr. Austell?"

Miss Connie merely shook her head, with no change in her kindly concern. Not so her brother. His face flushed and darkened.

"Who—me? Heck, no! What d'you want with Vance Austell, anyhow?"

The "Vance" told Gary how he had put his foot in it. No wonder Jack was sore. Austell was the yellow-haired young man who had "cleaned" his former friend. Gary looked up at the loser's sister with an apologetic smile.

"I didn't know about this man Austell, believe me. I'm—my name is Owen— Gary Owen. After you told me I'd find Arizona better for my cough than California, I got to talking with that Mr. Sutton. He said Austell might employ me."

"What!" cried Jack. The idea seemed to strike him as humorously as it had the two-gun deputy, Lobo Leet. He grinned broadly. "Whoop, Connie! Can't you see Vance making a dude lunger his *segundo?*"

The girl did not share her brother's amusement.

"Why, you see, Jack, I—that is, I'm sure Mr. Sutton did not mean it as a joke. The boy really is sick, and I thought —anyhow, Vance will at least help him back to the railroad."

She gazed down again at Gary.

"Our name is Royd. This is my brother Jack. I'm sorry. If only we were not— if things were different with us, we'd be glad to have you come out and stay at the Box R until you felt all right again. As it is, the best we can do is drop you at the Hat-on."

"Like fun we will!" scoffed Jack Royd. "Two hours out of our way, and after Vance—after what happened last night. We'll circle round by the Tonto."

"No, that would mean six or seven hours' delay. Don't be silly, Jack. Vance took the eastbound, and we'll not have to stop at the ranch."

SULKILY her brother went to fetch the two saddle-horses that were cropping the coarse grass, their bridle-reins on the

ground. The easing of Gary's thirst had given him back a little strength. He managed to stagger to his feet, aided by the firm grip of the girl's small hands. She screwed the stopper on her canteen and picked up Gary's pistol.

Though he was tottery from weakness, he had no more than taken the pistol from the girl when, with a movement as automatic and swift as the weapon's own action, he snapped a loaded clip into the magazine, in place of the empty clip, and shucked the top cartridge into the barrel. A sleight-of-hand magician could not have reloaded the pistol more quickly. The action was so rapid that Connie Royd quite failed to see it. Even her brother caught it more by guess than by actual eyesight.

"Lord, dude!" he said. "If you sling lead out like you sling it in, you could stack up with Lobo Leet."

"Not if I could—sidestep him," muttered Gary, swaying dizzily. "I don't—like—hunting trouble."

"That's right, boy," approved Connie. "It's foolish even to carry a gun nowadays. Lend a hand, Jack. I'll have to take him up. Your bronco's crowhops would jolt out the little life that's left in him."

The girl jumped for her stirrup and swung upon the smaller horse with an ease that astonished Gary. For the first time his still inflamed eyes perceived that she had changed from her train clothes to a sombrero and leather chaps and a pair of unbelievably small high-heeled cowboy boots.

She reined the horse close before him, to draw her foot from the near stirrup and reach down a helping hand. Clearly enough she expected him to raise his foot to that stirrup and pull himself up on the horse behind her.

Ashamed of his weakness, he made the attempt. The grip on her hand alone saved him from pitching back on his head.

With an impatient growl, Jack Royd picked him up bodily and tossed him on astride, behind the high cantle of the saddle. The horse made a plunge that would have flung Gary off backward if he had not clutched the girl's shoulders. Fearful that she might be offended by this unintentional familiarity, he started to let go. Better to fall off than to risk losing her friendliness.

"Take hold of my belt and hang on," she directed. "That's it. You can't spill now."

The fingers of his lowered hands had hooked in the band of her chaps. The plunges of the horse were easing into a smooth swinging movement. Gary was a good dancer. Almost instantly he balanced himself to the rocking-chair lope.

Connie Royd started off straight for the eastern flat-topped hill—the one from which he had turned away. Her brother did not follow, but he headed in the opposite direction. Gary thought that the loser of the poker-game felt too sore at himself to go near Vance Austell's ranch. Then he saw four horses with loads tied on their backs. Jack rode past the grazing animals and wheeled to drive them after his sister.

The lope of the girl's horse was so smooth and steady that Gary soon felt tempted to let go his grip on her belt. A swerve of the horse to avoid a barrel cactus taught him differently—he barely saved himself from pitching off sidewise.

Long before they neared that elusive receding hill Gary was swaying again from weakness. But he clung fast to the girl's belt, certain that she would bring him through this jam.

And at length the horse struck into a dusty double trail that looked as if it might be a half-beaten road.

CHAPTER IV

A LURCH against the girl's back roused Gary out of the stupor of his exhaustion. The horse had halted. He heard the girl's voice ring out in a musical hail.

"Hello, the house! Anyone there?"

Gary's opening eyes glimpsed Jack and the loaded horses. Then, off to the right, he saw men moving around with horses in a corral. From the other side came a man's voice that broke abruptly from harsh impatience into pleased surprise.

"Who in—huh— Why, Miss Connie! Howdy, howdy! Glad to see you back. 'Light and come in. I'll jingle coffee and pie in two shakes."

Gary swerved his gaze around to that side. He saw a bush-bearded, moccasin-footed man, with a flour-sack apron, coming from the floorless porch that connected two squat adobe buildings. Miss Connie was answering the fellow:

"Thanks, no, Pete. Jack and I must push on *pronto*. Just stopped by to leave this sick boy. Sheriff Sutton told him to try the Hat-on for a job. That new deputy

of his headed him out from the rails afoot, knowing that Mr. Austell was right there in the station. I'm glad you're still here, Pete. You'll see that the boy gets a square deal."

"Sick dude!" grunted the cook. "I'd sooner wet-nurse an orphan calf."

Yet he complied with Connie's gesture to ease Gary down from behind her. Jack Royd had already driven the pack-horses past, with no more than a sullen nod to the cook. His sister started off after him, without waiting for Gary's thick-tongued attempt to murmur his thanks.

"It's all right, boy. Luck!" she said. " 'By, Pete."

The cook let go of Gary to lift his hand in parting gesture. But he gripped hold again as Gary reeled and slumped down.

"All in, are you? Lunger, huh?"

"No," rasped Gary between his cracked lips. "Lead-puncture."

In clutching hold as Gary fell, Pete's arm had clamped against the automatic in the left pocket.

"I savvy," he jeered. "Come West to pop cottontails, and popped yourself. If 'twasn't for Miss Connie, I'd leave you outdoors for the cottontails to nibble on."

He slung Gary over his shoulder like a sack of meal and packed him through the porch into the adobe building on the right. The next Gary knew, he was lying on a bench beside a long oilcloth-covered table, and Pete was holding a pint tin cup of black coffee to his nose.

Supported by the cook, he managed to gulp down the drink. It was strong as lye and almost scalding hot. Within a minute he sat with his elbows on the table, wolfing down the mess of pork and beans that Pete had dished up from the pot at the back of the cook-stove.

When he could gorge no more, his head sagged in a stupor of drowsiness. Grunting with contempt, Pete smeared the crimson sunburnt face and neck of his charge with some kind of grease that smelled like rosin. After that he hoisted Gary to his feet and dragged him out across the porch and in through the other building to a small room at the far corner.

"Heap of sleep a dude'd get in the bunk-house," he growled. "Lucky for you Austell's away. I'll run a bluff on the boys —tell 'em you're the boss' pet poodle."

Gary did not mind being razzed by a fellow whose deeds gave the lie to his rough tongue. Besides, this grouchy chef was a friend of Miss Connie's. He grinned, rolled onto the bunk against which Pete shoved him, and promptly fell asleep.

WHEN he closed his eyes the room was cool and not very light. He wakened with the feeling that his head lay on a restaurant broiler. The desert sun was pouring its fiery rays down into his face through the room's glassless little window.

Puzzled that he had slept so short a time, he started to turn on his side. It was all he could do to move, though not because of weakness. He felt fresher and stronger than in months. But his muscles were so stiff and sore he hardly could use them. In spite of this, his new sense of well-being, coupled with thirst and hunger, kept him on the go even after he had shifted his face out of the sun-glare.

As he hobbled from room to room, he noted with interest the jumbled mixture of skins, horns, priceless old Navajo rugs, mahogany furniture, canned-goods cases, saddles, city clothes and cowboy rigs. No woman around this dump, evidently.

Out under the porch he saw that the sun was on the opposite side from which it had been when he reached the ranch. No wonder he was hungry! He had slept from early afternoon of one day to late morning of the next.

When the savory smell of cooking drew him across into the mess-room kitchen, Pete halted him with a yell from the pot-laden stove: "Beat it, you yap! No hogs 'lowed 'fore the swill's in the troughs."

Gary knew that chefs, like prima donnas, are apt to be temperamental. He backed out onto the porch. His quick eye had already noted the great earthenware jar slung from one of the beams of the dirt-covered porch roof. He now perceived the tin dipper hooked on the lip of the jar.

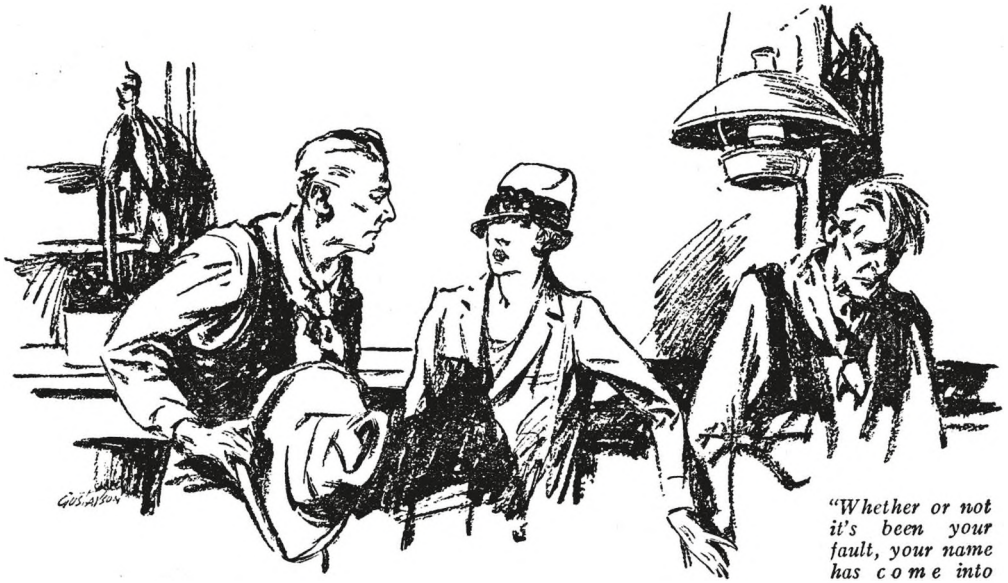
The water proved deliciously cool, though it had a slightly sweetish and soda-like taste. His thirst quenched, he eased his sore muscles on a rawhide cot that stood across from the water jar.

At last the cook came out to pound on a hoop-iron triangle. Gary was ready to follow him in even before the workers down at the corral started to race for the house. Pete scowled at him.

"Bound to get it PDQ, are you?"

Gary smiled. "Can you blame me, chef —cooking like yours?"

"Uh? Well, you squat here at the cool end, next the boss' seat. That's yourn till



"Whether or not it's been your fault, your name has come into it every time. That's enough."

he comes and fires you. Don't let none them Sonora yaks horn you off."

The bunch of punchers came shoving and scuffling in at the door. Pete sang out with authority:

"Choke off that racket, you laughing hyenas. Meet our future *segundo*."

Gary was a good mixer. He smiled at the joke and offered his hand. But each of the ten men in turn took a single look at his clothes, stared blankly and walked past him. All through the meal, except for an occasional word from Pete, he was as completely ignored as if his seat at the table had been vacant.

As each man finished his feeding, he slouched out, still seemingly oblivious of the guest. After the last one had left, Pete jerked his thumb for Gary to follow. Across in the boss' house Gary helped himself to a battered old sombrero. His face felt like a lobster just off the broiler. But the doctor had told him to keep in the sun. The wide-brimmed cowboy hat shaded his face and neck.

Down near the small barn, or stable, he saw that the men were roping horses in the big corral and taking them to the smaller corral for riding. Some of the animals had to be tied cross-legged and held by the ears before they could be saddled. The men seemed to think it great fun when the horses plunged and jumped and twisted. The biggest joke to them was the sight of a rider hurled out of his saddle to sprawl in the dust. That brought yells of laughter from all the others.

Gary could understand the sport of the risky game, but not the reason why it should be considered so funny. He climbed up to perch on the top rail of the corral and watch the hilarious players. On the right shoulder of each horse was a brand that at first glance looked like a blank face topped by a sharp-crowned sombrero.

This, then, was why they called Austell's ranch the "Hat-on." A clearer brand showed him that the hat and face were made up of an "A" over a "U," separated by the straight horizontal line that formed the hat-brim. Lobo Leet, the two-gun deputy sheriff, had called the Hat-on the "A Bar U."

One of the younger punchers turned to Gary with a sudden show of grave courtesy.

"Like to top-off a live bronc', Mister? I'll lend you the loan of my saddle. It aint greased—honest it aint."

"Not today, thanks," replied Gary. "I'm still on the stretcher."

Another puncher swung the loop of his rope and called endearingly: "Aw, come along, little doughie."

Swiftly as the noose shot out at Gary, however, his hand was still quicker. It struck the down-whipping loop and fended it aside.

The other punchers shouted mockingly at the roper, certain that he had made a misthrow. Another made a jerk cast to yank the dude off the rail, but Gary fended it as neatly as the first one.

An older man promptly jerk-cast with a

loop too wide to be reached by an upthrust hand. Before it could whip down below the level of Gary's head, he dropped from under the snare into the corral.

"Forget it," he said. "I'm no horse."

The very quietness of his tone compelled a pause where bluster would have invited jeers. The man who had asked Gary to ride broke the awkward silence.

"Say, you wise waddies, mebbe so we got a wildcat by the tail. How 'bout Pete's tip to lay off the dude? 'Sides, Vance'll skin us alive if we don't get all the broncs worked over."

The last argument gave the bunch a good excuse to back up, and they hastened to return to their interrupted riding game.

AS the setting sun cut the western horizon, Pete's triangle clanged across the desert stillness. Gary sauntered up to the mess-hall, where, in contrast to their manner at the noon meal, almost all the rough bunch of punchers displayed great politeness to him during supper.

After they left, Gary ventured an offer to help wash the dishes. Pete shoved a dishrag at him and scowled until the last pot had been scoured clean. Then he grunted, none too graciously:

"Huh—leastways you're no lily-fingers. If you got a wad, best cache it in that empty coffee-can. Boys asked me to steer you over for 'em. Y'ever played poker?"

"Some. I'll take my roll along."

"Well, it's up to you. Only stick to penny ante if you don't want to drop your wad."

In the lantern-lighted bunk-house several punchers were rubbing liniment on injuries. One other was plaiting a horsehair bridle. Four sat around a small table. Each member of the quartet at once threw down his cards and politely rose to offer Gary his seat. Gary drew up a battered fifth chair.

"I usually look on," he said. "But if you gentlemen want me to sit in, I'll join you in a white-chip game. Only, first, I'd like to ask if you play it straight or tinhorn."

"Tinhorn!" growled the oldest and biggest man. "If yuh mean to insinooate we aint white, I'll lay yuh out in pieces."

"Then it's to be a friendly straight game between gentlemen," said Gary. He smiled down at the dirty cards and wound his wrist-watch. "Told you I'm still on the stretcher. I intend to pull out of the game at twelve sharp, win or lose. How's that?"

"Suits us, dude. I'll have yore shirt 'fore then."

All sat down, grinning, Gary with the others. Pete scowled and went back to the ranch-house, abandoning the bullheaded dude to his fate.

By midnight the oldest and biggest player was ahead of the game to the extent of all the cash of his fellow-punchers and five dollars of Gary's money. It was his deal. He scowled when Gary glanced at his watch and rose.

"Say, dude, yuh aint aiming to quit now?"

"I said twelve sharp. You agreed. Can't miss my beauty-sleep."

"Rats! Yuh're scairt I'll skin yuh like I done the rest of the bunch, yuh quitter!"

Gary quietly stepped around the table. He spoke still more quietly: "I'm not used to being called a quitter. I'll ask you to take that back."

"Like hell I will!"

"In that case it's my painful duty to inform the gentlemen present that you are a liar."

The big man sprang up with both his fists clenched.

"Shuck it, Wy," warned one of the other men. "He packs two guns."

Against the rules of both ranch and gambling etiquette, Wy had played with his big old six-shooter on his hip. He reached for it with the quickness of a gun-fighter. But Gary's hands did not jam into his coat pockets. They thrust forward. Their slender fingers closed on the long barrel of the out-flipping six-shooter.

Before the big man knew what was happening, the revolver had been twisted out of his grasp. It jerked upward, and the butt struck the point of his bulldog jaw. He dropped like a shot steer.

Gary looked around at the dumfounded onlookers, laid the unfired six-shooter on the table, and sauntered out into the starlight, with a pleasant-spoken, "Good-night, gentlemen."

Pete had left no light burning. But Gary found the ranch-house door unlocked. He slipped in, and without so much as striking a match, felt his way to a bed in another room from the one assigned to him by the cook.

The precaution proved needless. No one crept in during the night to catch him off his guard, and he slept undisturbed until broad daylight. In fact, when he turned

out, he found himself more than an hour too late for the dawn breakfast.

Much to his surprise, Pete did not yell at him to keep out of the mess-room. On the contrary, the cook opened his oven and took out food and coffee that he had kept warm for the laggard.

"Morning, kid," he greeted. "I hear tell you come off with your wad and a whole hide too."

"I let him have a five, just as a peace-offering," explained Gary. "He played a straight game, but I saw he would make a poor loser. It pays to side-step trouble whenever you can."

"Wish you had pounded that into Wy's bone head. The tap you give him on the jaw ought to've learnt him that some dude rabbits has got a kick like a mule. Only got him sore at you, though, and he's the foreman of this ranch. Can make you a lot of trouble."

Gary did not answer. He was attacking his food with the ravenous appetite that had come to him along with the brilliant sunshine and dry tonic air of the desert. Pete eyed him mistrustfully.

"This here crowd figgers they's a bunch of lobo wolves. They aint done with you yet—specially Wy. 'Sides, there's Vance. Best make your getaway while the going's good. Vance'll chase out from the rails on a lope."

"It's a long walk," said Gary. "Guess I'll keep on resting up."

"Uh—sort of begins to look like you aint no Mary's little lamb. All the same, just because you handed Wy what was coming to him, don't you try to monkey with the boss. No bird is too hard-boiled for him to chaw up."

After what Gary had seen of Vance Austell, he was far from keen to work for him. But he did not intend to run off like a yellow dog. He had come to the Hat-on for a job. Time enough to leave if he did not like the job offered or if Austell refused to employ him.

CHAPTER V

THIS time Gary drifted up the slope above the ranch-house, away from the corrals. If the roughneck punchers were bent upon getting him, they would have to come his way. He stretched himself out on a little knoll beside a giant sahuaro to bask in the full downpour of the sun.

Austell failed to come as soon as Pete had predicted. Hour after hour Gary waited. The sun mounted toward mid-sky. Its heat seemed to melt away all his regained strength and put him into a dazed drowsiness that bordered upon stupor. Yet when, close upon noon, a horseman raced into sight around the flank of the mountain, Gary was quick to see him. He knew that none of the punchers had left the ranch. The horseman might be another visitor or one of Austell's range-riding cowboys. More probably, though, it was Austell himself.

Gary went down to the house to cool off. He had no more than dampened his hot head and taken a drink, when Austell came galloping on a wild-eyed, trumpet-nostriled bronco. A jerk of the ring-bit threw the horse back upon his haunches in a sudden halt. His flanks and shoulders were bleeding from the scratches of the sharp spur-rowels.

Austell was off before the overridden beast had ceased slithering in the dust. At sight of Gary under the porch, his small red mouth curved in a smile that was not shared by the blue eyes. Their hardness gave a rasp to his mock-genial greeting:

"Well, well, see who's here! He actually went and made it on his tootsies! Must be one of those dude champion heel-and-toe hoofers."

"Not quite," replied Gary. "I had a ride part of the way."

"Did, eh? That shoves the joke back on Lobo."

"Glad you think so, Mr. Austell. Playful sort, isn't he? My name is Owen—Gary Owen. Perhaps Lobo told you that Sheriff Sutton sent me—"

"Bah!" broke in Austell. "Pass over that cup."

He cleared his dusty throat with a gulped drink, and shouted angrily: "Hey, Pete, you mangy loafer, what's holding up dinner?"

Pete was just coming out with the big bolt that he used for ringing the triangle. He scowled back at his boss.

"I'm 'most ready to throw the grub away. You've kept the boys waiting over an hour."

He turned to glower at the heaving, head-sagged horse. Austell smiled with sudden good-humor as he went to the wash-bench.

"Just stopped for a little business with Lobo. After that he insisted on my giving

him a poker lesson. Gave me enough for it to meet my next pay-roll."

"Wolf eat wolf," muttered Pete, so low that only Gary heard him. He hastened to clang his bolt against the triangle.

DURING dinner Austell, as well as his men, entirely ignored the stranger. The boss' talk was limited to criticisms of the cooking and curt inquiries of Wy about the work that the punchers had done during his absence. But when the men started to slouch out he checked them with a lift of his hand.

"Hold on a minute, boys. Want to tell you the latest. Sutton says a dude on the train asked him if anybody out in Arizona needed a personal guard. Old Sut tipped him off to brace me for the job. Guess I'll have to put the gent on my pay-roll. You know how much I need protecting."

The yell of laughter that burst from the punchers told Gary that the joke must be a rich one. He took another spoonful of his plum duff and smiled across at Wy. The big foreman's mirth-gaped mouth suddenly clamped shut. He reached for his gun. Gary's smile broadened. He had noticed that with the coming home of the boss all the men had left their guns outside.

A sudden hush fell upon the other laughers. Pete broke the silence with a polite suggestion: "Mebbe the boss'll loan you his gun, Wy."

"What's that?" demanded Austell.

"I aint testifying legal," replied the cook. "I just heard someun allege how Wy pulled his six-gun on this here dude, and the green tenderfoot, not knowing any better manners, went and borrowed it. Wy was so shocked at sech bad etteykat he swoonded plumb away—after bumping his chin on his own gun-butt."

The glare in the eyes of the foreman told Austell that the hearsay story was based on fact. "Git," he ordered.

When the punchers had clumped out, he fixed his hard blue eyes upon Gary.

"Took Wy's gun away from him, did you?"

"I thought you'd like that better than having him winged."

The quietness with which Gary spoke seemed to impress his host even more than his confirmation of what he had done to Wy.

"Say, who the hell are you, anyhow?"

"Gary Owen."

"You told me that before. Whether it's your own name or an alias, it don't mean a bean to me. I'm asking *what* are you?"

"For the last two years I've been personal guard to Mike M'Gruder."

"The new king of Ireland, eh?" jeered Austell.

Gary's lips quirked. It seemed preposterous that anyone could be so ignorant.

"Mike M'Gruder is the big boss. He carries more of Chi in his vest pocket than the other top ones pack in their trunks."

"So that's what he is—a machine-boss political crook. I savvy you now—one of his gangster gunmen. Left Chicago for your health, didn't you? Afraid you might choke from lack of breath if you stayed there."

"No, it wasn't quinsy or asthma. Just a piece of lead on top of the flu. Doctor told me to come West and grow up with the country."

"And you took his advice—to save your health from more bullets or the gallows."

Gary met this gibe with another quirk of his lips.

"You'd be greener in Chicago than I am out here, Mr. Austell. Why, they'd try you for libel if you said the police and judges didn't know any better than to frame the bodyguard of Mike M'Gruder."

"Yet you admit that one of them leaded you."

"Don't you think it, Mr. Austell. He was a hired bumper-off for the bootleg ring. Shot me in the back to get at Mr. M'Gruder. I got him from the floor. He'll never pull another trigger."

"City gunmen!" sneered Austell. "Like to brag about your shooting."

"Not bragging—just tipping you off. That fat sheriff let out you were looking for a man from away who could handle a gat."

Austell sprang up and jerked his hand for Gary to follow him. Down at the corrals he called the punchers from their bronco-twisting.

"Sit in, boys. He's going to show us—or show himself up."

Between the bunched men, as they drew near, Gary picked out a small knot in a corral post about twenty paces away. He put his hand into his right side pocket and shoved the barrel of the automatic above the front end of the opening.

"Stand still," he said.

The punchers saw the pointed pistol-muzzle and jerked their hands upwards.

Gary fired from the hip—nine shots in such quick succession that the reports whirred like the rattle of a riveting-machine. With the tenth cartridge warily left ready in the barrel, he reloaded the magazine still more swiftly than after his rescue by Connie and Jack Royd.

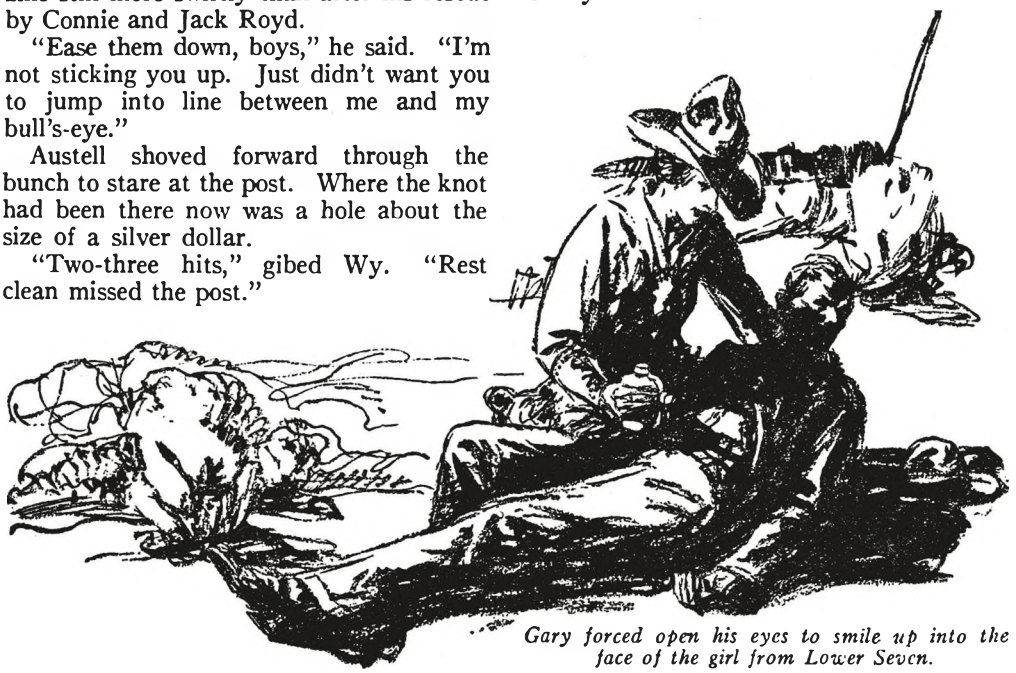
"Ease them down, boys," he said. "I'm not sticking you up. Just didn't want you to jump into line between me and my bull's-eye."

Austell shoved forward through the bunch to stare at the post. Where the knot had been there now was a hole about the size of a silver dollar.

"Two-three hits," gibed Wy. "Rest clean missed the post."

This stirred the punchers to derision. But their boss frowned.

"Don't you get funny with me. You came here to panhandle a job. If you can't rope, how about forking bronc's? Can you ride?"



Gary forced open his eyes to smile up into the face of the girl from Lower Seven.

But Austell came back to admit the fact. "You can shoot, kid."

"Guess I was born that way, Mr. Austell. Seems as if I can't miss. That's why they call me Gary the Gat. Got my job with Mr. M'Gruder because the Payroll Delivery Company told him I was the best shot in Chicago. Of course, though, Chi isn't this cowboy West of yours."

"Not by a damn' sight it aint," agreed Wy. "Nor's that measly pop-gun of yourn in it with a man's size gun. Takes a forty-five to stop a real gun-fighter."

Gary had already heard something like this before. He murmured politely: "Yes? Perhaps we might try it."

"Cut that out," ordered Austell. "I'm talking. You said you didn't leave Chicago to dodge a rope. Do you know how to handle one?"

"Can't say I do. Never even saw a hanging."

"You driveling *bobo!* I'm asking, can you rope as well as shoot?"

"Oh, I see. You mean catching horses in the corral by throwing nooses the way your men do. Why, I don't know. I've never tried it."

"I managed not to fall off, day before yesterday," replied Gary. "I might do it again if you let me have a mild one."

Austell's scarlet lips curved in that seemingly genial smile that was not shared by his eyes.

"Boys, it's always a pleasure to do our best to make a visitor feel at home—to get him in touch with the ranch, so to speak. You heard his request. Don't saddle him any untried bronc'. We'll let him start off on Gentle Annie."

THE sudden gravity that fell upon the punchers reminded Gary of the similar look he had seen on the face of Lobo Leet. The two-gun deputy had sent him off afoot on the fifteen-mile desert hike to the ranch, knowing that the ranch's owner was right there in the railroad station. Austell must now be framing him for another such cow-country joke, and the punchers knew it. Well, whatever could not be side-stepped must be faced without whining.

Wy and the youngest puncher were already waddling, bow-legged, into the big corral. Almost all of the horses had been taken out by a wrangler to graze. With

one exception the few broncos left in the corral dashed wildly away from the two ropers, their ears flattened back and teeth bared.

The exception was a fleabitten gray mare that stood motionless in the dust raised by the others, her bony head drooped low on its scrawny neck. Nothing could have been meeker than the way she waited for the foreman's *reata* and then shuffled from the corral at his heels.

Inside the breaking-corral the young cowboy reached down a saddle from the top rail. Gentle Annie staggered feebly under the weight of the heavy saddle, but did not quite collapse. Gary decided that the joke was to put him on a horse so sick or old that it would fall down under him. He had caught a glimpse of the animal's peculiar glassy eyes—but he knew nothing about horses. There was none of the ear-holding or the hobbling of which he had seen so much the previous day.

Wy turned to call out to him in a tone of almost solemn deference: "Me lud, yore hawse awaits. I done loaned yuh my own saddle."

"Thanks," replied Gary.

He had taken hold of the reins the way he had seen the punchers do it. Also like them, he put his other hand on the saddle-horn and lifted his foot to the big stirrup. The young puncher had left before Wy. No one held the mare. Unlike all the other broncos Gary had seen mounted, Gentle Annie never stirred even after he swung up into the saddle and found the off stirrup with his right foot.

This, then, was the joke. They had given him a dead one—a horse too old to move. Well, at least he would go through the motions. He jerked on the reins and dug his spurless heels into the spiritless mare's flanks.

It was as if he had touched a match to a bomb. Gentle Annie seemed literally to blow up. She jumped straight into the air, and came down with a frightful stiff-legged jolt that almost snapped Gary's backbone. By sheer accident he was not thrown off. The extreme quickness of reaction with which he had been born needed only that lucky break of the game to flash into gear.

He had no thigh grip; he had already lost both stirrups; he showed daylight at every buck. There was no possible chance of his winning the game. Yet somehow his gift of swift movement and almost perfect balance kept him in or above the saddle for a full three seconds of Annie's terrific pitching.

The end came with a camel's hump heave that lifted him skyward. Before he could come down, Annie jumped backward, clear out from under him. A fence-corner twist to the buck had turned him over sidewise as he shot upwards. Had he remained in that position, the shock of the fall on the sun-baked ground probably would have killed him. He flipped himself in the air like a tossed cat, and came down feet foremost.

He stood in a daze, erect yet knocked out by the frightful punishment. For some moments he was only vaguely conscious of jeers and laughter. Then the voice of Pete rose clear above the mockery:

"Naw, I tell you, Wy, the kid didn't pull leather. You're a great little bunch of sports, the whole lot of you, I'll say. What if the kid did show daylight? He rode, and he stuck on longer than any of you'd 'a' done with a half-healed hole through yore bellers."

"Hear that, you yapping coyotes," said Austell. "Hush your yammering. Petie wants to sing his baby by-by."

Smiling at his own wit, the boss came around in front of Gary to look him over with derisive deliberation.

"So that's how you ride! What d'you suppose I'd hire a man for who can't rope or even sit an easy crowhopper?"

Gary spat out a mouthful of blood, and nodded. "I bite. What's the answer?"

"None of your lip, you—"

"Yes?" Gary patted the side pockets of his coat. "Didn't lose either one."

The sheer cold nerve of this gave Austell pause. His cruel stare narrowed with calculation.

"Say," he muttered, "maybe I can use you. Keep it under your hat. Savvy?" He raised his voice. "Pete, you're right about the boy. We ought to go kick ourselves for picking on him. He's welcome to loaf around here till he's ready to hit back to the rails. No more funny business."

CHAPTER VI

GARY had double reason to feel no surprise when, after supper, Austell asked him into his living-quarters. The young cow-man lighted a fancy lamp and mo-

tioned his guest to sit down at the mahogany card-table. Gary declined "the makings."

"Thanks—I don't smoke. Friend of mine got bumped off behind a puff from his own cigarette. It kept him from seeing the killer's gat soon enough."

"My eyesight's better," replied Austell tersely.

He made a one-handed roll of a cigarette, lit it, and in the haze of the first puff took a bottle and deck of cards from the table drawer. He shoved the bottle across to Gary.

"Try this, then. Its smoke is only in the taste— No, go on and take a snort. It wont blind you. It's real old Scotch, not any of your city wood-alcohol. Ran it up from Sonora myself."

"I'll take your word for it, Mr. Austell. But I've seen more than one bootlegger lose out—trigger finger slowed up by his own stuff just from Canada. My stock-in-trade is a clear eye and quick hand. How about that job you mentioned?"

"We'll let that matter ride till we're a bit better acquainted," replied Austell. "A little game may break the ice. What say?"

This time Gary did not refuse. In accepting he had in mind two purposes.

The game lasted all night. At the start the luck seemed to run against Gary. It turned in his favor, then once more ran against him. Toward the last, however—with the whisky-bottle empty at Austell's side of the table, and the burned-out lamp smoking in the gray light of daybreak—Gary's last deal was made with part of his roll staked against all of Austell's cash. Austell looked at his cards, smiled, and wrote a check equal to the amount left in Gary's roll. That had been the agreed limit of any bet. When Gary covered the bet, Austell displayed four aces. But when he reached for the stakes, Gary spread out a *royal* flush.

As Gary started to rake in the check and pile of cash, the narrowed eyes of his host glared at him through their blear.

"Drop it, tinhorn," he growled. "It's my win. You dealt *five* aces."

Gary looked back at him, not a trace of emotion in his mask-like poker face.

"You didn't see me pull anything crooked," he replied. "As for your own play, my eyes are quicker than yours. Yet I'm ready to call it a straight game, if you are. Kindly keep your hand down. Reaching for what's under your armpit might give you heart-failure. Don't tell me you're a poor loser—like your friend Royd."

Austell's uplifting hand dropped back on the table.

"Royd? What d'you know about him?"

"Little bird told me you trimmed him, and he started to pull his gat on you."

THE blue eyes blazed white-hot under the down-scowled forelock of yellow hair.

"Bird—little bird? Connie? No! You slick sneak, it was a man who sang out. It was you!"

"Glad you admit it," said Gary. "I've been waiting for you to thank me."

"Thank you? I had the drop on him. Was only waiting for him to draw."

"With his sister on her way to look in on what you'd done," put in Gary.

Again, as down at the corral, Austell's anger chilled into calculation.

"Say—what's your game? You met her on the train—led her to the store. She and Jack trailed after you to pick you up and drop you here. Hired you to get me, did he? All right, go ahead now and try it. I'll get you first. If I don't, you haven't any more show to get away than a broken-backed rattler. You can't ride. Maybe you can handle your popguns. But all that the boys need do is shy clear and use their rifles."

Gary quirked his lips.

"What's the flutter? Told you I came West for my health. I haven't the honor of being hired by the lady. Her brother thinks I'm a rabbit-hunter. Just happened I reached that store ahead of the lady, so I paged her brother for her. Got lost coming out here. Happened to wander over their way. I was down and out. They gave me a lift. That's all."

"Why'd they dump you here? Why not pack you out to the Box R?"

"The what?"

"Jack Royd's ranch—the Box R."

"Why, I gathered he's not hiring men, and the sheriff told me you are."

The crafty calculation of Austell's look hardened into decision.

"Yes, I'm looking for a man of your breed. You bragged that they call you Gary the Gat. All right, here's the proposition: You've been wised to the jam I'm in. Royd is dead set on getting me. He promised it when your paging for his sister blocked our shooting it out. If he sees me first, I decorate a coffin. If I beat him

to it, my chances with his sister are no less defunct."

"Yes?"

Austell frowned. "You're no *bobo*. How about another check, to be cashed after you've got your man? It would be double this check."

WHILE considering the proposal, Gary casually stowed in his pocket the cash and check already won.

"Well," he objected, "I see two holes in that. First place, payment might be stopped on the checks. Second place, people might ask how come you'd paid out so much to your visitor."

"Poker."

"Nobody's seen me win this, and I gather you're the classiest player in your county."

"You've said it," agreed Austell. "I'll hit for town and draw out the cash for you."

Gary raised another question: "What if I don't get my man?"

The hirer laughed. "You will if you do, and you will if you don't. Only, if you don't, you'll be out of luck. He'll get you. But if he murders a poor, sick, inoffensive dude, Lobo Leet will bring him in, dead or alive."

"In the name of the law—and your name out of it," murmured Gary. "You would stand to win, coming and going."

"What of it? Easy enough for you to collect your pay, if you're the lead-slinger you claim to be."

"Well, I'll just hold your check as an I-O-U," said Gary.

"Sure, till I bring you the cash. While you're waiting, you're to have a pony that don't even crowhop. Your play will be to drift out to the Box R because I've got sore at you for trimming me."

The clang of the breakfast gong saved Gary the need of any reply.

AT the table Austell met the furtive curiosity of his men with a clever pretense of bluffing to hide the chagrin of defeat.

"Talk about beginner's luck! This green kid happened to draw a flush and knew enough to back it with all his wad. I've got to go in for more cash. He has won himself a pony, too, with the right for Pete to hand-pick the remuda for his choice. You boys shy clear. He's my meat. When I get back, I'll trim him to a frazzle and kick what's left off the map."

Gary neither looked nor said what he felt. Even in your own crowd it is always as well to sit tight. To avoid any more talk with Austell, he cut his breakfast short and slid out. If the gang thought he had sneaked off because he feared their boss, all the better. That suited his plans.

The loss of his night's sleep, after Gentle Annie had jarred loose the wound in his lung, left him badly in need of rest. He reasoned that as it was already too late to catch the eastbound morning train, Austell would wait to go in for the night express. A day's basking on the knoll would do the sore lung a lot of good. He could sleep while getting his soak in the sun.

But hardly had he stretched out and closed his tired eyes when he heard the thud of hoofs coming up the slope. The half-broken bronco Austell had saddled rushed the knoll in a running buck. Yet a jerk on the cruel ring-bit threw him on his haunches in a slithering halt.

Certain that Austell intended to ride over him, Gary had leaped to his feet. He sidestepped to dodge the spurt of pebbles and dust shot at him by the plowing forefeet of the bronco.

"You sure can shift," admitted Austell. "I've seen a wildcat bounce slower. Yet you look like you're about all in."

"I'm still on the stretcher," said Gary. "Don't ask me to move now."

"No, you're to loaf till I return. If an eastbound freight happens along, I may get there in time to catch the night express back. In that case, you can sneak off before daybreak tomorrow morning. Easy enough to follow the Box R trail, once you strike into it."

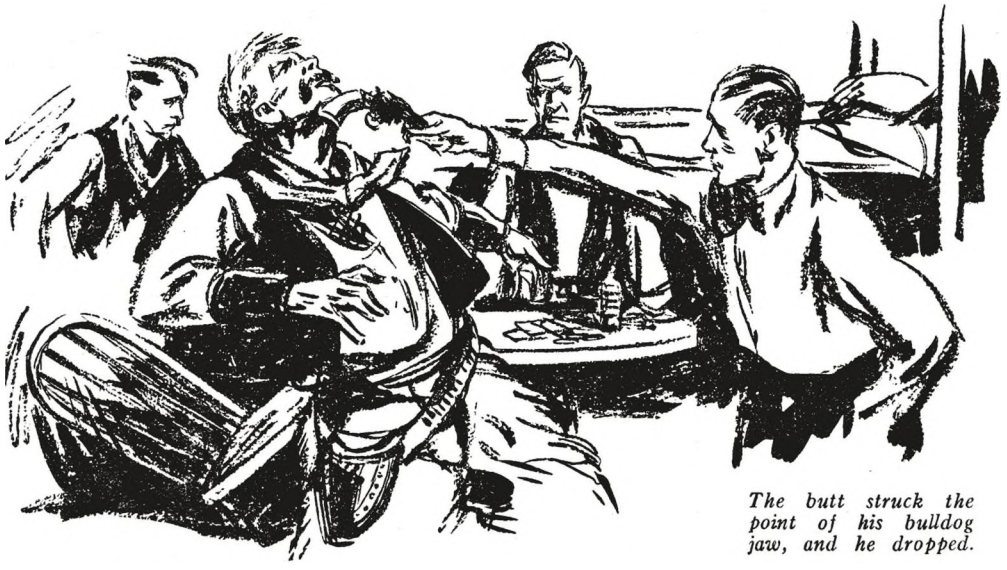
"How about the rest of the cash if I get my man?"

"Easier still. When Lobo told me his joke, I trailed you on my way out. Found where you'd cached your suitcases. After getting your man, you'll shy clear of here. The cash will be in your cache."

Gary disregarded the pun. "I might not find it."

Austell misunderstood. As a Westerner he probably took it for granted that only an idiot or a blind man could be unable to back-trail to his own cache.

"Don't fease yourself, Gat. You'll find every red cent there. If you don't, you'll be welcome to dry-gulch me. I'll do the same by you if, after you get him, you fail to take your pay and *vamose*."



The butt struck the point of his bulldog jaw, and he dropped.

"Do what?"

"Clear out—pull your freight—skip the country."

"Oh, you mean fade." Gary nodded. "You followed where I went, yet you let on you didn't believe I lost my way. If you're so good a police dog at tracking, you must have seen where I crawled toward the wrong mountain, before Miss—Mr. Royd picked me up."

"You've another guess coming, Gat. I tracked you only to where you headed for the west butte."

"I see. You knew I was a stranger. You saw I must be lost, yet you didn't look for me."

Austell smiled. "Why should I? By that time you had either hit the Box R trail, or the buzzards and coyotes had picked your bones. Let it ride. This isn't sob-stuff. Go get your man. The money will be waiting in your cache. That's straight. I'm no liar. Ask your friend Pete. He loves me like a colt loves a lobo."

WITH a smile of contempt for his city gunman tool, the handsome young cow-man spurred his bronco into a bucking run down the knoll. As soon as the dust settled, Gary stretched out to watch the horse and rider race away southwards.

He did not stir until the fast-receding horseman dipped from view around the bend of the mountain base. A side look showed him all the cowboys down at the corrals.

Gary sidled around and walked down the slope, with the house in line between him and the men. When he slipped into the mess-hall kitchen, Pete met him with a surly question:

"What's eating you now, feller? Thought you was a sun-lizard."

"It's the life," said Gary. He stepped close to the busy cook and lowered his voice. "I take it you are a friend of Miss Royd's."

Pete scowled up at him over his bottle rolling-pin.

"You're dam' right, I am, kid. Was cooking for a mine. Bunch of Mex miners caught the smallpox. I beat it in a side-door Pullman. Brakie knew the symptoms. He threw me off at the siding. Would 'a' laid there and croaked if Miss Connie hadn't happened to ride in. She borrowed a tent and took care of me till the county sent a he-nurse who'd had it."

"I knew she was the class," said Gary. "Why didn't you go to cook at her ranch?"

"Jack was sore at me 'cause of her running such a risk."

"I see. Well, you know how she dragged me from under those eagle buzz birds. Maybe we can come back at her. I'm not saying how. Only, if there's a horse you think I wont fall off, I'll try to find the road out to her house. The whole gang heard Austell say I'd won a pony from him. Sooner I start, the better. I want to fade before Austell gets back."

The cook stared straight into Gary's unwavering eyes, jerked off his flour-sack apron, and reached for his hat. Gary lay down on the rawhide cot in the porch. The experience of his walk from the railroad led him to believe he would need every

ounce of strength and endurance he could muster.

He saw Pete saddle a big black horse at the corral and ride off along the bank of the arroyo. Rather more than an hour later the cook came loping back on a smaller horse, a pinto pony fancifully blotched with white and red. He stopped at the corral to speak to the punchers, then rode the pony up to the house at a quick, smooth pace that was neither a trot nor a lope.

" 'Sall hunky," he announced. "Here's yore limousine, kid. Miss Connie can top off 'most anything on four laigs. But the boss got this gentled pinto to give her for a peace offering after she heard of him cutting the tongue out of a bronc. It's a natural singlefooter—reg'lar dude-cradle."

"Thanks," said Gary. He stepped to the right side of the pony and raised his foot to the stirrup as Pete swung off at the other side.

"Hold on," interrupted the cook. "That's Injin fashion, getting on from the off side. What's more, you aint got no chaps ner nothing. Can't let you go off without a rig. Miss Connie tol' me to see you got a square deal."

HE left the pinto standing with trailing reins and went indoors. He came out with a pair of worn chaps, a still shabbier pair of riding boots, a slicker-wrapped roll, and a canteen.

"My own pers'nal saddle and rig, what I brung here with me or bought off them lobos," he explained. "Same's that hat you loaned. I tol' the bunch you was going to practice spilling off up back of the rise. Tumble into the boots and chaps and fill your canteen while I fix you up a snack."

Gary was wabbling in the big boots beside the water-jar when Pete returned with a long package of food. He placed it in the slicker roll, which he lashed behind the cantle with the saddle-strings. After that he carefully tied the filled canteen to the saddlehorn opposite the picket rope.

"Ought to sling it over yore shoulder, case yore pony gets away from you," he said. "Figger, though, you got to ride light. Don't get off 'less you have to. If so, tie your rope to the bit and let all trail. You wouldn't savvy how to foreleg him. But he couldn't go far dragging the rope. If it's for night camp, picket him on a patch of grass."

"But I don't—"

"Sure not. You're going to hit right out to the Box R with no lay-over—not if you can help it, huh? 'S only thutty-five mile."

"Why not come along? I'm no Wild West scout. How'll I know the trail from an Indian warpath?"

Pete grinned at the joke.

"You couldn't have strayed off the Hat-on road if that mangy wolf Leet had started you out on it. The Box R road is plainer marked far's the Tonto fork. You'll hit it near the nigh side of the west butte you was heading for t'other day. Fork to the Tonto splits off beyond the butte. Take the t'other one—right hand."

Gary pulled out the roll of his own money and started to peel off tens.

"You're the goods, Pete. How much for the layout?"

Pete's eyes reddened. "You boob! It's my chip-in for *her*."

"My mistake," apologized Gary. "Should have remembered I was dealing with a gentleman. But these two tens—just hand them to Austell for my board, will you?"

"Will I!" Pete grabbed the banknotes. "Boy, they'll raise blisters on his sole-leather soul. Getting board paid him out of his own wad!"

"No, it's my roll—the one I brought from Chicago."

"Hotter still!" cried Pete. "The Hat-on taking board money off tenderfeet—Vance Austell running a dude-ranch! Wow! Wait till I peddle the news down the line. He wont never hear the last of it."

CHAPTER VII

THE pinto proved himself a perfect horse for a new rider. When, up behind the crest of the rise, Gary leaned a bit forward in the saddle as instructed by Pete, the horse quickened from his brisk walk into that curious one-two-three-four, one-two-three-four pace. It was an even smoother gait than the rocking-chair lope of Connie Royd's horse, and it covered the ground no less rapidly.

Yet he had started out in such poor shape for traveling that he began to tire before they had gone more than halfway to the west butte. Ashamed of his weakness, he set his jaw and rode on without a stop. By the time the vivid red rimrock cliffs of the butte towered high before him against the brilliant blue of the sky, he felt that a few more strides would find him

slumping clean out of the saddle. None the less he was not going to lie down on the job. And presently he caught sight of two parallel tracks in the valley just below.

A word sent the pinto single-footing north. The wagon-trail gave easier riding than his route across country from the Hat-on. It curved around the east side of the butte on a course that avoided all sharp climbs and struck gulleys at easy crossings. The mountain gradually swung around back of Gary's left shoulder.

He looked keenly for the fork in the trail that split off to the Tonto—whatever that might be. Pete said he would find the fork north of the butte; and yet mile after mile passed without any sign of a branch from the trail. He had begun to fear he had already ridden past the place when a slight movement of the horse brought his glance upward. The pinto was looking toward the rise ahead, his ears pricked forward. Little as Gary knew about horses, he guessed that the pinto had seen or heard something alive up the trail.

He rose in his stirrups and caught sight of a small moving object above the crest of the rise, and a moment later he saw a driver and the upper part of four horses and the tarpaulin-covered top of a high-loaded wagon. Good luck! This truck probably was from the Tonto. At any rate, the driver would know where the Box R trail forked off.

GARY rode forward. The horses and wagon rounded into full view over the rise. Behind them he saw the head and shoulders of another man, then the heads of several horses. The man was on horseback and driving a horse herd—what the Hat-on punchers called a *remuda*.

"Hello, cowboy!" the girl bantered. "If Austell has forced you to start range-riding already—"

Something about the wagon-driver appeared familiar. Gary peered hard. It was not a man. It was— She lifted her hand above her head in greeting him. Yes, it was the girl—Miss Royd herself!

When he came close, he saw her pull at the reins of the four horses and shove her little foot against what looked like a long-armed brake-pedal. The wagon squeaked to a stop. A moment later he had halted the pinto beside the front wheel and pulled off his limp old sombrero.

"Hello, cowboy," the girl bantered. Then her smile sobered into concern. "You locoed tenderfoot! You ought to be flat on your back, loafing. This is no way to get well. If Vance Austell has forced you to start range-riding already—"

"No, not—not range-riding, Miss Royd. He—" Gary found his cracked lips oddly stiff. "Pete—y'see, Pete helped me make my get-away."

"Oh, then it's true. Vance hadn't the decency to allow a sick visitor ordinary hospitality!"

Jack Royd spurred his horse forward from the rear of the wagon.

"What's that?" he demanded. Then he saw Gary's face. His own face reddened under its dark tan. "You? Git, you! No skunk of Austell's gang can talk to my sister."

"But I'm not working for Austell."

"Needn't try to lie out of it. You're riding a Hat-on horse."

"Not now," replied Gary. "It's mine. Ask Pete. He picked it out for me. He said it's the one Austell bought to give to Miss Royd. It rides like balloon tires."

"Then Pete saw that you had a square deal," said Connie. "You need an easy horse. Only I'm sorry it means you're as bad as Jack. If Vance bought this horse to give to me, he never would have sold it to anyone. You must have won it from him at poker."

This brought a quirk to Gary's lips.

"Maybe I'm as bad a player as your brother. I knew enough, though, to push the bottle back to Austell's end of the table."

Jack frowned. "Meaning I'm a fool."

"Yes. You fogged your own eyes with the whisky." Gary unpocketed the roll of bank-notes he had won and held them out. "Here's as much of what you dropped as I could collect from him in cash."

"Chuck it," growled Jack. "What a man loses he loses. If you think I'll do the baby act, you've another guess coming."

"My other guess is that the whisky is still fogging your sight. You don't owe what you lose to a tinhorn."

"Tinhorn? Vance Austell? He'd bite your head off for that; he'd take you all apart."

"Would have tried it at the end of our game if he hadn't lacked the nerve," said Gary. "I played it straight till the second time I saw him slip a card from his sleeve."

Jack's eyes widened with amazement.

"He what? Him? Vance Austell? You're lying—you must be! He's a devil—a wolf; but he's no tinhorn."

"Yes?" said Gary. "Well, where I came from, one such card may pass as an accident. The second one calls for action."

"Oh-h!"murmured Connie. "Then you—you shot him!"

"Not him, Miss Royd, only his roll. Would have cleaned him the way he trimmed your brother, only he's a piker as well as a crook. He wouldn't stake any part of his ranch. His limit was his cash on hand and a check to match my own roll. I fed him three aces. He drew another. But I raked in the stakes with a royal flush."

This was beyond Connie. But her brother was quick to see the point. His scowl came back.

"Stacked the cards on him! You own up to it, yet ask me to dirty my hands with the proceeds! It'll take more than the word of a self-confessed card-stacker to make me believe Vance Austell tinhorned me. Roll along, Connie."

But Connie kept her foot on the brake.

"Wait a minute, Jack. If this man is crooked, why should he come to give you the money he won from Vance?"

"That's easy. He's afraid Vance'll get onto his stacking the cards. Figures on bribing me to hold Vance off him. Counts on my being sore over losing the ranch. Why, it's dollars to doughnuts he's a hawse-thief atop his tinhorning. This pinto's brand isn't vented."

GARY didn't know the enormity of being called a horse-thief. He disregarded the accusation and stuck to the main issue.

"Count me out if you want to, Miss Royd. What's the difference about me? All I'm driving at is that your brother didn't lose this roll, and he didn't lose his cattle or his water-hole. Austell framed him—played a crooked game—stacked the cards on him. That was the same as buncoing him or picking his pocket."

Connie put in ahead of her brother's heightened anger:

"No, wait, Jack. Why should he lie to us? He's trying to be grateful. About this pinto, the lack of venting proves only what a tenderfoot he is. Besides, he refers us to Pete."

"Yes, Miss Royd. Pete rode away to where they'd taken most of their horses, and he chose this one for me. Austell had told him to do it."

"That sounds as fishy as the rest," scoffed Jack.

His sister came back at him shrewdly:

"Just because it doesn't sound like Vance, is what tells me the boy isn't trying to make up a smooth story. He owned up straight out about the way he beat Vance. I don't like his cheating, even if he did it for you. But it proves he's telling us the truth. Vance doesn't always do that. You've admitted he lied to me about the bronco he tortured. He's bad. You know he's bad, Jack. You know he cheated you out of the cows and water-hole. He didn't

play fair. This boy is right. Vance the same as stole them from you. What more proof do you ask than that he let the boy get away with what you call stacking the cards? If that hadn't trapped him in his own crooked playing, he'd never have given up the stakes."

The arguments at last broke through Jack's rather dense-headed stubbornness.

"By godfrey! I'll go and kick in Vance's slats! The son of a—"

"No," differed Connie. She threw off the brake and started to swing the four-horse team around sidewise.

"Whoa there," ordered Jack. "What d'you think you're doing?"

"Going back to the ranch."

"What's the use? Even if Vance did gyp me, he's got me hog-tied with my bill-of-sale and the contract to deed the hole."

"They don't bind you," replied Connie. "He paid you nothing. Remember how he beat Tonto Drake on that steer deal? It's not a debt of honor, either, when he cheated."

"But he must have put the papers on record, the moment he hit town. You know I haven't a cent left to fight a law-suit. Couldn't have paid off the boys if they hadn't taken their wages in ponies."

Connie smiled and flicked the lash of the blacksnake wagon whip.

"How about Dad's old saying that possession is nine points of the law?"

AT last she had struck fire. Jack's sullen eyes flamed. "By jakes, possession and a gun used to be all ten points! I'll make it that now. You'll haul the outfit back to the ranch, then *vamose pronto*."

"But you can't swing it single-handed, Jack."

"Mebbe so, mebbe no. Leastways I'll give Vance and his bunch a run for their money."

Gary held out again the roll of bank-notes. "You spoke of paying off your men, Mr. Royd. How about taking this money of yours and hiring them again?"

"No," refused the stubborn Westerner. "Two crooked deals don't make a square game. Keep your dirty winnings."

"Excuse me, Mr. Royd," said Gary. "Your sister saved me from the buzz birds. Because of her, I've taken what you've handed me before, and I'm taking this last of your compliments. But I'm not taking this money. It's not mine. So, as you say it's not yours—"

He tossed the roll down into the dust of the trail. Jack scowled, unable to figure out how to meet the unexpected come-back. Connie deliberately set the wagon-brake, tied the reins to it, and swung down to pick the crumpled bills out of the dust.

"Drop 'em!" blustered her brother. "I'll fire any rider hired with that money."

"Don't be silly, Jack," returned the girl. "If you shoot a gunman who has shot at you, it's self-defense, isn't it? Vance pulled a trick on this boy, and all he did was pull one in return."

Jack opened his mouth to growl a rejoinder—and thought better of it. Gary gave the girl a grateful smile.

"That's a life-saver, Miss Royd. You believe I wouldn't have stacked the cards except to do what I said. Only thing left —I'd like you to get your brother's permission for me to help him stand off Austell's gang."

"What's the idea?" ungraciously demanded Jack. "You heard me say I'm flat broke. Anyhow, what good would a green dude do me in a gun-fight?"

Gary showed the hilts of his two automatics. "I was rated good enough to bluff more than one gang. I'm strong for your law—all ten points of it."

"Why?"

Gary looked at the expectant face of the girl and uneasily dropped his gaze. If he insisted on the gratitude stuff they might take him for a sob sister.

"Well—" He hesitated. "For one thing, I don't like Austell and I don't like his gang. They put me on a horse they called Gentle Annie."

"They did?" cried Connie. "And Vance let them! No wonder you look almost as sick as when we left you with Pete!"

Jack reined his horse closer and held out his hand to Gary.

"Put it there, buddy. I back up. Connie sized up Vance. If she says you'll do to take along, it's a go. She's no fool."

Gary took this without even a quirk of his lips. But he met the crushing grip of Jack's powerful hand with a deft twist and squeeze of his wiry fingers that left the bigger hand tingling.

"Speed against weight," he answered the look of astonished inquiry in the young cow-man's eyes.

And now come even more exciting episodes in the tumultuous career of Go-getter Gary. Be sure to read of them in the next, the October issue.

Five Years After

By

H. BEDFORD-JONES

"Who makes such charges? This clumsy would-be spy?"

"I HAVE been asked to take on a hard job—never mind who asked me," said Clancy. "It deals with sugar, jewels and a dancer."

"Excellent," I commented.

"And Deauville," he added. "Steam yacht *Enella,* two thousand tons, cleared last night from Guernsey for Deauville-Trouville. Owner aboard—Jaime Caigen, the Cuban sugar magnate, with money enough to sink the yacht. He'll lie up by the lower bridge on the Deauville side."

"Fine!" I said. "Paris in July is mostly Cookies and Londoners. What's the answer?"

Clancy—Peter J. Clancy, D.D.S.—did not reply at once. We sat in his surgery, after business hours, with a drink between us. Clancy was not distinguished in looks; with his gray imperial, his rusty black garb, and his careless appearance, he looked like a Frenchman. He had lived in Paris for years, and official Paris was extremely alive to his detective ability if not to his dentistry. I liked being his assistant—it was better than the newspaper game, both for rewards and excitement.

"From Deauville," he said at length, "the worthy Señor Don Jaime Caigen goes in his yacht to New York."

"And you'll depute me to go with him, maybe?" I asked hopefully. Clancy did not rise to the bait, however.

"He has other company," he responded. "The dancer, La Violette."

I whistled at this. "All plums fall to the rich! But they wont let him land at New York in such company. You must remember we're proudly virtuous in America—vice is only approved if unseen—"

"Don't be a fool," snapped Clancy. "Caigen's wife is aboard, and there's nothing wrong in the trip at all—except that La Violette takes her jewels with her."

EVERYBODY in Paris knew of La Violette. She had become famous partly by her dancing, partly by her jewels. She had three costumes, whose value was estimated at two million dollars, being chiefly jewels. The dazzling display of this wealth had headlined her. Originally the jewels had been hired, but by degrees La Violette had bought them in, so now she was the most expensive proposition on the Paris stage or any other. Her dancing had become top-notch also, and she was a big drawing-card.

"Then Caigen pays her entry and the duty?" I said. "Or the jewels will be allowed in as stage property. She'll be going temporarily?"

"Permanently, or at least for some years," said Clancy vaguely. "She has long-time contracts. No, Caigen wont pay any duty. It's been given out already that

Detective Clancy's assistant Jim Logan undertakes a dangerous job in this captivating story by the distinguished author of "Rodomont," "The Wilderness Trail," "The Second Life of Monsieur the Devil" and many another well-remembered tale.

Illustrated by O. E. Hake

she is taking paste copies of her stones. That looks fishy. She may hire stones to make up her costume, in New York—but think of the cost! And think of the woman touring the whole country, in these days of banditry and crime! Man, it's absurd. She'll dance in her own jewels in New York, and the other big cities."

"Oh!" I exclaimed. "Twenty-five per cent of the value of Customs fines goes to the informer—so you figure on making some money, do you?"

"Will you let me talk, or wont you?" demanded Clancy, his bright gray eyes probing into me with a touch of impatience.

"Go ahead. Hollow boot-heels and the rest—"

"And umbrella-handles, and all the rest of the bag of tricks you read about in novels," he said with a sniff. "Jim Logan, at times you're so obvious I wonder you don't get up and throw stones at yourself! You know as well as I do that Caigen's yacht will be gone over with fine-tooth combs. No, there's apt to be more in it."

"What, then, if you know?" I said.

"If I knew," he retorted, "I'd not be discussing it with you. I'd be drawing up a report for my employers. Now, La Violette goes to Deauville to do three shows at the Casino there, after which she goes aboard the *Enella* and across the big ditch. The rest is up to you."

"Thanks," I returned ironically. "You want me to run the show on my own?"

"Do I ever ask you to run a show on your own?"

"Nominate the facts, then," I said, and leaned back. Clancy was a difficult person to force into any definite statements of his intent. Just now he seemed unusually nervous and irritable, so I judged the affair might prove even larger than it looked. Rather, it might prove otherwise than it look. Clancy's cases were not all on the surface by a good deal!

"You're a good prober, Logan," he said thoughtfully. "Suppose you make inquiries at this end, and then take a run down to Deauville. It's an expensive place at the height of the season—here's ten thousand francs, and a check for another ten if you need it. There should be money in this if we win."

"A big *if*," I said, tucking away the money. "With liners leaving Havre and Cherbourg every day, sometimes two or three a day—"

"Leave your pessimism at home," he broke in. "La Violette appears at Deauville day after tomorrow, so you've no time to lose."

I nodded and started to leave, when he called me back.

"Hold on. There are differences in this. It's not like our other cases."

"Yes?"

"So far, we've been catching 'em after the act," he went on, "but now we must stop 'em from doing it. We must either stop 'em at this side, or else be able to cable definitely to New York and have them stopped there."

"Just as easy as some of our other cases," I said. "Such, for example, as the trail of the harp-string and the dead Algerian."

Clancy grinned. I had put it over on him in that case.

"The point is, Don Jaime Caigen is only

sugar, but proud—inordinately proud. He's half Spaniard and half French, and has lived here for years. Now, the dancer is like many of her kind, out of the gutter. While Don Jaime might take her out to supper, it's odd that he should take her to New York on his yacht, together with his family."

"Oh!" I said. "Then there's pressure somewhere."

Clancy shrugged. "I didn't say so. Report to me when you find something worth while. If you don't find me, I'll find you. Good luck!"

I NOSED along the grand boulevards, in quest of information, and headed up Montmartre way. It was the *apéritif* hour, but I drew blanks everywhere until at length, sitting outside the Café Madrid, I found the very man—Stock, a newspaper syndicate man who gave special attention to theatricals. A *consommation* of lurid color was in front of him, and pushing out the other chair at his tiny table, he invited me to have one.

"No, thanks, George," I responded. "Brown beer is enough for me—I'm drinking, not painting my insides. And I want information about La Violette."

"Her mother keeps a little *charcuterie* in Passy," complied Stock. "La Violette, whose real name is Gauffret, makes the old lady an allowance on condition she keeps away—that's characteristic. There was a sister, some time ago, a twin sister. La Violette got her a start in some Montmartre cabaret, but she disappeared. Let's see—what was it, a murder? No—she simply dropped out of sight with a man—ah, I remember now! Mimi Gauffret was the lady in the red dress. She had supper one night at the Wooden Flute with some man. After supper she went off with him. Two days later she was found in the Seine, down by St. Cloud. The red dress had caught on a post, and she had been dead two days. So that's that."

"And the man?" I queried. Stock shrugged.

"Paris is Paris. There's a taxi-driver somewhere who's retired and living a life of ease, simply for keeping his mouth shut. Find him if you want the rest of the story—the police failed, as I remember. All this was quite some time back. However, all this deals with the sister, not with La Violette."

"And what about her?"

"A genius, not a woman. Hard as iron, out for fame and money—that's all. Going on tour in the U. S. A., I hear, with a big contract. You can know she's straight enough when Caigen, the sugar magnate, takes her over on his yacht, in company with his wife."

"Why does he, then?"

"He's an eccentric. It may be sheer bravado, may be anything at all. Perhaps a press-agent stunt for the lady, to suggest to the folks at home that she's somewhat off color—you know how this sort of stuff is pulled. Well, that about pumps me dry, Logan. What the devil are you doing in Paris at the end of July? Everybody's gone."

"I may run down to Deauville," I said.

"Worse yet," was his cynical response. "Nothing there but press-agent stuff for the Casino and the usual rot to draw tourists. They run the game well there, I must admit—but you know what the better class French think of the place. Trouville is far and away ahead of the so-called fashion resort."

I nodded. "Still, it has a glitter, and people like glitter! I may meet up with some folks there, too—hard to say."

"If you want a look at the inside," suggested Stock, producing a card-case, "take along one of my cards. I've done a lot of free publicity stuff for them, and they'll treat you right. La Violette's doing a turn there the end of the week, too."

"Right—and many thanks."

DEAUVILLE in midsummer! Fashion and folly, a crowded sea-front, the boardwalk alive with mannequins and tourists, and the Casino a blaze of life and color from mid-afternoon to early morning! And just across the little river the second of the twin cities, Trouville, catering to the cheaper crowd of tourists and resorters.

Domiciled at one of the less expensive Trouville hotels, I sauntered down to the river, took the little ferry-skiff flying across, and went on to the basins where the yachts lay tied up. It was no hard matter to pick out the Caigen yacht, and I was soon looking down at her from the pier-side. She was considerably larger than the others, yet this light-draught pleasure toy seemed singularly unfit for a transatlantic voyage, even at this time of year.

The *Enella* lay against a barge, across whose deck had been laid a gangway to the

"Antics!" he muttered contemptuously. "She won't want to caper when we get to sea."

wharf. I lighted a cigarette and loafed. Her decks were deserted save for two trimly uniformed men at work forward; no doubt, at this late afternoon hour, the owner and friends were all up at the Casino.

Presently a man came from the forward companionway and started for the wharf. He was a perfect glory of gold lace and bright blue uniform, a stage officer if ever there was one. As he reached the wharf, he gave me a sharp look, and I accosted him in my none too fluent French.

"Pardon, M. le Capitaine, but have you the exact time?"

He had, on the face of a dainty gold wrist-watch. I offered him a cigar, and he took it in a mingling of surprise and suspicion. Then I flashed Stock's card on him, and it was plain he could read English, for he looked impressed.

"If you are free," I suggested, "suppose we have a drink together? I am alone and only arrived in Deauville today. You might give me some pointers about the place—"

He was a weak and ladylike sort of man, extremely flattered by being taken for the yacht's captain, and assented laughingly to my proposal. I confided to him that I really sought to write a story for my newspapers about his boat, and hinted that a photograph of him might go very well with the story. So it all went off excellently. We strolled away together, he trading his poor English for my poor French.

We headed along the streets leading to the Casino, and dropped in at a very decent little café where we could get a table to ourselves. When I ordered a bottle of Saumur, he gave me a decided wink of appreciation.

"But on your vessel," I said carelessly, "champagne must flow like water."

He grimaced at this.

"Those who have money, have it because they spend little," he stated, not so enigmatically as might appear. "The accounts are carefully attended to. I see little champagne, me!"

The bottle came, and we clicked our glasses in the approved local fashion.

"So you are on leave today, M. le Capitaine?"

"For the remainder of the day." He puffed himself out a bit. "I am not the captain, m'sieur, but am of even more importance, since we spend more time in harbors than at sea. I am the head steward."

So I had judged, indeed. We emptied our glasses and refilled, over small talk of winnings at the Casino and famous characters there—infamous, would be nearer the truth.

"You see a good deal of M. Caigen and his guests?" I asked presently.

He shrugged. "I see what I see, m'sieur," he responded coolly.

"Not for the world would I abuse your confidence," I said unctuously. "We are men of the world, you and I—men of the world, eh? Come! I give you my word that not a line of what you tell me shall appear in print without your consent!"

"But there is nothing to tell," he rejoined with a Gallic gesture.

Our bottle being emptied, we went on to a second.

"Nothing," I corrected, "which might seem important to you, yet none the less it might give me a story for my journal. Your work—it is well paid, eh?"

"Bah! Our owner might reckon his francs by the thousand rather than by the million, so careful is he of them," rejoined my steward, disgust in his mien. "Look you, m'sieur! I was in the Messagéries Maritimes before this, and the pay was better and the food as good, while the *pourboires* there would frighten the guests of this Cuban! He likes the artistic, and with them is no money at all. Why, from Guernsey came over with us the virtuoso of the piano, Krilensky, and went ashore today to stop at a small hotel. And what do you think he gives me, me?"

I confessed ignorance and filled his glass anew. Obviously my friend was one of these thrifty French who love money hard.

"Five hundred francs, perhaps?" I said.

"Thirty francs!" said the steward explosively, and went into heartfelt oaths. "Name of the little black one! I was minded to hand it back to him, but did not. Yes, my place is well paid—very well paid! And now, while I am on leave ashore, I must run errands too."

"That's hard luck," I commiserated.

"Impossible errands, at that," he went on, warming to his self-pity. "Yes, impossible! Here in Deauville, at the height of the season, I am to hire two men to assist at dinner and supper parties on the yacht, since La Violette is coming, and the Cuban pig wishes to do her honor, gutterslut that she is! He thinks I'll get his two men for fifty francs a night, here in Deauville, at this time of year. Can you imagine such ignorance?"

GOOD! My hunch had paid out well. I took a bank-note from my pocket and smoothed it out on the table. It was a nice new purple-lavender note for a thousand francs. I studied its design, and the steward regarded it greedily.

"Such a thing as this, now—it's nothing to you," I said.

"The jest is a poor one, m'sieur," he replied sourly.

"Suppose you employed me as one of your two men?" I said. "You would get this note, and might also keep the fifty francs a night."

His eyes began to widen, and I took the opportunity to refill the glasses. He shook his head, but as I began to put away the note, the motion slowed down. I hesitated.

"Why not?" I said. "Perhaps I'm not a good waiter, but I'm as good as any you'll find here, and you know it. Under your tuition I can soon learn."

"But—but m'sieur is of the press!" he ejaculated. "Why, M. Stock?"

I hoped he had forgotten the name on the card, but he was a sharp one.

"Why?" I repeated. "You have already said it. La Violette! Think what a story I could write for my paper, eh? One who has studied her at first-hand, who has seen her eating and drinking, heard her conversation!"

"Ah!" he murmured, with a nod of comprehension. "Yet—it will cost me my place!"

"No, for before the story is printed, you shall see it and change anything which might hurt you. Yet how could it be traced back to you? It would be for the papers in America, you know, and La Violette will be only too glad to have it printed. Over there they do not sell their space to any who come. Besides, you will give me another name—"

"True, true," he muttered, his eyes straining after the slowly disappearing note. "And the fifty francs a night is something—"

"In your pocket," I finished. "My name would be, let us say, Logan! I am a waiter from Delmonico's in New York—now, alas, no more! You found me hunting work here, and engaged me. *Voilà!* What do you say?"

He gulped and held out his hand. "You are engaged, M. Logan."

It was amusing to see him stuff that note into his pocket as though fearing I would change my mind about it. I demanded to know when my work would begin, and where I would sleep.

"You sleep ashore. M. Caigen gives a

dinner at Ciro's tonight. Suppose you report aboard tomorrow morning at eleven. Over the lunch-table you will learn much, in readiness for the dinner of tomorrow night. There will be twenty guests, and you must be dexterous, for the saloon is small for such a party. Afterward there will be dancing, until they go to baccarat at the Casino about midnight."

I nodded cheerful agreement. Jacquot, as my man was named, and I bade each other an affectionate farewell, both of us highly satisfied with the afternoon's work.

PROMPTLY at eleven in the morning I showed up aboard the yacht.

The chief steward met me—and as I anticipated, he had been unable to find his other man. Therefore he was intending to put me on the regular service, being short-handed, and this suited me exactly. He drilled me assiduously, and about twelve appeared the Caigens.

They were a middle-aged, comfortable pair, as incapable of smuggling jewels as a pair of babies. The lady was heavy and begemmed, a Frenchwoman. Caigen himself was swarthy and bearded, handsome in a sultry way, rather unintelligent, and apparently devoted to the business of enjoying life and luxury. He wanted to know about me, but just then another steward announced M. Krilensky and M. Gervase Krilensky, the first of the luncheon guests, and I was immediately forgotten by the millionaire.

The great Krilensky was a nervous, delicate type, with waxen face, protruding and queer-looking eyes, and coal-black hair and imperial. Brother Gervase looked very different—was heavily whiskered, lacked all delicacy of appearance, and his shifty gray eyes wandered everywhere. Caigen welcomed them cordially, and was exchanging a few words when two ladies arrived, a Madame Latour and Mlle. Richepin. After these, I lost track of names, though five others in all came along.

Caigen was furtively inspecting his watch, and Jacquot was cursing. Cocktails were served in American fashion—in the luxuriously furnished lounge leading into the dining-saloon. I handed them about, and noted that Krilensky helped himself to two, while brother Gervase, to whom I took active dislike, scarce finished his one. There was general chatter, mention of the yacht's coming voyage—nothing worth hearing. And then, La Violette!

SHE came suddenly, without heralding, and alone—theatrical as always. She was in upon us abruptly, and the reality was far more gorgeous than anything I had expected, since the gods had given her beauty and grace. This woman with the magnificent sad eyes—who would have guessed her as the gutter girl who had once played in the mean back streets of Passy?

When the general acclaim of greeting had subsided, Madame Caigen welcomed her, almost too effusively, I thought, and presented her to Madame Latour, the only one of the party she did not know already. The great dancer refusing a cocktail, Jacquot announced luncheon as served, and all adjourned to the dining-saloon.

Here I discovered that a *garçon's* lot is not a happy one. It was less the serving than the watching, and the making sure nobody lacked for anything. A luncheon-table looks different from the waiter's viewpoint. I flattered myself that I got through very well, but Madame Caigen's vigilant eye missed nothing, and she remarked my clumsiness to Krilensky, her neighbor.

"Such a nuisance!" she exclaimed. "Our second steward—you remember Jules?—left us suddenly, and we are compelled to bring in occasional help. And Deauville is so difficult these days! Servants are not what they used to be."

I was offering a dish to Brother Gervase, next whom sat La Violette. Caigen paid her some compliment, and she laughed, touching Krilensky, on her other side.

"Yes, and I have achieved a miracle—the inseparables are separated! Never was such devotion as between these brothers."

"But every genius," put in Gervase Krilensky vulgarly, "must have his financial attendant—or should I say, his attendant financier? Last night, for example—how many thousand was it, Otto?"

"You lost more than I did," said the great pianist sulkily, quite feeling the ill-taste of his brother. Caigen jumped in and turned the trend of talk very deftly.

I watched the two brothers, feeling love lost between them so far as the genius was concerned. Gervase, more of a brute, concealed his feelings by his jocular air. Then my attention was turned. It seemed that Mademoiselle Richepin was regretting not being of the party aboard the yacht; she and her mother, Mme. Latour, were sailing on the *Leviathan* a day after the yacht left Deauville, so she would precede them to New York by a few days.

My ears cocked at this, but it was the only thing of seeming importance I could pick up, and presently the meal was over. In the smaller saloon the party lazied along over their coffee, until Krilensky went to the piano and played for La Violette to dance.

It was only a slight little performance —a wild, sad Tzigane melody. With her great somber eyes and her lithe grace, the dancer interpreted it marvelously. I found Jacquot jabbing his elbow into my side.

"Antics!" he muttered contemptuously. "She wont want to caper when we get to sea—"

Brother Gervase and the dancer fell into talk, voices low, faces close together, while the great Krilensky gloomed at them and ruffled his long hair. Half an hour afterward they all trooped ashore and were gone, and Jacquot dismissed me until later in the afternoon.

I WENT back to my hotel—a small place, where I had secured a top-floor room overlooking the street. As it chanced, the local branch of the Crédit Générale was just opposite. I drew my table to the window, opened it, and sat there writing out my report to Clancy. The possible relation between Madame Latour and her daughter, and La Violette, was the only item of much interest. I was addressing the envelope, when glancing down into the street I chanced to see the broad, powerful figure of Gervase Krilensky turning into the bank. Probably after money with which to play against his losses of the preceding night at the Casino, I thought.

Going downstairs, I bought a few stamps at the hotel office, and then, standing in the entrance, stamped my letter to Clancy. As I did so, Gervase Krilensky came from the bank opposite and crossed straight to me with the evident intention of accosting me. When he spoke, it was with astonishing fierceness.

"Cochon!" he exclaimed abruptly. "Pig that you are! Why do you spy upon me? I saw you at the window—"

This was my first intimation that he had even observed my existence, and the attack was so amazing I had no ready response. Then I laughed.

"Spy on you?" I said. "By no means. If I wanted to spy on anyone, I'd pick on a man and not a parasite."

Curious, how the shot went home! His mouth opened, and he stared as though I had struck him. Then, without another word, he turned away and went striding up the street.

The incident was odd, and yet it warned me I must have been observed aboard the yacht. It puzzled me, naturally. I could only conclude that Brother Gervase did not have any too sound a conscience, and must have been in fear of spies. However, it was of no great importance, unless it brought about my discharge from the yacht, so I dismissed it with a shrug.

Contrary to my fears, by evening the man appeared to have forgotten all about me. They made it a cross between supper and dinner on the yacht, for La Violette had her engagement at the Casino for the evening, and Caigen was to entertain her afterward. The night hours were crowded until dawn at Deauville.

The twenty guests arrived, and after her habit, La Violette burst upon them when all the others were assembled and waiting. Now she wore, beneath her wrap, one of her three marvelous costumes—the most decorous of the three, glittering with rare jewels, though off the stage it verged on indecency. Not on her, though, with those great dark eyes and the air of utter unconcern.

This girl of the gutter carried herself with singular dignity and presence, and exercised an obvious attraction on all the men present, with the sole exception of the great Krilensky. Though Brother Gervase was more her slave than any of them, the famous pianist seemed to shun her, or to be indifferent—it was hard to say which.

JIM LOGAN had his hands full this evening, and Jacquot set him to passing in dishes from the kitchen, taking over the serving himself. The party went up to the boat deck for coffee, and after a time I noticed Gervase Krilensky get La Violette off to himself, up in the shadow of the port lifeboat.

Well, I managed it, though I'm not proud of the part I was playing. Clancy's work had not previously called for this sort of task, and I was beginning to realize the distaste of it. I was no better than a spy, and the nobility of my cause made no appeal whatever, but as I had to see it through, I swallowed my feelings and went ahead. Inside of five minutes I was well placed—the precious pair were so anxious to get out of sight that they themselves had no sight of the deck around.

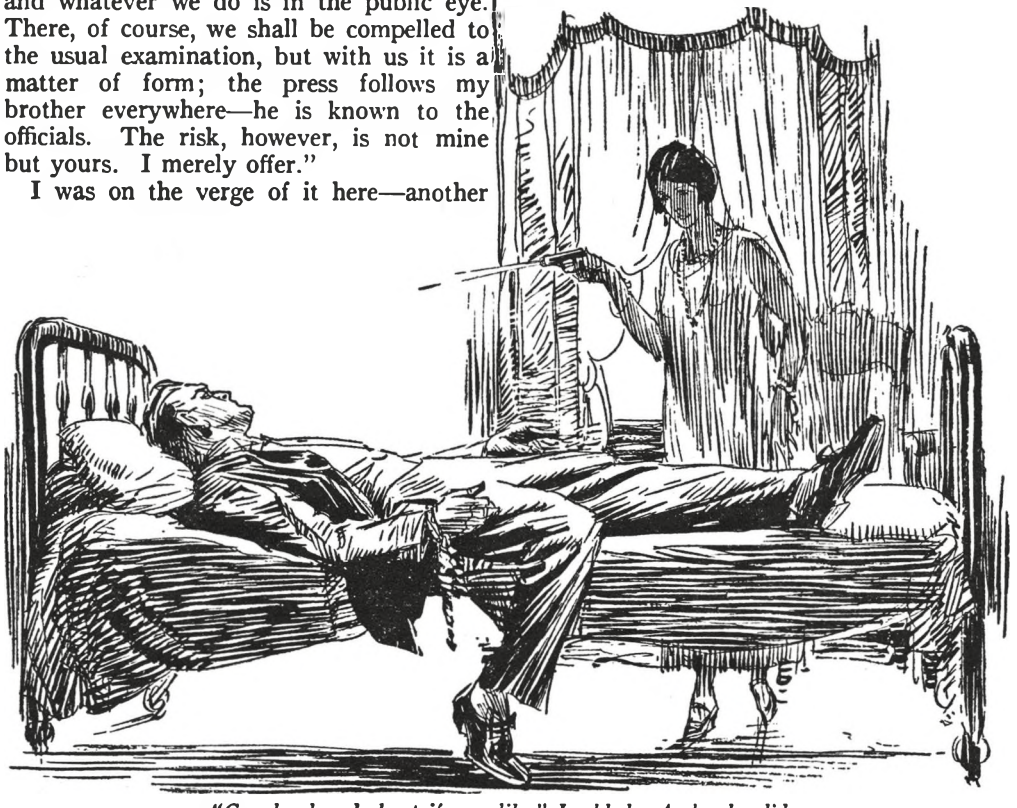
The voice of Brother Gervase reached me first.

"As you will, my dear lady! It is for you to decide."

"It might prove too great a temptation," she responded half-mockingly.

"That too is for you to decide," he made answer. "For an unknown man, yes! But my brother and I, we are public characters, and whatever we do is in the public eye. There, of course, we shall be compelled to the usual examination, but with us it is a matter of form; the press follows my brother everywhere—he is known to the officials. The risk, however, is not mine but yours. I merely offer."

I was on the verge of it here—another



"Go ahead and shoot if you like," I added. And—she did.

five minutes and they would be in my hands, with full information! And just then Caigen saw me, and called to me for more coffee. And that ended it so far as eavesdropping on the pair was concerned, for they soon returned to the others.

I silently cursed.

BROTHER GERVASE was a rude beast. Just before the party broke up, he was talking to his host in regard to his famous brother's health.

"He has not been himself for some time, yes," he went on. "As a public figure he cannot be too careful; so I have made him see a specialist."

"And the result?" asked Caigen.

"Ah! It will appear in the papers to-morrow," said Gervase with cool effrontery. An almost unbelievable bit of rudeness, yet typical of the fellow. Caigen turned to La Violette and asked if she intended to play at the Casino that night.

"I stake five thousand francs each night," she rejoined. "If it is lost, it goes. If I win, I play longer. And now we had better be going, my friend—"

I knew where her five thousand came from each night—not from her own pocket-book, by a long shot. The Casino was a wonder at getting free publicity. Half the actresses of Paris are brought down and staked to enormous losses, and naturally the crowd flocks to the baccarat rooms.

So the party broke up, taxicabs were summoned, and presently all were off to the glittering lights. Jacquot expected me to stay and help him clear up, but I laughed at him. I was free until dinner the next day, and had no intentions of being a slave.

"No, no, earn your thousand francs, my Jacquot," I told him, and ducked for my hotel to change into an evening waistcoat, white tie and coat. The baccarat rooms at

the Casino liked formal dress, although anything went in the outer rooms.

As I changed, and then sought a taxi to get me over to Deauville, I was a prey to mixed feelings. This dinner-party had left a bad taste in my mouth—hard to explain. Behind all the clash of odd characters I could sense something going on, as though these people were playing some queer hidden drama.

It was unnatural. Most wealthy men are outstanding in character or personality, yet the handsome Caigen had little, and his wife was colorless as himself. The delicate Krilensky and his brute of a brother presented a strong contrast. Madame Latour and her daughter, Mlle. Richepin, were quiet, cultured women, both enigmas. Against them all as against a neutral background stood the flaming La Violette. It was all very odd, and at the moment inexplicable.

THE Deauville Casino was much like others of its kind, scattered all along the coast. The immense auditorium was crammed with little tables, where four prices were asked and obtained for drinks; a little stage was at the front, and at the rear were the *boule* tables—a variant of the illegal roulette, with the odds well in favor of the house. The baccarat-rooms were set apart, with a higher charge of admission, and here gathered all the fashionables, well away from the common herd. Caigen's party, I knew, would be there after the dancing.

My delay in changing clothes made me miss the performance of La Violette, for the hour was already late. When I came up the stairs to the vast hall, it was abuzz with voices and well filled, crowds three deep around the *boule* tables in the rear, and a cabaret performance taking place on the stage. As I walked along the corridor under the arches toward the rear, I came to a sudden halt and slipped in beside a pillar. There at the back, by the railing, were La Violette and Brother Gervase at a corner table.

A gauzy wrap flung over her famous costume, the dancer passed almost unnoticed amid the throng—there were plenty of others with more daring lack of dress all around. The pair were holding a serious confab, and were paying no heed to anything around. Thus, when a table was vacated close by, I slipped forward and secured it, sitting half toward them.

Neither of them glanced at me. I saw Gervase following some woman with his eyes, in the way he might be expected to do, and looked—it was Mademoiselle Richepin. He rose, said a word and then made for the girl. Both of them disappeared in the corridor to the rear, leading to the baccarat-rooms and the dining-rooms and the garden terraces.

La Violette appeared quite careless over the desertion, and sat idly fanning herself. She did not seem very joyous, but looked thoughtful and rather fatigued. Now, I have been a fool more than once in my life, but never more than at this moment, for I acted purely on impulse, without stopping to think. Rising, I came to her table, bowed to her, and laid Stock's card before her. She glanced at it, lifted her brows, shrugged, and with her fan gestured to the seat Brother Gervase had vacated.

"It is Fate," she observed. "I am never to rest from the press, eh?"

I sat down. The waiter came, and she ordered a chartreuse for me.

"You will drink with me, m'sieur," she said, to my protest. "I am tired of the party, tired of everything. When one is bored, one seeks a change. Come, tell me all you want to know, confide in me! We shall turn the cold shoulder to all the others, you and I!"

"Very well, then I shall confide," I returned, and laughed. "To be frank, I sought only the honor of talking to you."

Her eyes searched me. "Why? So that people might see you with me?" A vicious thrust, this.

"No," I said. "Because you are a very beautiful woman, and I might also have an interview with a celebrity."

This got her both ways, personally and in character, and she warmed into a smile.

"Good! You are frank, and so am I."

I thought she had paid no attention to the waiter aboard the yacht, and had not recognized me. I should have known better.

"You have not finished your engagement here?" I asked.

"I dance tomorrow," she said; "then for New York with M. and Mme. Caigen, as you know."

The waiter brought my chartreuse and set it on the table, and at a gesture from La Violette departed.

"As I know?" I repeated, looking at her.

"Or you would not be here!" And she laughed. "Nonsense! It would be ill-fortune if the new waiter were discovered for

what he is, eh? Look around and see if any of the yacht-party are near by."

HER words, her acuity, caught me off guard. So she did know me after all! To cover my confusion I turned and glanced over the throngs around—fool that I was, not to dream she must have a reason for the command! When I turned again, she apparently had not moved.

"So, M. Stock—I drink to the success of your quest," and she lifted her glass and touched mine. Once more her words brought me to confusion—what the devil did the woman mean by them? I swallowed the chartreuse, and it had a most unpleasant tang.

"We all have quests," I said. "You, to find a certain person—"

"What do you know of my quest?" she almost snapped, a glint of anger leaping in her dark sad eyes. "However, no matter. I have spent money on it, have renounced many things for it, and until I find what I seek, shall go on renouncing."

These words puzzled me. I had meant the quest of some one to smuggle her jewels into America—but what did she mean? It was past me.

Then the lights seemed to run together strangely, and dizziness hit me hard. In a flash I comprehended the whole thing; Gervase had seen me after all, and now she had put knockout drops in my glass when I turned around—

I half rose, then gripped the table and, clinging to it, saw her smiling cruelly at me. I tried to speak, and could not. Some one cried out at the adjoining table. With an effort I straightened up.

"I wouldn't try it, if I were you," she said calmly. "You'll fall flat. Careful, now—we'll take good care of you—"

Her voice trailed away on my consciousness, and with the miserable realization of my folly, I knew no more.

WHEN I wakened, it was with a head that any toper would have envied. And my wakening brought astounded amazement to me, though not at my position or environment. I lay upon a narrow iron bedstead, still in my evening clothes, and was free except for my hands; these were scientifically tied with stout cord, one to each side of the bed, so that I could move one of them to my mouth, but could not bring them together. It was daylight. The astonishing thing, however, was the person who sat beside my bed, calmly reading a paper. It was the quiet little French girl, the daughter of Mme. Latour—Mademoiselle Richepin! And in her lap glittered a small automatic pistol.

"If you don't mind, I'd like a drink," I muttered.

She looked up, nodded brightly as though this were the most natural situation in the world, and rose. From a table she took a jug, poured a glass of water, and brought me the glass. I lifted my head enough to drain it, and she took it back.

"And the morning paper, if you please?"

She smiled at this, but handed me the paper and I managed to look it over. As the sun seemed now late in the morning, and this paper was dated the day after my call at the Casino, I knew it was only the next morning—for the Paris papers reach the resorts swiftly. This was the *Matin*.

With my vile headache, I cared little about the news, but pretended to read so that my face would be hidden from the composed young lady in the chair. I was pretty badly disconcerted by the sight of her—the last person I would have imagined to belong to any pistol-toting gang, despite my suspicion of her smuggling activities. Then, abruptly, a name caught my eye on the sheet, and I read a short news item:

> M. Otto Krilensky, the renowned artist of the pianoforte, has canceled all engagements for the next six months on advice of his doctors. He will make a tour of the United States, but not, alas, to delight vast audiences. His health is impaired, and he seeks rest and recreation. He will be accompanied by his brother, M. G. Krilensky.

I put the paper down and met the calm gaze of the girl.

"How long do I stay here, mademoiselle?"

"Until the *Enella* has sailed," she responded with staggering frankness.

"Ah, the *Enella!*" I murmured in my best French manner. "But perhaps you will tell me where I am?"

"Why not?" she returned. "You are in the Châlet Langlade at Blonville, some four kilometers from Deauville. Beautiful country, admirable bathing; as a health resort, you should prefer it to Deauville. Blonville is renowned, m'sieur, for possessing the most rascally Norman curmudgeons in the west."

Her ironic calm was irritating. "If I got back, I'd make Deauville unhealthy

for you and the rest of your precious gang," I said gruffly.

"That goes without saying; so you stay here. The admirable Jacquot—"

SHE checked herself, but not in time to avoid giving away everything. I saw now that the head steward must have been playing me along all the time.

"Well," I said, "the others will see to the business. I can be spared."

The shot went home. She came out of her chair and stepped to the window, then gave me a disdainful look.

"Bah! That's an old trick."

"All this affair is a series of old tricks," I said, more cheerfully. "May I trouble you for another glass of water?"

While she poured it, I tried the cords about my wrists, but they were beyond me. I might roll off the bedstead and drag it after me, but to free either hand was impossible. She came with the water, and smiled at my efforts.

"Useless, m'sieur," she said.

She sat down again. On the wall opposite was a mirror; in it, I saw her pick up the paper, the pistol again in her lap. The pistol was bluff, I felt sure. So, twisting about, I got one foot off the bed to the floor, on the side from her; and lay thus with my back to her. She paid no attention, after a casual glance.

Being tied, my one foot on the floor had good purchase behind it, and I tried a shove. The bed moved, perhaps an inch, toward her. I shoved again, and she looked up.

"Kindly put your feet on the bed," she commanded sharply, "and turn this way, if you must turn."

I did not move. She rose, and lifted the pistol. "You have one minute in which to obey me!"

"Make it one second," I suggested. There was no doubt in my mind that she was not well suited to her task, and only acted as guard because no one else could be spared for the moment. "Go ahead and shoot if you like," I added.

And she did. My scalp tingled when the pistol exploded, and I saw the bullet smash into the wall just below the mirror.

"Next time, your head," she threatened; yet there was a quaver in her voice.

"Go ahead, then," I said, and laughed. "And with me out of the way, you can get back to Deauville the sooner."

She hesitated; then, in the mirror, I saw her sink back in the chair. Presently a very different voice came meekly to me:

"M'sieur, will you not turn around and put up your feet, as I ask?"

I chuckled, amused by her change of front. She had the pistol in her lap again, and I wanted only the chance to reach it.

"So you'll try to be nice, will you?" I said tauntingly, purposely trying to anger her. "You're a demure little thing, eh? But you can't try any flirting tricks on me, young lady."

She lifted her head. In the mirror I saw the quick blaze of shame and rage in her face, saw her hands clench and unclench. And, every muscle set, I gave a tremendous shove with my foot and then flung myself around.

Eureka! The bedstead actually cannoned against her chair, and my hand reached the pistol just before her slim fingers grabbed frantically for it. She recoiled, then turned and dashed for the door.

"Stop it!" I called sharply.

She paid no heed, but wrenched sharply at the door-handle—quite forgetting the door was locked. I aimed carefully and pressed the trigger. A low shriek broke from her, and she took a backward step, holding up one hand. To my own dismay I beheld a thin line of red start out on her wrist—and I had aimed well away from her! That's how good a shot I am.

"Closer next time, preferably in the foot," I said. "Now, if you want to remain unharmed, come and untie these cords and let's talk comfortably."

White-faced, she looked at me a moment, then came to the bedside and reached to the hand I held up. The pistol, in the other, was safe enough from her. In five minutes I was free and sitting up, while she stared at me from a pallid face and held a handkerchief to her scratch.

"Now," I said, "suppose we trade places, my charming friend. Lie down on the bed and I'll tie you safely. Come, no tricks! Obey!"

She started back, terrified.

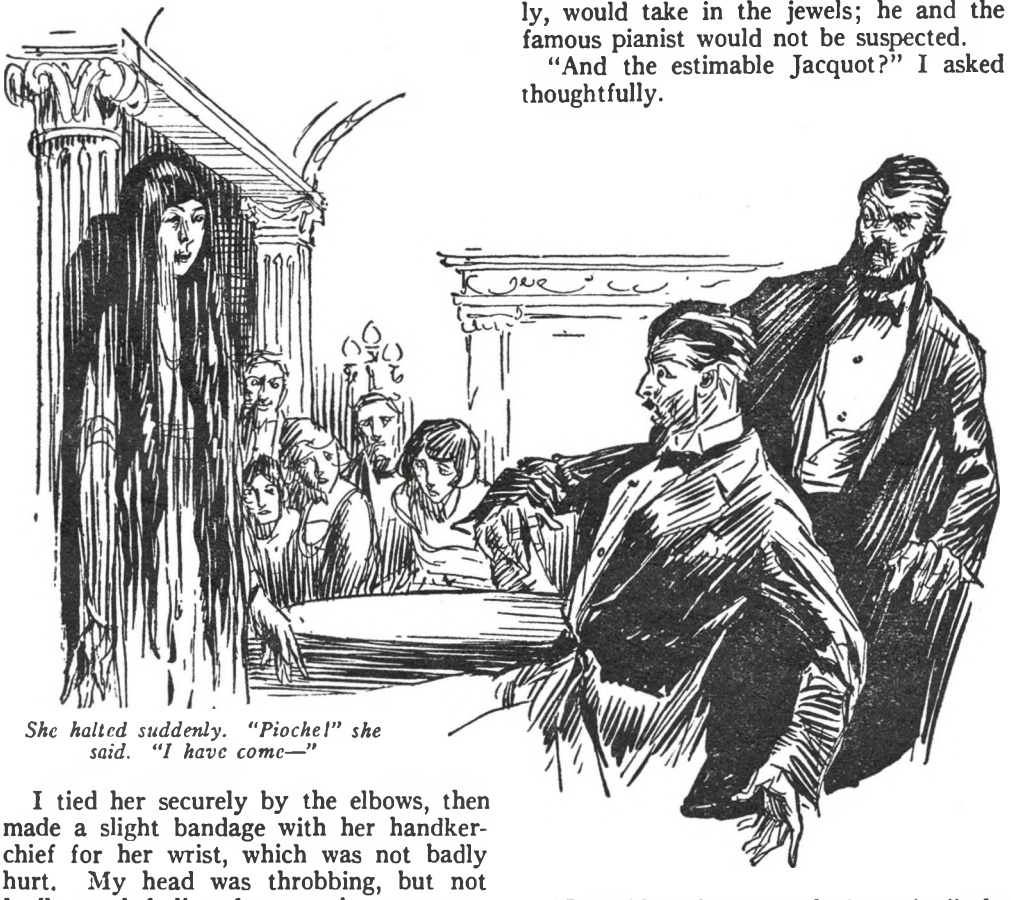
"I—I can't!" she wailed out. "He'll kill me!"

"Who?"

"Gervase."

I whistled. "So! Well, you'd better take a chance on him. I don't want to harm you, and did not mean to touch you with that first bullet—but if you force me to it, I've no alternative. Come, lie down on the bed and I'll make you secure."

She shrank, then came forward and obeyed, being of evident fear of me. So, then, my first judgment of her had been correct, and she was hardly of the proper mettle for this gang! Also, the châlet must be deserted, no one having come to the two shots.



She halted suddenly. "Pioche!" she said. "I have come—"

I tied her securely by the elbows, then made a slight bandage with her handkerchief for her wrist, which was not badly hurt. My head was throbbing, but not badly, and feeling for my cigarette case, which was intact, I got it out and lighted a smoke.

"If you want to get well out of this whole business," I said, "suppose you talk, and talk freely. It will pay you, and you need not fear Gervase."

She swallowed hard, and jerked her head in a slight nod.

"How many are in this?" I demanded.

"In what?" she asked, staring at me.

"The jewel smuggling for La Violette. Speak up!"

"She and I and Gervase—no others," she whimpered.

"And Otto Krilensky, too?"

"He does what Gervase tells him. It is all Gervase!"

"And the Caigens?"

"No. Only the three of us."

I reflected, over my cigarette. She was probably telling the truth, and the Caigens would hardly be involved in the affair. The Customs people at New York would naturally concentrate on them while Brother Gervase, entering the country independently, would take in the jewels; he and the famous pianist would not be suspected.

"And the estimable Jacquot?" I asked thoughtfully.

"Is paid to keep watch for spies," she answered with a touch of acid in her voice.

Here again she was probably telling the truth. The head steward would not be trusted very far—he would merely be put to use. Figuring I had all she could give, I stood up.

"Then I'll say good-by—"

"You wont leave me here, like this?" she gasped.

"Assuredly. You're in no danger, and—"

"But he'll kill me!" she cried out. She was verging on hysteria.

I only shook my head, went to the door, unlocked it, and left the room.

HER cries sounded after me, but I paid them no attention. Through a staircase window I could see the ocean and

beach; the ground sloped away sharply from the châlet, which was on a hillside.

The staircase led me down to the main entrance of the house. I passed closed doors but knew the rooms must be empty, as the shots had not been heard. Downstairs I came upon a stolid old Norman woman, who looked at me and said nothing. I spoke to her, but she shook her head and indicated she was deaf. I shrugged and went on.

At the entrance I found myself on a main road where automobiles whizzed along recklessly, and at once passed around to the seaward side of the house. In five minutes I was down the hillside and on the beach. I must have been a curious sight in my rumpled evening dress, but one of the French virtues is that of disregarding other people's business, and no one paid me the slightest attention. Numbers of people were sprawled on the beach, and the tide was out, so I started along the wide sands for Deauville. Less than an hour of walking would do it, I figured.

And it did. About twelve-thirty I found myself in Deauville, headed for a little brasserie and got a bite to eat and a long drink. The fresh air had cleared my head and I felt very much myself. The first thing to do was to reach my room and change clothes, then send Clancy a wire—the case demanded his attention from now on, since I had cleared up the whole matter in a very satisfactory manner. Despite my folly, I felt well satisfied.

So I went on to my Trouville hotel. No one was at the desk, and I went right on up to my room, and opened the door—to see Peter J. Clancy sitting there reading a Paris paper.

CLANCY looked at me with the beginnings of a grin.

"Hello! I've kept it up pretty late myself in my younger days, but I don't remember sticking to the evening clothes until after noon—"

"New times, new fashions," I said. "Besides, I've a few marks."

I showed my wrists, still bearing traces of the cords, and dropped into a chair.

"Go ahead," he ordered, gave me a cigarette, and settled back to listen. He heard me out, his bright gray eyes sparkling, fingering his gray imperial, saying nothing. When I was through with my story, he grunted: "So Gervase is the man, eh?"

"Apparently."

"Know anything about him? His history?"

"Less than nothing. Why?"

Clancy ruminated a moment. "After getting your report I took the trouble to look him up, also his famous brother. They've stuck together a long time. Well, suppose you shift out of your glad rags, and get a bit of lunch up here for us, then we'll drift along elsewhere."

"Where?"

"To make a call on La Violette."

He relapsed into one of his abstracted moods. I rang for some lunch, shaved and dressed, and forty minutes later we set off together. Knowing Caigen was throwing a party for the lady at Ciro's, we went there.

Clancy asked for the manager and demanded a private room, to which the lordly gentleman conducted us. Then Clancy scribbled a few words on a card, and handed it to the manager with a banknote.

"A small commission for you, m'sieur! At a discreet opportunity, hand this to La Violette. I believe she's here with a party—but let no one else see it. If she asks for the man who sent it, bring her here. There is no haste."

The manager withdrew. Clancy ordered coffee and nothing else, and we settled down to wait over a cigarette.

"Looks to me as though I hadn't effected much after all," I observed dejectedly. "Might as well have stayed in Paris."

"On the contrary," returned Clancy brightly. "It's because you're here that I am here! And not being a man of muscle, I need you. You've accomplished little that you're aware of, but you have your uses, Logan; yes, you have your uses!"

I was content to let it go at that and not press him for explanations. Clancy liked to spring his little surprises in his own fashion, and after a moment he spoke suddenly:

"You have the girl's little pistol, I believe?"

"Yes, I slipped it into my pocket when I changed—"

"Did they take your money?"

"No. Most of it was locked in my grip and I had little on me."

He nodded to himself as though satisfied, and went into an abstracted meditation, from which he did not waken until a knock came at the door and the manager entered, ushering in La Violette.

We rose. She gave me one look, and a pallor came into her face. Then Clancy bowed her to a seat—this little man in rusty black, facing one of the most professionally beautiful women of her age—and closed the door. He turned, facing her, and she smiled.

"Well, m'sieur? May I ask why you locked the door?"

Clancy's gray eyes twinkled. Even I had not observed his deft action.

"When one estimates in millions," he said, "one does not like to be disturbed, Mademoiselle Gauffret."

She started slightly, and the smile died on her lips. Her eyes drove to me for an instant, then returned challengingly to Clancy.

"Two millions in American dollars," he went on musingly. "Hm! The stones would mean a higher duty than even our good M. Caigen would care to disburse. The enhanced value of the stones, once landed, would make their sale highly profitable. Eh? Of course."

She leaned back in her chair. "Who makes such charges—this one?" Her hand flicked toward me in a gesture of contemptuous dismissal. "This clumsy would-be spy? Bah! Who says I would sell my jewels, m'sieur?"

"It scarcely needs saying," returned Clancy. "I credit you with great sense, mademoiselle, and no woman of sense would take such jewels on a trip like this, merely for their show—even for their advertising value. Press-agents talk, but people of sense know what is done. Let us suppose they would sell at ten million francs, allowing for the increase in value in the United States—no mean sum, eh?"

She did not answer, but looked steadily at Clancy. "Whom do you represent?" she demanded abruptly.

"Myself," said Clancy. "I might say, also, the prefecture of Paris. I might say, also, certain other parties. I say—myself. Come, mademoiselle, let us be frank!" He came toward her, took a chair, and faced her smilingly. Leaning forward, he put his hand upon hers with the gentle kindliness of an old man. "You know what I wrote on that card—we shall come to it presently. I wish you only well, I assure you! If you regard me as an enemy, you stand to lose much. If as a friend—you gain."

A trace of real color came into her cheeks. She eyed him searchingly, and relaxed.

"Very well," she said quietly. "But about the jewels—you mean to prevent me making that ten-million-franc sale?"

"No," said Clancy. He got out a cigarette and lighted it, with deliberation. "But I shall prevent Gervase Krilensky from putting ten million francs into his pocket and then blackmailing you for life besides."

Her mouth opened, an instant, with sheer astonishment.

"What do you mean by such charges?" she exclaimed sharply. "M. Krilensky is a man of honor—"

Clancy's satirical smile silenced her.

"Look! If he lands those jewels and sells them, have you any redress? No. You cannot dare even to claim them, lest you be prosecuted as accessory to the smuggling. He—"

"How dare you!" she flashed. "He would not do such a thing! He is a gentleman."

Clancy reached into his pocket.

"A gentleman? Perhaps. Others might call him a gambler, moral leper, and thief. Only the influence of his brother has saved him from jail on two occasions. On an earlier occasion, he served a short sentence. He is debarred from re-entering Poland. Suppose you glance over this, in case you doubt my words."

HE handed her a little sheaf of papers bearing official stamps, and I knew he had here the *dossier* of Gervase from the police records in Paris. I had a shrewd idea, from her expression, that it went into certain explicit details which Clancy could not well have voiced. She colored, handed back the papers, and gasped:

"M'sieur! I—I had not dreamed—"

"You are a woman of the world," said Clancy, "but you also are the tool of Gervase Krilensky. He is a dangerous man. If you entrust your jewels to him, you'll never see them again, I promise you."

She abruptly abandoned all evasion or defense of the man.

"But I have given them to him!" she exclaimed.

"Already?" said Clancy sharply.

"Yes. He has two of the costumes. They go with him and his brother on the *Leviathan*. It is all arranged; his brother has canceled all engagements, and they tour for health. Gervase has two of my costumes for demounting the jewels. I kept the third for my last appearance tonight at the Casino."

Clancy scrutinized her. "You no longer disbelieve my charges, then?"

"I do not know—I fear you are right," she said, in some agitation. Her long, slender fingers were locking and untwisting nervously.

"You become implicated by the smuggling, and reclaiming them is then past your power," went on Clancy. "How were they to be taken in?"

"Otto Krilensky has an old and valuable spinet he uses for concerts of ancient music," she said anxiously. "Without his knowledge, Gervase is using it to conceal the jewels, as it often travels with them and is well known to the officials. I think it is at the châlet where this friend of yours was taken last night. Gervase has rented part of it, and is doing the work there. If —if you can get them back for me—"

Clancy regarded her for a moment. "You did not come here to talk about jewels, but about something very different —eh? Of course."

A red tide of color leaped in the woman's face. "Yes," she murmured, and stared at him with frightened eyes. "But what do you know about that—about five years ago—"

"That," said Clancy gravely, "is a confidential matter between us, for the present; we shall come to it after M. Logan departs. First, please supplement our information! Who is this girl named Richepin?"

"She is Gervase Krilensky's lady friend," said La Violette, and shrugged expressively.

"Introduced into the company of those aboard the yacht?"

"Bah! It is a good bourgeois custom, my friend—what would you? Besides, Gervase has some hold on M. Caigen. I do not know just what."

"He blackmails. Yet you would trust him with your jewels!"

"I had not thought of it as blackmail. Besides—"

"Well, no matter. I'll do my best to recover your jewels for you, and probably M. Logan will find them at the châlet. Is Gervase at the party downstairs?"

"Yes."

"A good time to go, Logan. We don't want him to suspect anything, just yet. If you'll go to the Deauville police headquarters, at the street triangle this side the Casino, you'll find that the prefect has full instructions from Paris to place himself at our service. Ask for one gendarme to accompany you in case of trouble, and go out to that châlet at Blonville. Make no arrests—search the place on some pretext entirely unconnected with our affair—and bring the jewels back here."

"Right," I said.

As I left the room, I saw Clancy draw his chair up to that of La Violette, and knew he was about his confidential talk.

ENGAGING a car by the kilometer, the usual custom hereabouts, I went to the prefecture, handed in Clancy's card, and was received impressively. Ten minutes afterward, with a gendarme beside me, I was speeding out the coast highway to Blonville.

Another fifteen minutes, and we were at the châlet. Nearly opposite it on the highway was a local rental agency, and I sent the gendarme to make inquiries as to who had rented the châlet. He returned with word it had been let for a month, to a man answering the description of Brother Gervase, but that no one occupied it—the lessees came during the day at short intervals, and had brought in some packing-cases, but that was all, and the thrifty Norman agents were much puzzled.

We entered the place, and found only the old deaf *bonne*. I went up to the room where I had wakened that morning; it was empty, Mlle. Richepin gone. Only two of the rooms showed any traces of use, and in one of them was a very beautiful old spinet, dismounted from the legs, with a large packing-case near-by. Nothing else.

Though we searched the place very carefully, the jewels were not here, nor were they in the spinet, though I found where Gervase had made a place to hold them. Probably he was keeping them in his own possession until the last moment, or until he had secured all three costumes from La Violette.

Failure again! When I returned to Clancy, later in the afternoon, and informed him of the fact, he only nodded.

"Doesn't matter," he murmured, and dropped back into abstraction.

And this was all I could get out of him, except that we had an important engagement for the evening.

"HAVE a look at this and express your sentiments," said Clancy that evening.

So saying, he handed me a pocket case. He had just come in, and was getting into

his evening clothes—old-fashioned ones, made by a French tailor ten or twelve years since. Old as they were, or perhaps because they were old, they lent him an indescribably distinguished air, not a little enhanced by the miniature Grand Cross of the Legion of Honor and its ribbon.

I opened the case, and found inside it an identity card for one Gervase Marius Krilensky, Polish subject, dated five years previously.

"Hm! Mind telling where you got it?"

"Just now, at the hotel rooms occupied by the honorable Gervase. He's at dinner with Caigen, so I took a look at his diggings. No jewels there. He keeps 'em close. What do you think of the card?"

His dry tone warned me of something unusual, and I studied the card carefully. When I came to the inevitable photograph, something unusual caught my eye. Allowing for the five-year interval, and for the usual distortion of likeness one always finds in passport pictures, the face looking at me was not the face of the man I knew. A certain likeness was apparent, but his face showed a man of more delicate build, wider eyes, less brutal features.

"Caught it, have you?" and Clancy chuckled as he surveyed his tie and began again.

"Uh-huh. Who's the gentleman here?"

"Gervase. The real Gervase!"

"The devil you say! Then who's the present holder of the name?"

"That," said Clancy, "is something I can't find out. Probably it will never be found out."

"But surely he hasn't imposed on his brother?"

"No. I imagine, from what I know, that this Gervase is a very wealthy blackmailer. Perhaps the real Gervase died suddenly and quietly and this one was able to take his place by dint of getting some strangle-grip on the famous pianist. From what I have already picked up, I've a very strong suspicion that this man is a certain rascal known as Pioche, who was supposedly drowned in the Seine five years or so ago. I've no proof whatever, but am taking a long chance and acting on the assumption. This Pioche was a clever, unscrupulous devil whose police photographs bear a slight resemblance to our present Gervase; facial operations performed by skilled surgeons can readily account for the differences. There's a group of surgeons in Paris who make a specialty of altering noses, cheeks and other features. It's slightly painful, but is done in a few days and is remarkably well done. Given time, I could trace this down—but we've no time, and I must take a chance. Our friend La Violette, by the way, has turned out to be a brick."

"Hm!" I grunted. "Wish I knew what the deuce you were driving at!"

"Ah," said Clancy, regarding his finished bow beatifically. "If you knew, you'd get no thrill out of the proceedings, my dear Logan—and whether we win or lose, we're going to give the Casino an unexpected thrill this evening. So, let's go over to Ciro's for dinner, and then we'll make the Casino in time for La Violette's dance. She has promised to reserve a table for us."

MORE than this, I could learn nothing. Knowing Clancy as I did, however, I could make a strong guess or two. Beyond doubt, one of Brother Gervase's blackmail victims had let out a squeal to the Paris prefecture—perhaps a long time since. The business of La Violette's jewels had come up, and probably some association of jewelers had also gone to the prefecture with their suspicions; then Clancy had been given charge of the cases, finding them to dovetail very neatly. This was only conjecture, but it explained his secrecy in the matter. Caigen might be the one who had squealed, I guessed shrewdly. He would not be keen about having La Violette and Gervase's light-o'-love thrust upon his family.

So we went to Ciro's and put in a very interesting hour and a half at an excellent dinner, Clancy's grand cross gaining us a tremendous lot of bowing and scraping. One in every three Frenchmen wear decorations, but a grand cross is a rara avis. He did not enlighten me as to his confidential talk with La Violette, but talked of everything except business, and I gave up any hope of anticipating his promised sensation.

After dinner, a taxi took us to the terrace entrance of the Casino. Clancy had a card, which passed us, and we crossed the wide terrace and entered the hall. Leaving our things at the cloak-room opposite the baccarat-rooms, we went on to the main auditorium, now well filled.

"We've five minutes," said Clancy. "If La Violette kept her promise—"

She had kept it. The head waiter led us among the crowded tables to one well up in front, reserved for Clancy at the dancer's

request. As we sat down, Clancy chuckled.

"See 'em?"

"I sure do," I said, staring. "Did she get them here?"

"Yes, by special request."

Two rows ahead of us, and directly behind the orchestra, just to the left of the stage, sat the entire Caigen party—the two Krilenskys, Richepin, looking none the worse for her recent bondage, and the others. They were all talking and laughing together and none of them looked around. Scraps of talk from the tables near-by informed me that something extraordinary had been predicted for the evening, and everyone was intent upon the stage. With the first notes of the orchestra, the general buzz of talk quieted.

Then the instruments rose to a discordant clash—and ceased abruptly. On this dead silence, the curtains rolled back from the stage, to show a Paris street set with a taxicab standing in the center. And the driver of the taxicab was Gervase Krilensky.

A choked cry came from Mlle. Richepin, no other sound. There was no mistake—the makeup was exceedingly well done. Despite the chauffeur's cap and dust-coat, the man who smoked a cigarette and stared out at the audience was decidedly our Gervase. I heard Clancy's ironic chuckle, but could not see how Krilensky himself took it.

Next instant a sudden gasp went up from the hall. A woman appeared on the stage—a tall, thin woman in a red dress, with lank wet hair streaming over her shoulders, I had to look hard before I could recognize the bobbed La Violette in this creature, for the face was heavily made up also. It was chalk white, and the crimson fabric clung oddly about her body—then I saw that it, too, was dripping wet.

THE audience was stupefied. La Violette came to the front of the stage, then turned to the steps on the left and slowly came down, past the orchestra, to the tables. The water was actually dripping from her as she came, and people moved aside to avoid her. She walked in a dull and lifeless fashion, and slowly approached Caigen's party.

"Wonderful actress!" murmured Clancy. "Look out, now—I'm depending on your muscles to stop him—"

She halted suddenly, staring at the yacht party. Then her voice broke out in a word.

"Pioche!" she said, and again: "Pioche! I have come—"

Otto Krilensky, the famous pianist, came out of his seat as though on springs, and one frightful shriek burst from his lips, a wild and wailing scream that made one shudder. The hall leaped into pandemonium. Gervase leaped up and turned, darting among the tables for the rear. I was ready, however, and went for him. He never saw me—terror was in his face, and blind panic. My fist took him under the angle of the jaw, and doubled him up limply.

There was a near-panic for a moment, but the management must have been warned in advance, for a dozen *agents* and plain-clothes men sprang into existence and kept the excitement down. Next thing I knew, two men were holding the struggling Otto Krilensky, who was gibbering and shrieking, and were dragging him away—he went to a lunatic retreat next morning and is still there. Others were handcuffing the senseless Gervase.

La Violette stood with her arms flung around Clancy, embracing him, while he struggled in vain to separate himself from the wet figure.

"Ask of me what you will!" she was crying. "I have avenged my sister at last—and I never dreamed the famous pianist was the man!"

Clancy freed himself, and ducked for safety.

"Your jewels will be returned immediately," he told her, then made me a sign and we got out of the crowd. I followed him to the rooms of the management, where Gervase Krilensky was being frisked by two *agents*. The jewels were found in three packets, and Gervase was taken away. Amid all the talk, Clancy stood weighing the three little packets in his hand.

"So Gervase was the taxi-driver of five years ago!" I said.

"A remarkable woman!" observed Clancy, and turned to me. "Logan, you're still high and dry—suppose you take the jewels to her dressing-room."

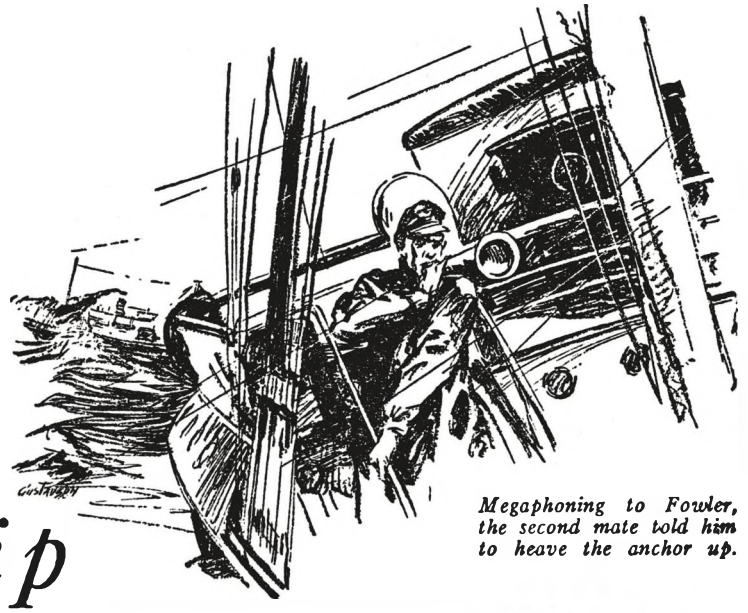
"No, thanks," I said hastily. "I don't care for embraces. Do it yourself!"

Clancy got a cigarette and lighted it.

"Oh! Well, I'll do it," he returned with a sigh. "And why not? If I were a bit younger, now—"

And he looked at me with a quaint smile on his shrewd old face—Peter J. Clancy, D. D. S.

The adventurous aspect of present-day seafaring has never been brought out with such vigor and authority as in these "Tales of the Merchant Marine," and this story is the best Mr. Orcutt has thus far written.



Megaphoning to Fowler, the second mate told him to heave the anchor up.

A Ship Must Pay Her Way

By STEPHEN HOPKINS ORCUTT

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

THEY had started painting the *Argentine Liberator* in Sourabaya Roads and finished the job before leaving Manila. So as she slipped into Hongkong harbor through the Ly-ee-mun Pass and slowly came to anchor off the harbor office, the boat had all the clean white snap of a yacht—or at least a world-cruiser, if her lines were too heavy for a strictly pleasure craft.

The limited passenger-list had been pretty well cleaned out at Manila, not more than half a dozen coming aboard for the run up to Hongkong. Of the old-timers who had sailed from New York, there were left only Miss Stevens, traveling for her health, and Mr. Fernshaw—supposed to be a man of independent wealth (which was partly true), but connected with Lloyd's in a confidential capacity. A Hindu maharajah who had come aboard at Batavia accompanied them. Miss Stevens and the Londoner had more than half intended transshipping in other directions from the Philippines inasmuch as the movements of the boat were now uncertain. The Brock steamers always managed to fix cargo from Liverpool and New York to the Cape and Oriental ports with the regularity of clockwork—but on the return voyages there was ruthless competition which compelled them to take anything the agents could pick up, sometimes going home via Australian ports, Puget Sound and Panama, sometimes having the luck to strike a cargo which paid enough to go back through Suez. It was really the personality of the officers and a very real attachment to the boat herself which decided Miss Stevens and Fernshaw to stay aboard and see in which direction she was going from Hongkong.

The new mate—Martin Williams—had joined at Manila, taking the place of one who had been lost overboard in the South Atlantic. And Williams, to properly understand him, was a type which needs a few explanatory high-lights. He had served his apprenticeship and got his navigation on the big iron clippers out of Newcastle, working up to third mate before he

tried for steam. There is also to be considered the type of owners he'd sailed under. The northern owners pinch a penny until King George gargles. Their boats are rarely well-found—their food never of the best—their officers frequently of the older, rougher type as contrasted with the personnel on London and Liverpool boats, who are usually picked from well-educated young fellows of good family—making a much more valuable class of shipmaster for the owner. The ships of the southern owners are well-found because they know it is economy to keep them so. Their food is better than Board requirements—because a well-nourished man is more efficient in an emergency. Of course there are exceptions to both types, but they emphasize the rule. The days of brutal masters and bucko mates are almost gone,—thanks to Clark Russell and the British Board of Trade, —but when a man starts even in the last years of that school, he finds difficulty in adjusting himself to more courteous standards. Williams came to Brock & Company with a third mate's ticket for steam at the age of thirty-five, and had risen to second mate in four years. A better-bred sort of man would have made it in one. They disliked advancing him to mate, because he needed to learn other things outside of seamanship and navigation—but they adhered to seniority rule and gave him his step when it was no longer fair to avoid doing so.

Now, a man of this sort may be fairly decent inside, well-meaning, understand his business thoroughly—and yet retain his natural inborn prejudice against the more gentlemanly kind of officer as being a "sissified ladies'-man" and therefore not possibly a two-fisted seaman. Williams had read newspaper accounts of Ned Coffin's exceedingly creditable work under very trying conditions during the outward voyage and had formed a rather deep-seated prejudice against him—expecting to find the younger man pretty cocky over what he had done and the amount of publicity which had been given him; in short, a sort of pampered cub. He dropped some of this to the Manila agents, and was amazed when they assured him he would find Coffin a different sort altogether—a fine, level-headed chap who deserved every good thing which came to him. They also cautioned him against trying to "ride" the second mate.

"He'll prob'ly take it, you know, an' say nothing—unless you carry it too far. But that sort of thing is likely to get Liverpool way—an' they like Coffin a jolly lot in the Head Office."

"Suppose I find he needs a bit of rough handling?"

"If you deliberately set out takin' him down a peg as you say—an' go a bit too far—well, I hope I'm where I can see what happens! Though you're at least a stone heavier, an' pretty solidly built—I'd put my money on Coffin! But I'm tellin' ye, man—ye've altogether the wrong idea concerning the lad. He'll treat ye fair an' speak ye fair—give him but half a chance!"

LET us avoid any misunderstanding of Williams' character. He was a thoroughly competent mate for sail, and competent for most practical purposes in steam. He was not, intentionally, unscrupulous—not the sort to do another man intentional injury merely for the mean pleasure of doing it. He was proud of his strength, tried to keep himself in fighting condition to handle any member of a crew or any other man who needed handling—rather fancying himself in that capacity—but he represented an older, rougher type of seafaring man from that of these modern steamer days when an officer must be a gentleman, to qualify fully as an officer.

When Williams came aboard, Coffin met him in his usual pleasant manner, took him below to the mate's room, which had been freshly painted and put in order, and made him welcome generally. All of this the mate received with what he supposed to be an affable smile—though it conveyed a quite different impression to Fernshaw and Miss Stevens, who happened to be looking on.

Crossing to Hongkong, the second mate was ordered to do a number of things which an officer on the better class of cargo-boats has done by one of the crew. He was spoken to upon a number of occasions, before passengers and crew alike, with quite unnecessary sharpness. Once it came pretty close to a show-down, when the mate used an expression that would have drawn a sharp reprimand from the Captain, had he heard it. Betty Stevens couldn't help exclaiming:

"Are you going to let him talk to you like that, Ned?"

Coffin laughed good-naturedly.

"Oh that's just Williams' way, Betty—he doesn't know any better."

That remark effaced whatever chance there might have been for the two men ever getting together as friends. The mate's fists doubled as he heard it and in another moment he would have struck Coffin—but Mr. Fernshaw's lazy drawl at his side made him give the matter a second thought:

"Go easy, Williams! If you don't, I'll repeat what you said to the owners—and make a point of seeing you broken!"

"Are you going to let him talk to you like that, Ned?"

As soon as the anchor was down in Hongkong harbor, Captain Connyngsby started ashore to enter his boat at the Customs. When he was stepping down the accommodation-ladder to the Company's launch, the mate spoke to him in an undertone, saying that as the harbor office wouldn't berth them until next day or the following one he'd like to go ashore that afternoon on some personal business. With a number of important matters on his mind, Connyngsby nodded:

"Fancy there's no particular reason for you being aboard, Williams. Aye, go if you like." And then forgot the matter entirely.

THE launch had fetched out one of the office clerks with a bag of mail and cordial greetings from the Hongkong Branch of the Line. Among her letters, Betty Stevens found one from an old and very close friend whom she had last heard of in Hongkong and meant to look up, but had not happened to connect with anyone belonging to the Liberator Line, though knowing the name of her friend's husband was Eversleigh Brock. It seemed he was a nephew of Sir Jason (Head of the Line), and was manager of the Hongkong branch. Mrs. Brock was writing to invite her to dine in their bungalow at the Peak, that evening, with Captain Connyngsby and Ned Coffin, whom Brock wished to meet after the rough experiences he'd gone through with the steamer—Coffin being now the senior officer of those who had left New York on her. When Miss Stevens found him, Coffin was reading a similar invitation—feeling highly complimented, of course, but not looking forward to the evening with any extreme pleasure. He had an idea that he would find the Brocks very agreeable people, but it just happened that he was of that very rare type which honestly doesn't like to talk about itself. The Captain had been gone an hour. While the two were discussing the evening, Williams came below into the saloon and told the second mate that he was going ashore—giving a few very unnecessary orders about getting winches and derricks ready for unloading.

"That'll be all right, Mr. Williams. You'll be aboard by four bells, I suppose?"

"What's that to you? I'll be aboard when you see me! I spoke to the Old Man as he was leavin'."

"It's my watch below this evening, you know, sir—and I've a shore invitation myself for eight bells."

"Hmph! Quite a ladies' man, eh? You'd best postpone it, I fancy—rather uncertain when I'll be comin' off."

Betty Stevens was on the point of exploding with pent-up indignation, but Coffin gently laid a hand over her pretty mouth—a little touch of welcome familiarity which didn't put the mate in any better frame of mind. (It was obvious to anyone

that *he* most certainly was not a "ladies' man.")

Coffin put up no further argument, merely saying: "Hope you enjoy yourself, sir—I'll look after the ship."

When they could see the mate heading for Blake Pier in a sampan, Coffin began to grin—then chuckled audibly.

"If that boob had an ounce of brains in his fool head, he wouldn't have taken the first chance he got to put one over on me—at least, not until he'd found out more than he did. He knew Connyngsby would let me go ashore for the asking—and thought he'd beat me to it. Oh say, Betty, this is rich! Laugh, girl!—why in thunder don't you laugh?"

"Because I'm too mad—that's why! And if you think I'm going to see my friend's nice dinner-party broken up by that sort of an idiot, you've got another guess coming! The Captain wont listen to such a thing!"

"Now,—now, don't get all het up! Wait a bit! You don't expect the Old Man to stay aboard so's I can go—do you? Of course not! Well, that would leave Fowler as the only responsible officer in charge with merely the bo's'n to advise him. Fowler's been in this harbor but once before—and never in charge of a ship. He knows practically nothing about the way a gale of wind can get started in those mountains back of Kowloon Bay, without any warning. You see, it's only a couple of weeks, now, until the monsoon changes—we're beginning to get a hint of it, and Hongkong harbor has been just plain hell at that particular time, more than once. If Williams isn't aboard at four bells, that settles it as far as *I'm* concerned. You'll take a nice little note of regrets from me to Mr. and Mrs. Brock, with the assurance that I'll give myself the pleasure of calling as soon as I can get ashore; perhaps you can get 'em to have tiffin with us at the King Edward or some better place. Possibly Mr. Brock may not be quite so put out over this as you think—"

"Why, what do you mean by that, Ned? Of course they will—both of them! You'll like Cora Brock—she's just lovely!"

"I'm sure she is—and, from what I've heard, she's got a pretty fine husband. Point is—I've a sort of hunch we'll find out some day whether I'm right or not. You know he got his instructions from Sir Jason about me—cabled them to Vandervelde in Batavia. I was to draw mate's pay from the day we left Durban and could have a mate's berth if I wished—but Mr. Eversleigh Brock's suggestion was that I stick as second mate for another voyage because of the additional experience I ought to get in that rating before my step-up came. It was left to me. I thought Brock was dead right—so I stuck on as 'second'.

"That left him the opening to wish Williams on us—the man was overdue for the rating and easily might have been assigned to one of the other boats, but they sent him down to Manila and put him over me, knowing that I'm entered in the Board of Trade files as Master and will get my ticket as soon as I reach London. Why? (If it was done intentionally, as I suspect.)

"Now, they know all about Williams, his make-up, his antecedents, and about what his reactions are likely to be with a chap of my type. So it kinda looks to me as if it's a sort of lodge-initiation to see how I'll come through. Well, I'll play the game the best I can. I'll take all I'm supposed to take from a superior officer, and a little more—not too much more. If I can't handle Williams tactfully, he's a bigger fool than his record would indicate—and I suppose there'll have to be a show-down of some sort. Don't you begin to get another slant on the proposition?"

WHEN the Captain returned, Betty Stevens interviewed him in his cabin and told him a few things about the mate and second mate which he had entirely missed coming up from Manila—winding up with what had occurred that afternoon. Connyngsby was fully as indignant as she expected—suggesting that he stay aboard and let Coffin go up to the Peak. But they both knew this wouldn't do—and let Coffin say so when they sent for him. He asked the Captain to see nothing and say nothing until it became evident that the mate was going much too far. Then Connyngsby got down to a subject which was giving him a lot of serious thought:

"For the last two or three years, d'ye see, the owners haven't bothered their heads about homeward-bound cargo until it was time for one of the boats to pick it up. If nothing else offered, there was always rubber an' tin from the Straits—more than there were bottoms to carry it. But anything as good as that gets about very quickly. Old craft have been refitted—nearly every flag is on the procession now comin' out to the Straits for that trade—

any sort of craft that'll stay on top of the water without constant pumpin'. For a bit, they cut the freights in a sickening way—but the extra rates charged by Lloyd's on wrecks of that sort more than evened it up again. At all events, there are bottoms now waiting for nearly every pound offering. Brock got his rubber an' tin for the last two boats, it's true—but they're the smallest in our fleet.

"Now, he's not been able to fix anything for the *Argentine* yet, but feels sure of getting it, time we make Penang. I'm by no means confident he will get it. An old mandarin friend of mine is offering me enough 'China General'—Canton to London—to fill three of our holds, but it's not as profitable as top rubber or tin, an' leaves the Number One to be filled on the way home. It would pay expenses an' a bit over—young Brock is leavin' it to me. I was about to close with the mandarin by telephone when I ran across an old acquaintance—the Sultan of Bungi-Trelak, on the Peninsula. He's an even more able man than Johore, I fancy—quite cosmopolitan—one of the most successful planters in that section. Of course there's little chance gettin' any of *his* rubber because Jardine Matheson have been carrying it for years—an old friendship dating back to his father's time, I believe. But he's influential enough to scare up a cargo for us, somewhere, if he felt good-natured. I suggested his going down with us—agreed to drop him anywhere up the Strait he wished to go. He walked down to Blake Pier with me and got a look at the boat (the fresh paint makes her the belle of the harbor, for the moment); asked about our accommodation an' what sort of chow the owners provided. Chance shot, to be sure—but worth takin'. He may come along. Never met him, did you, Coffin?"

"Why, yes. Owners were transferring me from one boat to another—sent me down to Singapore on the P. & O. Just happened that His Highness and I got to discussing something on deck the first night out—talked over a lot of things before we made 'S'pore'. If I run across him the chances are he'll remember me."

"My word! That might help a bit! Keep an eye out anywhere along Queens Road, or around the King Edward."

THE Captain and Betty Stevens went ashore shortly after six—Coffin going below for his dinner. With all the passengers ashore, McTavish and Jennings came up from the foot of the table to sit by him, and all three commented upon the lifelessness of the air, though the fans were going in the saloon. When Coffin went on deck again for a smoke, darkness had settled down oppressively over the harbor. The bungalow-lights sparkled through the trees like fireflies all the way up the mountain-side to the Peak, and the Kowloon lights were distinct enough—but there wasn't a star visible.

After a while, Coffin spoke to Fowler, who had the deck-watch until midnight: "Not likely to get a typhoon at the tail-end of the dry monsoon—but it sure feels like it! I'm betting there are white-caps and considerable of a sea before morning—all over the harbor!"

"Feels more like a summer thunder-shower to me, sir."

"Oh, we'll get rain, in sheets, and plenty of row—but it's the blow I'm thinking about! We've only one anchor down."

Coffin stepped into the wheel-house and spoke down the wide funnel of the engine-room tube.

"Oh, Mac! . . . . I say, *Mac!*"

"Aye, lad—I hear ye!"

"Have you steam enough to move her?"

"Aye. I'm no sic fule as would draw th' fires ontil she's fair berthed alongside a pier."

"Any juice for the searchlight?"

"Ah'll starrt th' dyneemo an' throw th' switch, at once."

"Fine! Feels as though it might be well to have a look-see around the harbor in half an hour or less."

The air became even more oppressive—there was a faint moaning and rumbling from the north as if some Chinese Rip van Winkle were bowling in the mountains around Mirs Bay. Then it began to thicken. The Kowloon lights were still visible but blurred. Coffin turned on the current and flashed the big searchlight around the harbor until he knew exactly the position of every anchored craft near him—every moving ferry-boat, sampan or launch. Then, with suddenly released fury, a hundred-mile gale came howling down Kowloon Bay, driving torrential rain almost horizontally before it. Sweeping a wide arc to the north with his searchlight, Coffin watched closely for any heavy craft which might have broken adrift, and presently spotted two coal-hulks being swept directly across the harbor toward the

anchored shipping off the Bund—heavily loaded, out of control and powerless, it was impossible for tugs to get near them.

Megaphoning to Fowler, stationed at the end of the bridge in his oilskins, the second mate told him to get forward at once and heave the anchor up. As soon as the hook was clear of the mud, the bow sheered off with the force of the wind—but he had shoved the engine-room telegraph over to "full speed ahead," and in a second or two the big hull was under control and heading out into the deeper part of the channel, away from the oncoming coal-hulks. At no time did they get near enough to scrape—but had the *Argentine* been left anchored, they would certainly have sunk her, as they did two other steamers off the Bund before going to the bottom themselves. It was conceded around the harbor next morning, when the full extent of the damage was seen, that the officer in command of the *Argentine Liberator* had been the means of saving a number of other craft by his searchlight fireworks—which at first had aroused much joking and laughter—and his subsequent warning signals with the whistle, heard more distinctly to the leeward of him than they were on the Kowloon side.

UP at the Peak, the Brocks had been good-naturedly annoyed at the way the mate had prevented Coffin from joining them, but agreed that the latter was entirely right in remaining aboard in the circumstances. Miss Stevens gave them the whole story of the voyage out from New York, with the various adventures which had befallen them—and told it exceedingly well. As secretary to a railway magnate, she was far too much the business woman to gush unduly over the second mate—but from her very conservatism in this respect, giving every person his just due, Coffin's actions stood out very clearly, as of an exceptional man dealing with emergencies as they came. Then she described Williams as he came aboard at Manila, his attitude toward Coffin from the start and his petty meanness on the way up to Hongkong; and she smilingly mentioned Coffin's impression that, knowing the mate's temperament, the owners had deliberately put Williams over him to see how much he would stand.

This, however, drew a protest from Brock.

"We knew Williams' general make-up, to be sure—just as we know all our officers—but there was never a thought of making Coffin uncomfortable! Our suggestion that he make another voyage as 'second' was merely to emphasize the need of caution in acting upon his own initiative—to take orders from a superior a bit longer in order to see that the other chap's idea may be better, at times, than his own. I say!" —as a howling gust of wind rattled the windows overlooking the harbor—"we'll be getting one of our Kowloon blows in a moment or so! Always have 'em when the

"Easy now, Squibbs! We've got you both covered!"

monsoon changes—sometimes a bit before that. My word! The boats at anchor seem to be waking up—watch that chap sweeping the harbor with his searchlight!"

Connyngsby's glance, right and left, spotted his own steamer in a second, from her position.

"That'll be Coffin, havin' a look-see—watching out for anything broken adrift. It's the *Argentine's* searchlight!"

"Perhaps Williams has gotten back aboard? Eh?"

"No fear! He'd not return before eight bells an' give Ned his chance to get ashore—no jolly fear! And he couldn't get out to the boat during the last twenty minutes in a sampan or launch—this gale would swamp him! I say! Have you a night-glass, Mr. Brock? Coffin seems to be getting up his mud-hook! My word! Have a look, sir! D'ye see what he's holding his light on? Two big coal-hulks adrift—comin' right down on top of him if he doesn't move!"

"Good lad! He jolly well keeps his wits about him!"

By this time, other searchlights were sweeping the water, so that all of the colony at the Peak got a very fair idea of what was happening. They saw the coal-hulks smash into a couple of small steamers and go to the bottom with them off the Bund. They saw other craft, farther east, break from their moorings and smash into the rows of Chinese house-boats alongshore below the Naval Station. And many of the Peak bungalows had their windows blown in as a taste of what was happening.

Williams came aboard shortly after sunrise, hearing from the third mate that Coffin's invitation for the previous evening had been to dine with one of the owners; but his intelligence was of the narrow-gauge variety which saw in this only a good joke on the "sissy with the swelled head." It never occurred to him that the Brocks might have *wanted* the company of the second mate.

"Hmph! Jolly good joke on Coffin! The whole port is laughing at him for his gallery-play with the searchlight, last night!"

"Perhaps a few may have laughed at first, sir—but they're not doing it now, I fancy! They were usin' their own lights as soon as they twigged what was up! Look around the harbor, sir!"

Coffin went ashore about ten, after Betty Stevens and the Captain had returned, dropping in at the Company's offices where he was immediately taken in to see Mr. Brock and congratulated upon his seamanship of the night before. It was on the tip of the owner's tongue to say that they were transferring Williams to another boat, but he felt some curiosity to see how Coffin would handle such a situation for the next few weeks. He decided to keep his hands off until the boat reached Singapore, at least.

As Coffin stepped from the offices out into the arcade which runs along both sides of Queens Road, he saw a figure which seemed vaguely familiar approaching down the arcade. The man was dressed in white linen, with a pith helmet, but he had more of the Malay swing and roll than the stiffer English bearing—and proved to be, as Coffin had thought, His Highness the Sultan of Bungi-Trelak.

"I'm wondering if Your Highness will remember me?"

The spotless and smart white uniform made the Sultan pause for a moment. "You are Mr. Coffin—yes? But I do not remember—"

"I was a passenger on the *Malwa* when I had the pleasure of those long discussions with you—but I've been an officer of the Liberator Line for several years. On the *Argentine Liberator,* at present—"

"Ah! Wait a bit! Connyngsby's boat? —Yes? He showed her to me yesterday—was telling me about your adventures on her. Of course I didn't associate the name

with my fellow-passenger on the *Malwa!* My word! Deuced odd coincidence—not? I say! Have you time for a bit of tiffin at the Club, down on the Bund?"

"If I'm not imposing upon Your Highness—delighted. The Captain was rather hoping he might have the pleasure of taking you down to Penang with us—but I suppose you do most of your traveling on the yacht. She must be a beauty, from the descriptions in the engineering magazines."

"Laid up for overhaul at Barrow, just now. First-class sea-boat, as I ordered—and I certainly enjoy her—but dev'lish expensive to keep in commission. And, frankly, I rather enjoy meeting a decent lot of steamer-passengers."

"We have two who'd please you—New York girl, and a Londoner worth talking to. They tell me at the office that we'll have also two girls and a nice married couple from the Governor's circle up at the Peak. Why not come along and join the party?"

"Do you know, Coffin, I fancy I will! We never finished one of those discussions, after I had become thoroughly int'rested in the subject. Started me trying out a few experiments down in my own State—I'd like to go over them with you. If there are accommodations, somewhere, for my two servants, I'll book this afternoon with you. What?"

Neither of them noticed two men in a 'rickshaw who had stopped by the next arcade-pillar and were arguing with their coolie. One of them was trying to make headway with understandable "pidgin"—but the other wasn't missing a word of the conversation between the Sultan and Coffin. When His Highness definitely agreed to book on the steamer that afternoon and they walked off down to the Hongkong Club, the pair got out of their 'rickshaw, paid their coolie and walked on to where they could stand under one of the arches and talk without being overheard.

"It's the chance of a lifetime, Horlock!"

"Think it's worth the cost of transportation, do you?"

"We'll make our transportation—no fear. There's always a game in the smoking-room—often a fairly stiff one. With only six to ten men in the room, it's a more intimate party—more friendly. They fancy no professional card-player ever bothers with limited-accommodation boats and are never watching too closely. The officers don't see enough of our sort to be suspicious; and they like to watch a big game. They've plenty of millionaires traveling with them—men who lift the limit clean off—"

"How much is the Sultan worth?"

"Ten millions—possibly twenty. Nobody knows. He's one of the most extensive and successful rubber-planters on the Peninsula. But he spends a deal—a born gambler."

"How much of a game does he play?"

"A bloody good one, if he's sober! Straight game—no tricks. But he likes champagne and drinks a lot when he's playing—not so much at other times. Up to a certain point, it doesn't affect his judgment, but beyond that, he gets careless and overplays his hands."

"With all that oof, isn't he likely to raise us quite beyond what we have?"

"Not if we watch out and know what his cards are."

"How much would you take along as a stake?"

"Fifty thousand Straits dollars. He'll accept our checks on the Hongkong an' Shanghai when we get down to real money—and we'll clean him out of a cool million, if not more. An' it's absolutely safe!"

AT two o'clock the Sultan came back with Coffin to the Company's offices and booked passage to Penang on the *Argentine Liberator*. While they were still chatting with Mr. Brock and his assistant manager, two men who might have been prosperous merchants, planters or financiers from their appearance, stepped up to the counter and booked to Singapore. Apparently they were strangers to each other—having come in at different times and shown no sign of recognition—but the clerk behind the counter, with the impression that the saloon was going to be full going down the China Sea, berthed them in the same room. One of them asked if he could have a room to himself by paying for it, but the clerk said their accommodation was too limited for that, and after a few questions about deck-chairs and luggage, the man went out. The other one waited to get folders and advertising matter, then he also left. Farther along the counter, a smartly turned-out P. & O. mate stood waiting for a word with Coffin—whose English stepfather lived near his people in Devon. When the Sultan and Brock went out together, the mate came up for a chat—bringing into it occasionally the clerk, who knew them both.

"I say, Ned! You'll have to watch out a bit for those two bounders who just booked with you!"

This seemed to cause the clerk rather serious concern—if there was a chance that he'd made a mistake. "What's wrong with them, Gaylord?" he asked.

"They're two of the smoothest, most dangerous gamblers in these waters—known on most all of our boats, the Messageries and other Lines, as well. They rarely travel on a limited-accommodation boat because the pickings aren't worth the trouble."

"Are you quite sure you're right about them?"

"Oh, positive! Ask any of our chaps, after describin' 'em. They travel under diff'rent names. Last voyage with us, they were Burroughs an' Spieder; they've booked with you as Squibbs an' Horlock, but the names are of no conseq'nce. Look like men of affairs—but you'll always find 'em in a big game—always thousands ahead when they go ashore. Crooks all through—but, far as I know, they've not been caught cheating. Asking for a separate room was pure bluff—they knew you were nearly full-up an' would berth 'em together—which you did, Merton."

"But—I say! One doesn't quite see how I could have refused to book 'em! Quite the lawst word in respectable appearance, d'ye see!"

"You couldn't! Our people can't—without openly accusin' 'em of being crooks. An' that has to be *proved,* you know! They'd get heavy damages in court against the Line, for slander—unless we could prove we saw 'em doing something crooked, an' unless the victim would swear against them as well, which the victim never does—can't stand that sort of publicity; it looks rotten at home, admitting he's been gambling to any such extent. We post notices in the smoking-room that gamblers are aboard an' give the passengers a quiet hint not to play with anybody they don't know pretty well. That's what Ned an' his Old Man should do. I've positively identified these two as men who constantly travel on our boats—always play the biggest game there is going—an' always win! Any of our chaps will swear to 'em at any time you wish—get a couple of 'em from whichever of our boats is in Keppel Harbor when you make Singapore an' see if they don't agree with me."

Coffin gave Connyngsby the gist of this when he went aboard and they tried to figure out between them some way of getting evidence against the crooks if some of the other passengers appeared to be getting the worst of it in the usual smoking-room games. It didn't occur to either of them at the time that Squibbs and Horlock had deliberately booked with any particular quarry in mind, because the Sultan's decision to accompany them had been made unexpectedly on the spur of the moment before it seemed possible that either of the other men could have suspected any such intention and made preparations accordingly. What was a good deal more in Connyngsby's mind was this opportunity for giving a big shipper one of the pleasantest voyages he'd ever had. In a confidential interview with Brock next morning, it was decided to fill but one of the holds with "China General" for London and chance getting rubber enough for the other three in the Straits. Brock thought he was pretty certain of fixing at least two thousand tons by the time the steamer reached Penang—and Connyngsby was hoping that through the Sultan's friendly influence at least, they might get as much more.

IN all of this, the mate Williams was as ignorant of what was going on as any of the passengers—but he didn't know it. To him, it seemed that he had established his authority on board as supreme—next to the Master. He now had the rating toward which he had been working for years and he meant to make the most of it. Had anyone told him that his remaining on the boat at all was due merely to the owner's casual interest in what he'd do and how far he'd go—that, from the Master down to the deck-hands, he hadn't won for himself a particle of respect—he probably would have knocked his informant down as a malicious liar. That would have been about the only thing occurring to him as a fitting answer—because he had that sort of rudimentary mind. So he finally put to sea, "cock-of-the-walk" next to the Captain—as he saw it. Ship's business was something for the owners and agents—no concern of his, one way or the other. Doing anything to help secure a cargo was right enough if he got a percentage for himself—he'd heard of such things. But not until years afterward did he grasp the fact that a shipmaster may be a merchant as well, and eventually get an interest in the Line that way.

RETURNING to the two gamblers—they had found through many years of plying their trade on the high seas that whenever they could get one or more of the officers friendly with them it went a good way toward diverting suspicion—they were likely to be watched less closely. In canvassing the personnel on board, they discarded Coffin at once—he was too obviously the alert officer, thoroughly onto his job. The Captain was out of the question, of course. Swain was under bond as purser—had to be careful whom he hobnobbed with. Fowler was negligible—he had too little to say, as merely third mate. McTavish was Scotch, and too shrewd to mix with them very far. Dr. Thayer looked like a good possibility—but the mate, from his general make-up, appeared to be still better. So they began cultivating Williams before the steamer passed the Ladrones, giving him an even better opinion of himself than formerly, because they appeared so thoroughly substantial: big, quiet men with wads of money who didn't need to be assertive. The first night out, he played a small game with them in their room and won a hundred dollars. The next morning, during his watch below, he won five hundred more. Naturally, he considered Squibbs and Horlock the most solid men on board—certainly not gamblers, or he would have stood no chance of winning from them—and he was therefore in a mood to take their part against anybody.

For the Sultan the voyage started out very comfortably. He'd been given the best stateroom on board—his two servants installed in a smaller one, aft—Miss Stevens and the two English girls from Hongkong had taken a liking to him and were most agreeable companions—the Captain, Fernshaw and Coffin were interesting talkers at other times—the food was surprisingly good. In fact, he scarcely could have been much more comfortable on his own yacht.

After looking on at the smoking-room games for half an hour, he took a hand with four other men who seemed to play as if their bank-accounts would stand it, and had a nice little kindergarten game until the dinner-bugle sounded. He had won perhaps eighty or ninety pounds, which he stuffed into his trousers-pocket for a stack of chips later in the evening. The ladies kept him busy until four bells, and the smoking-room lights went out shortly after midnight—so he wound up the first day perhaps two hundred pounds ahead.

Next morning, he got trimmed a little from straight bad luck. The man Squibbs had been watching his game and presently asked if he might sit in—being welcomed in the usual way. Anybody with a wad was welcome. And not a man in the room paid the slightest attention to a sign on the wall in half-inch letters:

> PASSENGERS ARE WARNED THAT PROFESSIONAL GAMBLERS TRAVEL ON EVERY STEAMER OCCASIONALLY AND THAT IT IS DANGEROUS TO PLAY FOR ANYTHING BUT MODERATE STAKES WITH CASUAL ACQUAINTANCES

Such notices are seen upon every deep-water boat, but they are almost invariably disregarded—to many a passenger's regret!

SQUIBBS apparently brought temporary good luck to the Sultan, for he began to win again—but the game was really too small to interest him. When he was about even, he got out of it with the remark that if anybody started a real game he'd like to sit in. This started a general smile—some one asked if he had suggested it to Mr. Horlock, who roomed with Mr. Squibbs and had refused going into the smoking-room games because they weren't worth his time. At this, His Highness turned to Squibbs and asked if his roommate really would like a good stiff game.

"Why, I really don't know what he likes or doesn't like—we were strangers when we came aboard. I can ask him if you wish. Eh?"

"Would you care to sit in, Mr. Squibbs? Or a couple of you other gentlemen—in case we get up a game worth while?"

Squibbs said he didn't mind playing within any reasonable limit, but he couldn't stand it with the lid entirely off—and one other man seemed to feel about the same way. Said he'd stayed with them until he'd spent all he could afford.

When this got around, the three young women expressed considerable curiosity to see a really big game—asking if they might come into the smoking-room and look on if they promised not to say a word. It wasn't exactly a welcome proposition because no man likes to have a woman he knows pretty well see him risk good money in really serious chunks on the chance of a card-game. Gambling in the Monte

Carlo casino is one thing—everybody does it—but a social game of cards on a steamer is "something else again." Squibbs, however, was good-naturedly in favor of letting them come in for an hour, and Horlock said he had no objections. Which one can readily see was a shrewd acceptance of an unexpected development.

For half an hour, Squibbs smilingly lost so tactfully that the fourth man dropped out of the game that afternoon—said he'd had enough. But two others had been itching to come in, and did so. As for the Sultan, when Betty Stevens got him into a tête-à-tête and told him exactly what Coffin had said, he considered the matter in silence for a moment or two, then smiled.

"Miss Stevens, I don't believe that any

"Ye damned bloody liar! Take that, now!"

several thousand dollars and Horlock, with a dyspeptic look, took in a few thousand. The Sultan lost twenty thousand and won thirty-five. Then Squibbs hit a run of luck and got into the fourth man about forty thousand. Horlock lost fifty thousand. Squibbs kept winning. When the bugle sounded for tiffin, he was nearly a hundred thousand Straits dollars ahead—the Sultan contributing three-quarters of it. The three young women found it difficult to grasp the fact that the chips actually represented that much real money—but Coffin, who had watched the game ten minutes or so, assured them that it did—and looked pretty serious about it when they got outside.

"You saw that sign on the smoking-room wall, didn't you, girls? Well, that sign means exactly what it says! If the Sultan and some of the other men don't quit that high-limit game, they'll be cleaned out—that's all! We have reason to believe that two of the smoothest crooks in these waters are on board. We can't say which we think they are without actual proof—that sign is the best we can do! But I wish to glory they'd knock off on any big game! Can't you girls get this across to them in some way? They really haven't a chance to win against professionals!"

They saw that Coffin knew what he was talking about and followed his suggestion

man in that game plays so much better than I do; and I can afford to back my opinion. Even if I lost a million, it wouldn't break me—"

"I understand of course that Your Highness enjoys pitting your wits and brains against other men—when they are playing the same honorable game that you are! But gamblers don't play that way—and you haven't a chance with the cards stacked against you!"

"Prove anything crooked to me and I'll stop like a shot—be a fool if I didn't! Whom do you suspect?"

"That's just the point—we can't say that without proof! But you can gamble that some of us mean to get that proof if we can!"

IT is probable the Sultan began to suspect after the second day that he was being rooked. He played a shrewd, scientific game and was careful to avoid drinking too much champagne—but while he occasionally won a few thousands, he lost more, and was soon over half a million in the hole. About this time, the two other men dropped out—and the Sultan suggested that the game be continued, evenings, in his own room with Horlock and Squibbs, who had been crafty enough to let the other two men stop while they were a thousand or so ahead. They were now getting monsoon

weather that meant a drenching coming around from the smoking-room if they continued playing there. When Coffin heard of this shift, he got Dr. Thayer and Tommy Swain down into his room for a discussion of ways and means.

"With those three playing in the Sultan's room, all by themselves, Squibbs and Horlock are likely to be a bit more careless than in the smoking-room with other men all around. I'm going to fix the blind of the Sultan's starboard window so that we can get a look-see. With this 'pea-soup' darkness outside, they can't spot us from a lighted room and I think we are pretty likely to get something on them. The Sultan is over half a million in the hole, now—and he'll hang on like a bulldog until he gets it back or loses a damned sight more! They've got his sporting blood up! The fact that those other men quit ahead of the game seems pretty good evidence to him that it's a straight one."

"An' if he goes ashore at Penang a million or more poorer, he'll not have as pleasant a recollection of this boat as we intended—eh?"

"You said something, Tommy! Our vision of unlimited rubber goes up with the birdies. Some way or other, we've got to get him out of this hole—that's all there is about it!"

The blind of a stateroom window, as any traveler will recall, has its slats pointing down on the outside and up on the inside—so that from the deck, one merely sees a few inches of the room ceiling if he looks. Cut the lower half of the under slat even with the lower edge of the one above it, and the chances are that it will not be noticed from either side. When not in use, the blind drops down into its pocket in the bulkhead with the cut slat at the bottom. When pulled up, the inner edge of the slat is just as it has been and the occupant wouldn't notice once in a hundred times that there is now a slit an eighth of an inch wide through which one may get a pretty full view of the room when lighted inside. Coffin very carefully fixed this when the Sultan was below in the saloon after dinner, with Swain assisting from the inside. Then they stood watch near that window in the darkness and rain until, after two hours, they got all the evidence they wanted. Removing their oilskins and getting a couple of automatics, they tapped upon the Sultan's door until one of his servants opened it for them, then stepped in and seated themselves on the transom. His Highness was annoyed at the interruption, but saw in a moment that they had come in officially.

"Your Highness, we have been watching this game for the last two hours through a crack in that blind. Several times we have seen these men deal themselves cards from the bottom of the pack—and by the way their fingers ran over them, I think you will find that they have made with their finger-nails little dents in a number of the cards every time a new pack was opened. —Easy now, Squibbs! We've got you both covered—just as soon shoot as not! Squibbs and Horlock were identified just after they booked at the Company's office as men who travel constantly on the liners between Colombo and Hongkong—always playing for high stakes—always winning—traveling under different names each trip.

"Now, gentlemen, possibly for the first time, this is not a case of 'information-and-belief'. We've got the goods on you—got you cold! Will Your Highness take this magnifying-glass and examine the backs of the packs you've been playing with? Hmph! Found 'em, didn't you? Well, that gets us down to a basis for argument —will Your Highness jot down memoranda of just how much you've lost to these men, with a list of the drafts or checks given them?"

WHILE the Sultan was methodically doing this, the pair started to bluster —trying stealthily to get their hands nearer their pockets—but they looked into the black, ugly muzzles of heavy automatics, and quickly subsided.

"Now, gentlemen, we are disposed to handle this matter in strict privacy if it can be done so, because we don't wish to upset our passengers by locking you in the brig and stirring up a general row. Have you got the Sultan's cash and checks on you, or are they in your luggage? You'd scarcely be foolish enough to leave them anywhere else except in the purser's safe—so they must be on you, eh? Just hand it all over and let His Highness check it up—that's the idea!

"We'll not say anything about the other men who were in the game because you allowed two of them to win and the other lost very little—good experience for him. After His Highness has destroyed those checks and put his cash in Swain's vault,

below, we'll consider this matter closed. You two are no worse off than when you came aboard. Nothing is going to be said as long as you walk a chalk line and don't try to rook anybody else—nobody will know about this little affair unless you try some rough stuff. If you try to hurt anybody, you'll go to jail in Singapore—the gallows, if anyone is killed. Do you get it? All right! We'll excuse you, now—pleasant dreams!"

After they'd left the room, the Sultan smilingly asked: "You don't intend prosecuting them, Coffin? They oughtn't to be let go right on with this sort of thing, you know!"

"Well, you'd be subpœnaed as a witness—also the Doctor, Tommy and I. Suppose you're in Bombay, London or New York? Suppose some of us are at the Cape—some in Rio? Inconvenience us a lot to be forced back here to Singapore for our testimony, wouldn't it? Of course we could sign depositions and leave 'em—but those fellows would have expensive lawyers to get around that without our personal appearance, and then they'd bring slander suits. If men will gamble with strangers when signs like that in the smoking-room are staring them in the face, I guess it's up to them, isn't it?"

"Well—I did."

"You happened to be our friend—with a lot of money to lose; and we guessed that Squibbs and Horlock booked passage for the sole purpose of getting it away from you. So we strained our gray matter some, trying to figure out how we could stop it without any notoriety."

The two gamblers, naturally enough, were sore. They would have knifed Coffin and Swain in a minute, the next dark night, and dumped them overboard, if it hadn't meant killing other men as well—which men, they didn't know. On second thought, it looked as if they'd been let out of it with more consideration than they could expect with the evidence against them—but they got hold of the mate and filled him up with a fairy story of Coffin's butting into their game with the Sultan until he wouldn't play with them, and Williams was just in the mood to see red over this. In the morning, when Coffin came up to take his watch, he saw the mate come out of the smoking-room with the warning sign and start to heave it overboard.

"What's the idea, sir?"

"None of your damned business! Get on the bridge and keep your mouth shut!"

"But you can't destroy that warning, you know—it was put there by the Captain's orders!"

"Aye—an' it's an insult to every passenger aboard of us! We've no gamblers this trip—that's certain! Some of them have been to me with complaints about this sign—say it casts reflections upon every man aboard. If there are any gamblers, they should be mentioned by name!"

"Easy enough to accommodate 'em—if they feel that way about it!"

"What th' 'ell d'ye mean by that?"

"I warned Squibbs and Horlock to keep their mouths shut if they didn't want anything unpleasant—but if they've gone to you with complaints, we'll have to post them—that's all!"

"Call 'em gamblers, do ye? Two of the quietest, decentest men I've ever had aboard with me! Ye damned bloody liar! Take that, now!"

CONNYNGSBY had appeared just in time to see the blow and ran down the steps from the bridge as Coffin, who hadn't expected it, was picking himself up.

"Williams! What in hell's the matter with you—are you crazy? Ned, are you going to take that from him?"

"Guess I'll have to, sir—until we get ashore in Singapore. Knock discipline forty ways if I don't! I didn't dream he'd go that far or he wouldn't have touched me—but if we get into a mix-up, now, where the crew can see it, not one of them will take another order from him—and they'd knife him if he got rough. Er, Williams! At the first opportunity after we make Keppel Harbor, I'll be going ashore with Dr. Thayer. We'll probably go across the bridge to Johore and stroll down the Strait to west'ard until we come to a nice quiet little opening in the jungle, running down to the water—not much chance of anyone but natives being around—no Sikhs to interfere. Now, if you should happen to be going that same way and meet me down there, I think we'll understand each other a lot better when we get through. Meanwhile just keep your hands and your tongue off me! Get that?"

Williams was rather stunned. He gradually sensed the fact that he had made a misplay, somewhere, and that the whole ship was against him; which made him relish Coffin's rendezvous all the more. It wouldn't be any boxing-lesson with this

cocky young fool—he'd spoil his looks until even a beauty-parlor would never get them straightened out again!

THE thing got around the ship, of course —Connyngsby was besieged with requests to get up a sight-seeing party and be among those present. The Sultan immediately started booking as many bets as he could. Coffin was naturally the favorite, but the majority were afraid of the mate's superior weight and experience. In a conference with the Captain—who was afraid of police intervention if too much attention were attracted—His Highness said that his friend the Sultan of Johore, or his vizier, would attend to that, as it was in his State and on his own ground. He knew the spot very well, knew a road through the jungle which would take them within a hundred feet of the men and yet keep the party out of sight in the foliage, and said he would have the cobras chased out before anybody got there.

On the morning after their arrival, Coffin and the Doctor went ashore with a hint to the mate that they were on their way over the Strait to Johore—and he followed them. An hour or more later, they had found the place and stripped to trousers and rubber-soled shoes. Apparently there was nobody else around but the Doctor and a crony Williams had picked up at one of the pubs.

The mate's idea from the start was to mash his opponent's face to a pulp—make a permanent job of it; and Coffin was equally determined that his face should not even be touched if he could avoid it. Williams' first savage blow went harmlessly over Coffin's shoulder, giving him an opening for a certain blow under the arm against nerves which his knowledge of jiu-jitsu had taught him would interfere with the other man's wind at once. It did. The mate didn't know what was the matter with him, but found it hard to breathe without a sharp pain in his side. Then Coffin landed full on his right eye, partly closing it. The mate got in a couple of staggering body blows which rocked his adversary perceptibly—but couldn't seem to touch his face. His own, however, was looking like a piece of raw beef—eyes, nose, mouth and one ear For the last five minutes he fought almost blindly, with Coffin planting blows with precision where they would put the man out of business for some time. There was no stipulation for Queensbury rules—Coffin's knowledge of jiu-jitsu gave him an unsuspected advantage from the start and he meant to punish the bully in a way he would remember. Finally he came up with a terrific jab to the chin which put the mate in his little hammock.

They'll be talking of that fight for years to come, on the boats of the Line. After tiffin, on the veranda of the Raffles, Colonel Gillespie of the Indian Secret Service came up to Captain Connyngsby and wanted to know what had happened aboard his ship.

"I went out to her in a launch this morning, you know, an'—far as one could see—she was in charge of a bo's'n, assistant engineer, two Sikhs an' a couple of stewards. Did your whole crew have shore-leave—or what?"

"My word! Was it as bad as that? There were services bein' held this morning, d'ye see—over in Johore—an' I fancy all our chaps felt a sort of obligation to go. Aye—that must have been it!"

"Services? In Johore! Oh, come now! —you're havin' me on! Any converts?"

"Why, in a manner of speakin'—aye. One chap was converted—no question about it! We're leavin' him in your hospital over yon. Leavin' almost immediately, you know—can't wait for him to get well. Going up to Lauang, where Bungi-Trelak is filling us up with top rubber for London. Fine chap—the Sultan! Good sport!"

"Aye—but His Excellency an' I have a bit of sportin' blood, too! You might have dropped us a hint, Connyngsby—the Governor'll be much disappointed. From what you say, the 'services' must have been int'restin' indeed!"

AS the steamer went up the Strait, that evening, Betty Stevens was going over some figures with Ned Coffin after dinner in the saloon.

"They told me at the Raffles that top rubber is selling today at a dollar a pound, American money—that's twenty-two hundred and forty dollars the long ton. And the Sultan is loading us with five thousand tons—three thousand of his own and a couple more from his neighbors. According to my figures, that makes over eleven million dollars for the rubber alone—but that simply can't be right!"

"It is, though. With our China stuff, we'll be carrying a fifteen-million-dollar cargo. The boat is sure paying her way *this* trip!"

"Stop!" Waters ordered. "I'm helpless without you and that affidavit."

Faith

By DRIS DEMING

An exceedingly tense little drama that takes you from a city skyscraper to a desert trail and back again. You will not soon forget this story.

Illustrated by William Molt

HE stepped in briskly, yet with that air of caution that becomes a habit with one accustomed to walking in dangerous places. Just past the massive bronze doors of the bank, he paused as if confused by the swarm of people, the hum of many voices, the clatter of typewriters and adding-machines. He stood there a moment, tall, big-shouldered, slim-waisted, his youthful face brown as a Papago Indian's, his sun-wrinkled eyes taking in the scene, the long rows of grill-work cages, the lines of men and women threading in and out past the windows.

"Did you wish to see some one?"

The man swung around. Railed off in the corner back of the door, a girl sat before a telephone switchboard. Against the wall behind her was a long dark-oak bench; and beyond that a closed door whose frosted glass bore the inscription: PERCY M. WATERS, *President.*

The man's gaze rested for an instant on [illegible]r, then came back to the girl. In one swift look of keen appraisal he saw her, a slender girl with milk-white skin, hair like yellow silk, and bright blue eyes that shone with all that confidence and faith and boundless enthusiasm that is the rightful heritage of youth.

"I came to see Mr. Waters—Mr. Percy M. Waters," said the young man.

"You had an appointment?"

He shook his head.

A light flashed on the switchboard. Mechanically, with one hand, the girl plugged in, with the other dipped into a drawer. "Third Avenue Bank." . . . . She laid a card and pencil on the rail. "Please fill that out." . . . . "One moment, please." . . . . "Thank you."

The man glanced at the card, and his lips curled. He wrote in swift, swinging strokes, the bold script of one who scorns frills and goes after results: *"John Rockford."* Over the blank after the word *"Address"* he hesitated an instant; then, with that same ironic smile, wrote: *"Sunken*

Desert." Following the phrase *"Nature of Business"* he set down emphatically, almost savagely: *"Personal."* He picked up the card, then, on sudden thought, laid it down again and after his name wrote: *"Jr."*

The girl took the card, arose, tapped lightly on the president's door, then entered, closing the door behind her. When she returned, she regarded Rockford curiously. "Mr. Waters is busy just now," she said, unlatching the rail-gate. "Please have a seat."

Rockford bowed his thanks, stepped in and sat down. He glanced at his strap-watch. It was ten o'clock.

"Third Avenue Bank." . . . . "One moment, please." . . . . The girl's voice droned on, cheerful, uniformly courteous.

ROCKFORD'S eyes were on the girl's hands as she worked the switchboard, but his mind far away, when his trained senses warned him that he was being observed. He looked up quickly. Beyond the switchboard, through the bronze grill-work of one of the cages, two men were staring at him. Rockford caught a glimpse of cold gray eyes, then the back of a gray coat that quickly vanished; of a bulldog jaw beneath a close-clipped mustache, then the back of a blue coat moved quickly out of sight. Rockford's face hardened. He glanced at his watch. It was ten-fifteen.

A moment later the girl turned to him, smiling. "Mr. Waters asks me to tell you he is very sorry, but he is busy this morning with previous appointments. He wants to know if you can call at three this afternoon."

A moment Rockford looked at the girl—without seeing her; then that same ironic smile curled his lips. "I'll be here," he said curtly, and left.

Half a block down the street Rockford stepped into a doorway, ostensibly to light a cigar. As he cupped the match-flame in his big brown hands, he glanced in the show-window mirror. Yes, there was the man with the bulldog jaw and close-clipped mustache! Rockford's lips curled in an ironic smile; he flipped the match-stub to the curb, and passed on.

AT three o'clock John Rockford was admitted to the private office of the president of the Third Avenue Bank. He had a sudden feeling of having stepped miles away from the hum and clatter of the main banking-room. Here was absolute quiet, a sense of aloofness, of security. He took the chair indicated, looked across the severely neat and orderly desk into the cold gray eyes of Mr. Percy M. Waters.

"Can it be possible," Mr. Waters began, glancing down at the card on his desk, "that you are the son of my old friend John Rockford?"

"It is," replied Rockford, unsmiling. "I hope that the man you sent to spy on me made a favorable report."

Mr. Waters arched his brows, then waved a blunt white hand in a tolerant gesture. "Merely business precaution, Rockford. Under the circumstances, you know—"

"I understand." Rockford smiled bitterly. "Fifteen years is a long time. Yet—you have not forgotten."

Mr. Waters picked up a letter, laid it in a wire basket, moved the basket a fraction of an inch, then moved it back. "Fifteen years, was it? Yes, about that. I have not forgotten. On the other hand, I don't understand why you should remind me of it. In fact, Rockford, I'm wondering what possible business you can have—here."

Rockford bent over the desk. "Mr. Waters, my mother died with a broken heart because of—of what happened. She could not believe it; yet she was forced to believe it. I don't believe it, never did believe it, and by God, you can't make me believe it!"

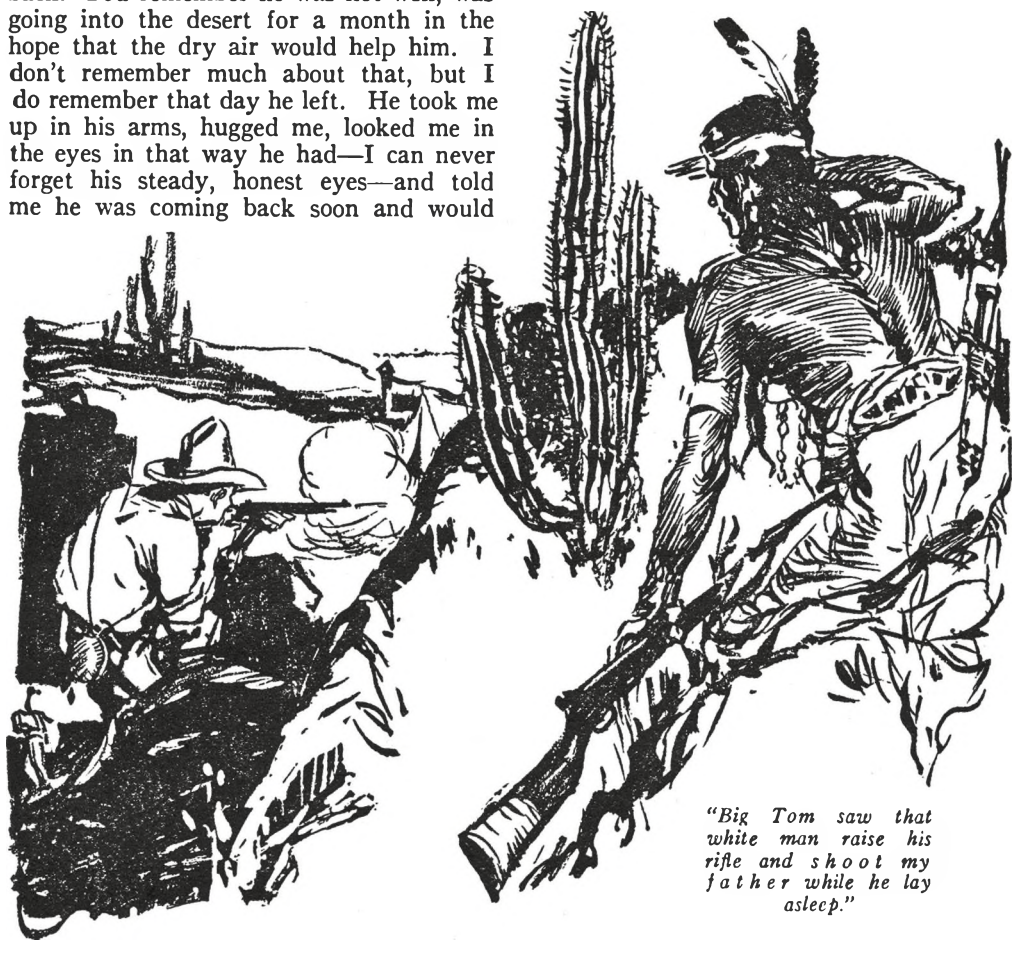
Mr. Waters sat up. His eyes narrowed; he looked at the younger man a silent moment. Then, pursing his tight lips, he shook his head, slowly and emphatically.

"The evidence was clear. The money—twenty thousand dollars—was gone. Your father's accounts had been juggled to cover the shortage. When he disappeared—"

"Just a minute, please!" Rockford broke in. "Mr. Waters, I realize that it seems strange, probably foolish, to you that I should bring this matter up after fifteen years. Let me explain that I knew nothing about it until Mother died. You may recall that I was only a boy and that we moved to the East very soon after my father—vanished. Mother never told me; but after she was gone, I found a letter she had written me in the hope that I could some day repay the bank. It seems that she blamed herself, said she was extravagant, not a companion to my father, upbraided him frequently because his salary was too small. When he disappeared. and that charge came up, she was afraid

that it was true; but she wrote that if it was true, Father must have taken most of that money with him.

"But Mr. Waters, I tell you that when my father left, it was his intention to come back. You remember he was not well, was going into the desert for a month in the hope that the dry air would help him. I don't remember much about that, but I do remember that day he left. He took me up in his arms, hugged me, looked me in the eyes in that way he had—I can never forget his steady, honest eyes—and told me he was coming back soon and would ever took that money. Not for a minute! I'm telling you this first, because what I'm going to say now, instead of helping to clear my father's name, only adds to the appearance of guilt.



"Big Tom saw that white man raise his rifle and shoot my father while he lay asleep."

bring me some real Indian arrow-heads. . . . . All right, scoff at a child's faith; but let me tell you something, Mr. Waters: I remembered that; and *I knew my father intended to come back to me.* And that proved to me that he had no reason for disappearing."

Mr. Waters lifted his shoulders expressively. "What happened to him, then?"

"He was murdered."

"What?" Waters sat up. "Murdered? You—how do you know that?"

"I told you that it was Mother's wish that I repay the bank. I am prepared to do that. At your convenience, you may figure out the interest due, everything—and I'll pay. But get this, Mr. Waters: That doesn't mean that I think my father

"My father left on a Saturday afternoon. He got to Calzona that evening. He had arranged in advance for an outfit, so he struck right out. He traveled practically all night. I happen to know that it was moonlight that night. At dawn he went into camp at Chuckwalla Well. He never got any farther. He was murdered in his sleep. No, not by Indians! My father was killed by white men who trailed him to his camp."

WATERS gasped. "Why—why, this—this is astounding! Unbelievable! Who would have done that? And why? Followed—murdered in his sleep! . . . . O-h! *Killed for something he had, eh?* But see here: how do you know all this?"

John Rockford dipped thumb and finger in vest pocket and laid something on the desk in front of Mr. Waters. Waters bent forward with as near as he ever came to betraying eager interest. He picked up the object, turned it over. It was an old-fashioned watch-charm bearing the engraved initials *J. R.*

Waters looked up, regarded the other man intently. "You—you didn't find this at Chuckwalla Well—after fifteen years?"

Rockford shook his head.

"As soon as possible after Mother passed away, I turned my attention to earning money to repay the bank. I didn't believe that my father took it, but I felt it was useless to try to clear his name so long afterward. But right there, Mr. Waters, Fate took a hand. The mining corporation that bought the old Freegold mine sent for me. They had heard that I knew that section of the country, that I had spent four years roaming those deserts and mountains seeking some trace of my father. They believed that since the old Freegold had paid once, there was gold in those hills, and they wanted me to find it. I was offered a choice of straight salary and expenses, or just my expenses and an interest in what I happened to find. I took the interest.

"I spent two years in that Calzona country, two more years of hell. If God ever spewed out more appalling desolation than there is in the Sunken Desert and in those lava beds in the Devil's Own mountains, I've never heard of the place. Well,"—he shrugged in dismissal,—"I found the gold—plenty of it. And quite by accident, away up in the east flats of the Sunken Desert, I found a Papago Indian wearing that watch-charm."

Waters, all attention now, held silent. From his inside coat pocket Rockford took a folded document backed with heavy blue paper. He laid the document on the desk before him, but did not offer it to Waters.

"Mr. Waters, you may have heard of an old-time border character known as Ironfoot Davis. No? Well, you're going to hear of him. What I'm going to tell you now will appear unbelievable; but I can prove everything.

"That morning my father camped at Chuckwalla Well, Big Tom the Papago Indian and a few of his band were coming out of the desert. They saw the white man's camp and pitched their own tents some distance away behind a sand dune. Later, Big Tom crept over the dune to see what the white man was doing. The Indians were friendly, you understand; but they had learned from bitter experience that white men who went alone into the desert were not always so friendly. So Big Tom crawled over the dune to see but not to be seen.

"To his surprise, he discovered that two horses had come up the trail from Calzona. With the horses was one white man; another white man was creeping up on my father's camp. Mr. Waters, Big Tom saw that white man raise his rifle and shoot my father while he lay asleep. Then both white men ran into the camp, searched frantically, and finally found what Big Tom described as a black leather box just big enough to hold a pair of moccasins."

"A black leather box—"

ROCKFORD ignored the interruption. "As soon as the white men left—they went back toward Calzona—Big Tom called his band, and they went to my father's camp. Afraid that the Indians would be blamed for the crime, which is probably what the white men intended, Big Tom ordered that everything be burned or buried. The only thing they took was that watch-charm which had struck Big Tom's eye.

"Now, as Fate would have it, Big Tom had recognized the man who did the shooting. It was this border character Ironfoot Davis. The other white man Big Tom did not know. But I had heard enough. Taking Big Tom with me, I hastened to Calzona. Because of that iron foot which Davis wore on account of a short leg, it was not difficult to find people who remembered him; and in less than two weeks I located him. He was serving a life sentence in state's prison at Carson City. We found him on his deathbed.

"Big Tom repeated his story, and Ironfoot Davis admitted everything. When I told him that it was my father he had killed, and that I wanted to know what was in the black leather box, he looked at me a long time; then, in the presence of one of the prison officials, he made a sworn statement. This is it," Rockford finished abruptly, picking up the document.

Waters' hand moved to take the statement, but again Rockford laid it down. He looked at the president. "I came to see you immediately on arriving in town, Mr. Waters. Haven't made any inquiries.

I wonder if Jake Dysart is still with you."

Waters nodded. "Yes. Sick a great deal, but still on the rolls. Why?"

"Jake Dysart was the other white man."

Waters tensed. He stared, incredulous. "Rockford! You—why, this—there must be some mistake!"

"There is no mistake. Jake Dysart, who worked with my father in your bank, hired Ironfoot Davis to kill my father and rob him of that black box. You can't believe it? Well, you listen!"

Rockford picked up the sworn statement, ran his eye over a few paragraphs, then read aloud:

" 'He was a man about forty years old. I would say he weighed about a hundred and fifty pounds and was not over five foot six. He had blue eyes. His face was thin, and I thought he looked sickly. He always had a long black cigar in his mouth, but when he talked he would jerk out the cigar and motion with his hands as if very much excited. Also when he talked, he showed an upper front tooth capped with gold. He was registered at the Border Hotel as J. Dykes.' "

Rockford looked up. Waters appeared to have sagged down in his chair. His right hand lay on the edge of the desk, the fingers tapping jerkily on the blotter; his left hand tugged nervously at his lower lip. Rockford continued reading:

" 'This man Dykes told me he was a private detective after a man who had robbed a bank. He said the thief was a desperate character and that I should shoot first and ask questions afterward. It sounded queer to me, but I was getting a thousand dollars cash for the job, so I done what he told me and kept my mouth shut. I don't know who the man was that I killed. I never saw this man Dykes since. No, I never saw what was in the black box.' "

AGAIN Rockford looked up. Waters was staring at the floor. Presently he sat up, his face hard, his eyes like the glitter of the sun on ice. Unhurriedly, but with the inexorable sureness of a powerful machine set in motion, he reached for the desk phone, put the receiver to his ear. "Miss Dysart, tell your father I want to see him."

"Miss Dysart!" John Rockford stared. "Is—is that girl out there—*his daughter?*"

"Yes." Waters' voice held no trace of emotion. "All he's got. Crazy over each other. Jake Dysart never did amount to much—just a plodder. Loyal, though, and dependable; so we kept him on. But the faith that girl's got in the old man would make you sick. This will about kill her. However—" He bit the word off savagely.

"This is an astounding tale, Rockford; but I can't doubt the evidence. I wonder what Jake Dysart will say? You keep still and let me do the talking. I have a surprise for both of you. If he starts to make trouble, you can handle him, eh?"

Rockford nodded.

"I can see now that this means a lot to you, Rockford," Waters went on. "Fifteen years—and now you see a chance to clear your father's name. You are going to justify the faith you had in your father. A fine thing, Rockford; splendid! I—"

The door opened slowly. Into the room, silently, furtively, crept a man with pinched white face and bent shoulders. He opened his lips to speak, and revealed an upper front tooth capped with gold.

"Come in, Jake!" Waters cut him off. He moved out a chair, placing it so that Dysart would sit facing the window, Rockford between him and the door.

Jake Dysart dropped into the chair. He glanced at Rockford curiously, then sat bolt upright, staring.

Waters arose, strode to the door and locked it. He sat down again, whirled his chair to face Dysart. "Jake," he said with almost savage intensity, "I see you recognize this man. Or do you? This is John Rockford, son of my old friend John Rockford, *who for fifteen years I've thought of as a thief.*"

Dysart started violently; then with a tremendous effort, he seemed to regain control of himself. He stood up. "The—the resemblance is amazing!" he stammered. "In fact, it quite upset me. I—I'm glad to meet you, Rockford." He held out his hand, but Rockford ignored it.

"Sit down, Jake," Waters ordered. "I want to talk to you. I—I hardly know just where to begin. Say! Did you ever know a man who went by the name of Ironfoot Davis?"

Dysart sat down. "Ironfoot Davis?" He shook his head. "I never heard the name before."

"Don't lie to me, Jake!" warned Waters. "Fifteen years ago a man who registered as J. Dykes paid this Ironfoot Davis a thousand dollars to murder my friend John Rockford. Murder, you understand? Jake,

it's hard, almost impossible to believe this; but things come back to me now. You were working with Rockford. You—all of us, in fact, except Rockford—were crazy over the oil boom. I lost heavily. I always wondered who helped you out. Now I understand.

"You knew Rockford was leaving for a month. We were careless in those days—neither you nor Rockford were bonded; we were equally careless with our books. Too much faith in each other. That gave you your chance. You took our money to cover your losses, falsified the books and put the shortage on Rockford. Eh?"

"It's a lie!" cried Dysart, his eyes blazing. "I never—"

WITH a savage gesture Waters brushed that aside. "Having got that deep, having done something that would blacken the character of an innocent man, a man who never harmed you, you realized then that to save yourself you had to go still deeper. Maybe you didn't plan murder at first; maybe this Ironfoot Davis had more to do with that than he admitted. But you went to Calzona, saw Davis, told him a cock-and-bull story about you being a detective and Rockford being a thief. To give your lie color, you hatched another lie—the one about that black box. I know what was in that box, Jake. I gave it to Rockford. Four little books—*'The Fauna and Flora of the Sunken Desert.'* That was all. And you knew it. Why don't you look at me now, Jake? You knew there wasn't money in that box! You knew where that twenty thousand went! And you had John Rockford murdered to save yourself!"

"I was crazy!" blurted Dysart; "I—" He jumped to his feet. "It's a lie, I tell you! Fifteen years! You can't ruin me now! You can't—"

"Ruin you?" echoed Waters, his jaw thrust forward, his cold eyes glittering. "Jake Dysart, I'm going to make you suffer as you have made that man sitting there suffer. I wish you had money so I could take every dollar away from you to repay the bank. But you're worthless. The bank will have to stand the loss; but you—you're going to prison. Understand?"

There was a silence. Slowly Jake Dysart turned his head and stared a moment at the door. On the frosted pane was the dim shadow of a girl in front of a switchboard. He looked at Waters. His white lips rigid, he spoke in a hoarse whisper: *"You can't prove it!"*

Waters' blunt hand slapped down on the desk. "Can't, eh?" He turned to Rockford. "Give me that statement!"

Slowly, John Rockford looked up. "What statement?"

"Why, that sworn statement made by Ironfoot Davis! You had it there in front of you a minute ago!"

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

Waters snapped back in his chair. A long moment he stared at Rockford; then he bent forward, his face hard. "Rockford! What do you mean?"

Rockford stood up.

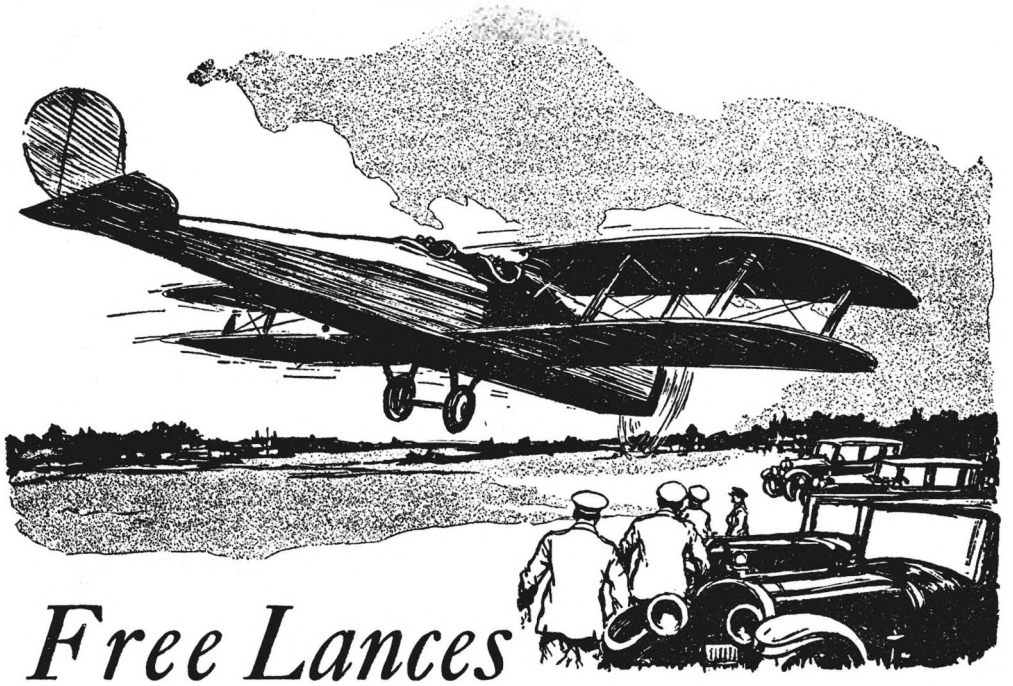
"I mean, Mr. Waters, that I don't know anything about any statement or document of any kind, that,"—he pointed to the shadow on the glass,—*"that would wreck that girl's faith in her father."*

A moment Waters stared, open-mouthed; then he sprang up. Rockford had put on his hat, was moving toward the door.

"Stop!" Waters ordered. "See here, Rockford! I'm helpless without you and that affidavit. You can't drop this now. The law—"

At that Rockford whirled on him. "Damn the law!" he flung out savagely. "The law branded my father a thief when he wasn't. It killed my mother. It made me an outcast. Not that I ever believed my father was crooked—but because the law said he was. All these years I've looked forward to this hour, when I could clear my father's name. And now—now I can't do it. A girl I've never seen before—have no expectation of ever seeing again—has come between me and the thing I've wanted even more than I wanted to live. For him—" Rockford did not look at Dysart, but his gesture was eloquent. "But for her—God knows *I* understand what a shadow it would cast on her life! And I can't do it. I—I can't justify my faith by destroying hers. So—"

MINNIE DYSART did not even look around as Rockford passed. Just outside the rail, he paused and looked back. Shuffling lines of men and women were threading in and out past the rows of grillwork cages. The hum of many voices—the clatter of typewriters and adding-machines—the girl's droning voice, cheerful, uniformly courteous: "Third Avenue Bank." . . . . "One moment, please."



Free Lances in Diplomacy

Illustrated by Ellsworth Young

By CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

"A Cabinet in the Making" again reveals the possession of special sources of information which help to make Mr. New's stories unique—and remarkably interesting.

LADY MAY JETHROY was motoring down from a week-end at Turlingdean Manor, near Plymouth, and was approaching Exeter on the main turnpike which ran on into South Devon. During the first two hours out of London she had napped comfortably in one corner while her maid, in the other, tried to see everything they passed. To the maid and the chauffeur, she was a clever and rather popular member of the British aristocracy who, though frequently short of ready money, was above reproach—an opinion which was generally shared in the world below-stairs. To herself, Lady May had been, ever since she was "presented," a bird of prey—a pirate ship on the high seas of society—from force of sheer necessity.

Younger daughter of a poor rector with a large family in Sussex, she had married a baronet with a limited income and no heirs—coming into what he had after his death in Flanders. With a flair for social position, a better education than most of her associates, and a capacity for the sort of intrigue which sometimes may be made remunerative, she had made of their small town-house a rendezvous if not a salon. But to do this required much more than her current resources—hence the drift toward such clever piracy as one may get away with in society without losing caste. A really excellent game of bridge or billiards, for example. A capacity for worming out secrets of the race-track from men who knew and liked her well enough to drop a hint. Though they got nothing from her in return, they rather banked upon the ultimate chance of winning out in such a game. And recently there had been bits of political intrigue which upon two

occasions had netted her rather surprising sums.

After passing through Exeter and turning southward, the car was bowling along comfortably inside the speed-limit when another machine passed them, and she caugnt sight of two men in the rear seat—two politicians who rarely appeared at country-houses or at such a distance from London. For no definite reason, Lady May was curious—they were over a hundred miles from their usual suburban radius. Picking up the tube, she ordered her chauffeur to keep the other car in sight until it reached its apparent destination. It might have been a long chase, but as the road approached Dartmouth, the other car swerved off on a narrower road to the left, coming presently to where it ran by an unusually high stone wall which she estimated to extend at least three miles, inclosing part of a large estate. At a narrow lodge-gate their quarry was admitted and disappeared—the massive gate immediately being closed again. She asked her chauffeur who the estate belonged to, but he hadn't the slightest idea—though, if Her Ladyship really wished to know, he could find out at a petrol-station back on the Exeter road. She hesitated, considering whether it would be worth while, then consented to his going back for more petrol, but cautioned him against making too definite inquiries.

AS the car stood at the filling-station, another machine passed at high speed —the petrol-dealer volunteering the information that it was one of "His Lordship's" cars, going down to Trevor Hall on the Scabbacombe Cliffs, which the chauffeur would recognize, if he went that way, by the long high stone wall bordering the road. So Lady May got her information without a question having been asked. In the Trevor car she had recognized three more politicians—one a Cabinet minister entitled to the more dignified term, "statesman." Telling her chauffeur just to loaf along slowly, as if favoring a defective shoe, she identified other politicians in two more cars which passed them, but neither the chauffeur nor the maid had the slightest idea that she was interested in any but those in the first car they had followed, supposing that she thought she had recognized friends in it.

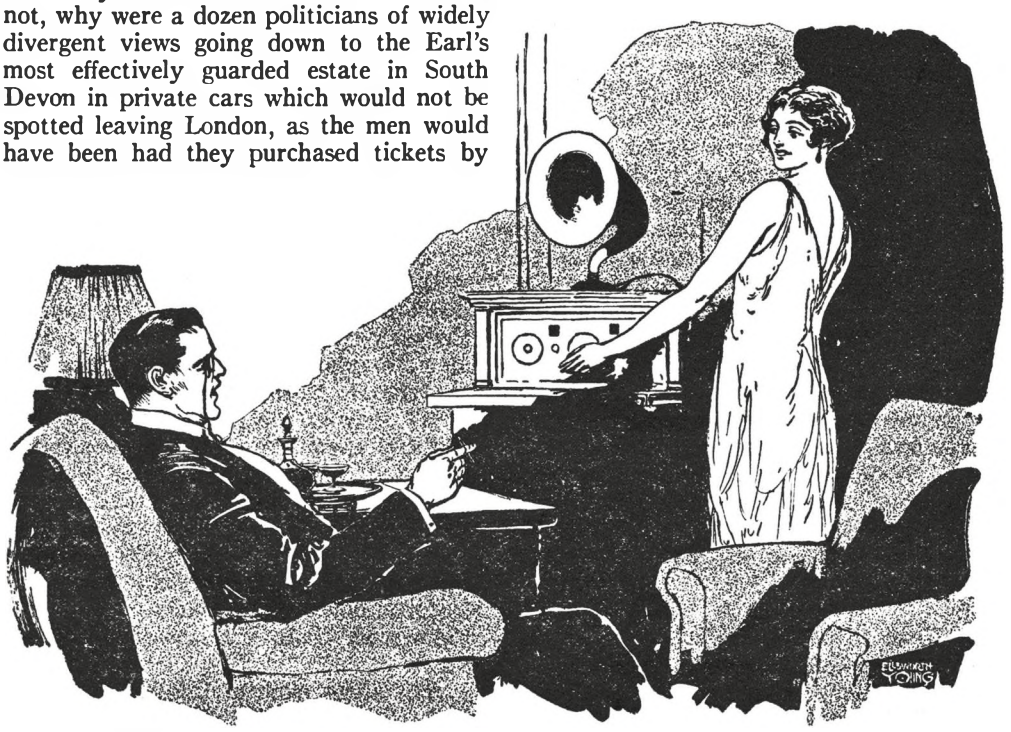
They reached Turlingdean Manor in time to dress for dinner, but it was not until some hours later that she drifted into the library with some of the other guests and sat turning the leaves of two current gazettes which published society notes. Presently, she came upon the paragraph which she had noticed in her own copy before leaving London. As the Court was in mourning, there was no general entertaining at Windsor—those who were spending a few days in the Castle being either personal friends of Their Majesties or statesmen down for conferences of one sort or another. In the brief list of names for the previous Sunday, her eye happened upon these:

> The Duke and Duchess of Cardon. Viscount Jenryngton. The Marquess of Laffan. Earl Trevor of Dyvnaint. Sir James Bartonridge and Lady Bartonridge.

Turning back to the Paris notes in the same gazette, she read that M. & Mme. the Comte and Comtesse de Dyvnaint were entertaining distinguished American guests at their mansion in the Avenue de Neuilly and would be joined by one of the Italian dukes over the week-end. As the next issue of the gazette would appear the following day, these items, of course, referred to events a week old. Merely from the bald announcements in print, it was sufficiently evident that Lord Trevor had expected to be with his wife and guests at his Paris residence, but had been summoned to Windsor by an invitation amounting to a royal command, which it is exceedingly discourteous to refuse, even if a person cannot be hanged for staying away. And it was equally self-evident that His Lordship had been asked down to Windsor for a conference with at least three leading statesmen besides His Majesty. Probably nobody else of all the gazette-readers had compared those two paragraphs or given them any thought, because the matter was of no interest to them and of no particular significance.

To Lady May, however, the bits of glass in the kaleidoscope were fitting themselves together in a pattern which looked like something so big that it took her breath away. She knew that the Government was about to introduce the bill to which it had been pledged, and that while the measure seemed the best possible medicine for existing conditions, an attempt to harmonize many conflicting views, it certainly would be defeated. This meant resignation of the cabinet and the forming of a new Government—by somebody. Was the Earl of

Dyvnaint that somebody, already selected by His Majesty in view of a certain Cabinet defeat, and started at working out a more successful ministry before there had been any show-down in Parliament? If not, why were a dozen politicians of widely divergent views going down to the Earl's most effectively guarded estate in South Devon in private cars which would not be spotted leaving London, as the men would have been had they purchased tickets by rail? Obviously, a conference. If not a new ministry, what else possibly could such men have to discuss with a man like Earl Trevor, who was known to have no taste for politics in general?



That particular radio-set had an extra compartment which contained a sensitive dictagraph.

MERELY on the face of what Lady May thought she had discovered, there would have been nothing which she or anyone else might turn to her personal advantage sufficiently to waste much time upon the proposition. With the knowledge which she had been steadily accumulating, however, she thought there was something in it which differed from any former attempt at assembling a new ministry. In the first place, Earl Trevor's distaste for everything in the nature of state affairs was known as widely as his delightful personality. His multitudinous commercial interests would seem to leave no minute of spare time for service of that sort. A premier cannot make business trips to the other side of the world at fifteen minutes' notice. If, then, he had no intention of becoming a Cabinet minister, could his conference at Windsor—his secretly assembling thirty or forty politicians, representing all parties, at his Devon estate—be explained upon any basis connected with the British foreign trade? She didn't think this conceivable. Which left—no other reasonable explanation than something connected with future politics.

Now, if His Lordship had agreed with His Majesty to produce at least the framework of a new Government, yet had no intention of accepting a portfolio, just what relation would he bear toward such a ministry? In all she had heard or read of British government, there had been no such precedent as a Cabinet with a lay-adviser in the background. Warwick had been a "King-maker"—but those were the days when *"L'Etat c'est Moi"* had been considered a matter of course. Modern Cabinets don't function that way. Still, even where precedent is as hide-bound as in Britain, a condition of public affairs serious enough to demand drastic remedies would be apt to jettison a good deal of precedent in the final show-down. After a wakeful night spent in considering this proposition, Lady May decided that if she could prove her

deductions more or less conclusively, there were at least two men among the more radical groups in England who would pay well for such reliable information as she gave them from time to time.

She was a sufficiently intelligent player to consider the possibility that one or both of these men might have been among those invited down to Trevor Hall. If His Lordship of Dyvnaint *were* the brilliant politician the whole scheme would appear to prove him, she admitted to herself that he might be a shrewd enough player to do just this—to bring the most extreme forces of the opposition into a round-table conference with others of all parties in order to see what compromises were possible. But after considering what she knew of the two men, it seemed practically impossible that either would accept such an invitation if it were tendered—though they might learn something to their advantage by going. No—they were too irreconcilable. On second thoughts, she decided that the Earl would not invite them, for just that reason—no chance of getting anywhere with them.

ALL of this was pure inference and deduction—as you see. There now remained merely a bit of skillful pumping applied to one of the men who had been at that conference, and she would have her proof—not so difficult a matter as one might suppose.

In running over the personalities of the eight men she had recognized in the other cars, Lady May discarded one after the other as being a possible subject for her investigations. All were members of Parliament, pretty hard-boiled—the sort who could, and frequently did, lie even to a fascinating woman, and do it with a poker-face. The man who presently came into her mind as being her best bet also was a Parliament member, from one of the western shires—a man of thirty-five, with considerable influence in his own borough and the surrounding country, from his frank and likable personality—very susceptible in the case of handsome women. He had been openly one of her admirers for some time. It seemed to her that there were good reasons why he should have been invited to the Earl's conference, but she had no knowledge that he was one of the party. If an inquiry at his rooms in London secured the information that he was out of town for the week-end,—and another at his home town proved that he wasn't there,—it gave some color to his being at Trevor Hall. Had Lady May been in the United States, she promptly would have telephoned both places—and then a few others. But in Europe—that simply isn't done, except by the millionaire class, and it takes even them a couple of days to put through a dozen long-distance calls. It presently occurred to her, however, that one of the other guests at Turlingdean was rather chummy with the man she had in mind, upon occasion. She asked if he had seen "Sir Freddy" recently.

"Er—Freddy? Oh, y-a-s! We rather made a night of it Thursday, y'know. Dev'lish pretty little American from the cinema. Had her for supper with a couple of other gels awfter they were through at the studio. Took 'em to their lodgings about four in the mornin'. They did a perfec'ly rippin' dawnce for us—somethin' named after one of their towns over theah—Johnston—Jameston—no, that's not it—somethin' of the sort at all events. Left old Freddy at his diggin's—in a cold tub. Said the bean had to be clear that night—motorin' down to Cornwall—Devon—some place neah heah, I fancy—for the week-end."

There was more of this, but Lady May had obtained what she wanted. There was no further question in her mind that "Sir Freddy" was then at Trevor Hall. She wondered if it might not produce additional information if she concealed her car along the Exeter road Sunday afternoon or Monday morning and kept watch for those motoring back to London. After reflecting upon the character of His Lordship, this seemed to be useless. He was much too excellent a player to send his guests back in any noticeable way. Once he had them within the walls of his estate Friday afternoon, he would make it certain that nobody had a chance to spot them coming out again—though she'd no idea how he could manage it.

Back in London again, Monday, Lady May telephoned Sir Frederick Bromlaw's chambers and had the luck to catch him in.

"Are you dated up this evening, Freddy? Could you manage a dinner with me at eight? Nobody else but two friends and their daughter—who's by way of being a beauty."

"Er—I say, you know! Might I ask who's speakin'?"

"You can't seem to recall my voice? Now I *am* piqued! Oh, well—if you're not int'rested—"

"Oh, I say! Wait a bit! . . . . Rotten wire, you know—very indistinct—muffles your voice frightfully."

"Isn't tnat odd—I hear you perfectly. Well—can you be with us?"

"Er—really! Delighted, you know—all that— Oh—by Jove! It's Lady May speakin'—what? Your voice is a bit clearer. I'm to be at your place in Chelsea shortly before eight? Yes?"

"But—are you quite sure you can put over the other engagement without giving offense, Freddy?"

"Er—I say! What other engagement?"

"The one you were going to explain about if you hadn't recognized me."

"Well—you know—there are places one might go if he were not in the House. Perfectly charming people—all that—but not exactly the sort approved of by one's constituency. Bein' gazetted as dinin' with 'em might be misunderstood. Frankly, you can't blame a chap for preferrin' to know what he's in for. Er—do I escort the handsome daughter anywhere, afterward? Am I invited for escort-duty?"

"You'd scarcely have time, would you? Supposed to be in the House—are you not?"

"Well—one shows up when there's likely to be a discussion or a division; otherwise the whips have a lot to say about it. But—to help you out—if it doesn't take too long, you know—er—"

"Freddy, you're as good as a sketch at the Halls! I was only having you on a bit. What would you say to remaining for a chat with me while the others go on to a ball? If they offer to set you down in Whitehall, you can say I promised to go over a speech you'd blocked out for one of the bills coming up—see if I noticed anything out of the way."

"No—I'll be delighted to remain with you, but I prefer not giving the impression that my speeches are written for me by any woman—no matter how clever she's admitted to be!"

"My word! If I keep ragging, I'll know a lot about you and your pet aversions before I get through, wont I? Very good! We'll say you're staying on to try a song with me—though God knows I don't fancy I could stand that! Of course, if you've something more int'resting to do, there's no obligation about your staying, you know."

"Oh, I say! Wait a bit!" But she had cut the connection.

He feared he had offended her at just the time when a few hours tête-à-tête seemed what he most wanted. He was uneasy—his mind filled with her—nervously irritated that it was still three hours before he could present himself at her attractive little house not far from Cheyne Walk. Which was exactly the frame of mind best suited to her purpose—throwing him very much off his guard during the whole evening.

THE other guests—a retired East India merchant, with his wife and a daughter in her early twenties—proved exceedingly good company. Having had the entrée in viceregal circles at Delhi, they were quite accustomed to birds of more royal plumage—but they gave enough courteous recognition to his status as a legislator to put him in a very comfortable frame of mind. (Which, also, was Lady May's intention.) With the departure of the Chelmsfords, she told her neat little maid that "cook" might go home—and that if anything was wanted from the kitchen, she could answer the bell herself. Then Sir Frederick was taken into a small leather-upholstered "den" overlooking the garden at the rear of the house and told to make himself comfortable. She produced a tin of cigarettes from a manufacturer in Cairo whose name is known in every quarter of the globe, and a flagon of sherry which he knew came from one of the famous cellars in Cadiz. (Must cost rather more than he thought she had—to live as she did.) Pulling up a big lounging-chair by the table in such a position that the shaded lamp bathed her in exactly the most effective subdued light, she lighted one of the cigarettes for herself and asked him what was coming up in the House that week.

"Oh—nothin' of importance, y'know. Everyone rather markin' time a bit until Governm'nt presents its bill."

"Which is practically certain to be defeated."

"Oh, well—I'd scarcely say that, y'know! We've hopes that we may get a bit more support in a few days. It's largely a matter of compromise. We'd hardly offer the bill if it were certain to be defeated, y'know!"

"Oh, bosh! Pure drivel! Government can't do anything else! It's got itself into a position where it is powerless if this bill doesn't pass. I'll wager the entire ministry

have their resignations already blocked out if not actually written. They'd rather step down and see a new government formed than remain in a position where they can do neither one thing nor the other!"

"I say! You seem to know a dev'lish lot about matters in the House! My word! I'd not supposed that women had any head for that sort of thing!"

"Most of them haven't—but I've been keen about politics ever since I had to hear the frightful rot my father preached against them. He was a Sussex rector, you know—good living for a small family, but he believed in taking what the Lord sent, and the Lord was more than generous in his case. Ten of us—on a rector's stipend! When I was married, my husband was returned from one of the smaller boroughs—we had many a party discussion in this house. In fact, I'd wager I know more at this moment about what's going on under the rose than you do, Freddy! How would you like to see me stand for one of the Sussex boroughs? Liberal. What?"

"Er—well, we've women in the House—aye. An' one or two of 'em seem to know their book. But—well, I fancy I'd rather see you stickin' more to a woman's natural sphere, you know—more attractive, don't you think? Something a man likes to come to after a hard night in the House—soothin' influence, y'know—all that. An' I fancy you must be spoofin' a bit about havin' so much real knowledge of politics—what goes on underneath. What?"

She hesitated a second—knowing that she would be shooting at an unseen target, estimating the range and the bull's-eye by mathematics and logic alone. But she was fairly confident of what must have occurred in South Devon.

"For example, could you form any definite idea, last Saturday and Sunday, as to what His Lordship really had at the back of his mind for his own activities—after he had succeeded in forming a new ministry?"

BROMLAW'S mouth sagged open in sheer nervous amazement. Had he really understood what she said?

"Er—fancy I must be a bit stupid! Who were you referrin' to? One doesn't form a new ministry, y'know, until after the former one has resigned!"

"Oh—quite so. But there's no harm in having one ready to form, is there—when it's a foregone conclusion that the old one will resign? You're really more than a bit stupid, Freddy—after my telling you I knew more about politics than you do. I suppose you'll be trying to make me believe I dreamed that Earl Trevor was down at Windsor in conference with His Majesty, the Duke and Sir James Bartonridge—at a time when the Trevors were booked to entertain distinguished guests in Paris? He refused to consider the premiership, absolutely, but promised the King he would form a workable Cabinet to succeed the old ministry at forty-eight hours' notice, if necessary. Then he invites about forty of you politicals down to Trevor Hall for the week-end—representing every shade of opinion in the House,—seats you around a big table, and starts a little Locarno conference of his own. To my mind, the balloting was one of the cleverest things he did—the man really is a wonder!"

This last was the most risky shot of all—pure chance, based upon what she considered a little more than possibility; but—it rang the bell.

"My word! So you know about the balloting too, do you? How the dev'—beg pardon! How could you possibly learn all this? I'll swear you weren't anywhere in sight about the estate! It's the most effectively guarded place I ever was in!"

Before answering, she got out of her chair and stepped over to a radio-set which she seemed to be manipulating so that no broadcasting from the loud-speaker horn might interrupt them. He'd handled radio-sets himself so frequently that there was nothing in what she did which, apparently, wasn't obvious. Yet that particular set had a switch at the back and an extra built-in compartment in the lower part of the console-cabinet which contained an exceedingly sensitive dictagraph—the loud-speaker horn collecting even a whisper in the room and recording it upon a wax-cylinder of sufficient length to keep registering for an hour. (This combination of radio-set and dictagraph is so simple that the reader will be safer if he holds any important conference in a room which is conspicuously without a radio installation.)

"You were saying? Oh, yes—you're quite right as to that. His mechanics are all the time building improved airplanes in the shops on the place and experimenting in his laboratories—so he's unusually careful about whom he admits inside his long walls. Er—speaking about the balloting

—did you by any chance bring away with you a scrap of the paper used in writing the names?"

"Er—why—now, that's the oddest thing you've said yet! I'm simply bowled over, May! One of the other chaps blabbed to you, of course! Y'see, it was so distinctly understood that the whole affair was in the strictest confidence—that while, of course, His Lordship couldn't prevent our discussin' it outside, it must be evident to all that there were most excellent reasons for not doin' so in any place where there was a possibility of bein' overheard—"

"Holding the receiver of a pocket dictaphone against that window. . . . I came over and listened with him."

"And if I were not more keenly interested in politics even than you are, I'd never have gotten into a position where I could hear a word of it; but—as you see—Eh? About that paper—what?"

"Oh, aye! Y'see, like several of the others, I scribbled down a few names which I afterward reconsidered—tearin' off the sheet from the little block an' stuffin' it into my pocket. (He'd passed around the little blocks of perfectly blank paper after we were seated at the table—an' when we'd written our choice, in each ballot, we returned them.) Er—here are two of the leaves I stuffed into my pocket—"

"H-m-m—nothing on the leaf to show who used it. So when he began figuring up the votes after you all left, he had no means of knowing which of you had voted for any particular name? (Of course he didn't tell you what names had a majority in the balloting—there must have been some of them among you, and it would have been embarrassing.) Seems to me he rather overlooked a bet—I don't believe His Lordship was as stupid as that. . . . . Wait!" She held the scrap of paper firmly against one of the electric-bulbs of the table-lamp for a couple of minutes, until it was pretty hot—and the number "12" began to appear at one corner in brown sympathetic ink. "You see? You were the twelfth man at the table, counting from his own chair. Had those blocks in a basket, hadn't he—evenly stacked in four piles of ten each? He knew exactly how each man of you voted for each portfolio in the Cabinet—and he will deduce a lot from that knowledge when he comes to size up the whole vote. He admitted frankly, didn't he, that he'd no intention of accepting a portfolio for himself—said he absolutely hadn't the time for it? But what keeps sticking in my mind is what relation to the Cabinet he's figuring upon for himself after it takes office? Secret adviser? What?"

"Oh, not in the least! Nothing like that at all! He was entirely frank an' open about the whole thing. Er—fancy I can repeat enough of it to convey what he said. Er—let me see, now? Oh, aye! We'd had a perfectly topping dinner, you know, after the last man turned up—an' then adjourned to a big lib'ry in the east wing, where the largest table I'd ever seen appeared to have been quite recently made for this or a similar occasion—circular in form—bog-oak with a wax finish. His Lordship said it wasn't Cornwall, to be sure, but was not far from old Camelot an' Tintagel Castle, at least—so, as much for a joke as anything, he'd had a go at reproducin' King Arthur's Round Table. It must have been fifteen feet across—an' there were forty of us seated around it. But in a room paneled with dark oak, the door tightly closed, there's no penetration of

sound from the outside—the top of Scabbacombe Cliffs is a quiet place, anyhow. Anything said by a man on the opposite side of that table, fifteen feet away, was perfectly distinct—even in a low tone. On the table there were coffee, sherry, cigars, cigarettes an' pipe-tobacco for each man.

"WHEN we were seated, the Earl leaned forward an' said the King had consulted him concerning a new government —said there had been no suggestion of his headin' it personally because His Majesty understood that he had no time for it. But he had submitted a scheme which His Majesty quite approved—which had led to his invitin' us all down there to a place where a discussion might be held in the strictest privacy. Then he said that his idea, briefly, was this: That a perfectly workable an' efficient governm'nt could be formed, in his opinion, in the same way as any group of commercial men would go about it. On this basis he had selected us, as he believed, to represent every shade an' differing view of politics in Parliament. He proposed asking each man to write down a nomination for each of the Cabinet portfolios he felt willing to support if the man he named became a minister. Of course it would be impossible to select every one named by thirty-nine different men—but he thought a final selection might be made from such ballots which would make each of the parties feel that it was ably represented in the governm'nt. The idea was something quite beyond a coalition ministry —it was, in fact, making the Cabinet practically an executive committee of the entire Parliament, an' enabling it, with representative men from each bloc, to thresh out differences far more easily than tryin' to get a majority of all the members on the floor of the House. The idea, he said, was purely an experiment in governm'nt which never before had been tried in Parliament—that it was in our hands to say whether we considered it feasible—worth tryin'. An' I don't recall a single objector —all were quite favorably impressed, provided it was permitted to be done. His Lordship's answer to that was: He had been asked to form a Governm'nt. When he presented his final selections, he had done so—it merely was necess'ry to confirm each appointm'nt, an' the thing was done, in the regular way, accordin' to precedent. Our method of makin' the selections, to be sure, was very much against all precedent, but that was a confidential matter which nobody would know about—an' therefore nobody's business, y'see."

"And the Earl was going to drop the matter there, as far as he personally was concerned—after submitting his selections?"

"Well—yes, and no. He was quite frank about that also. He said that if we succeeded in forming a workable business Governm'nt by such a method as this, he saw no reason why the present thirty-nine men at the table should not be formed into a sort of arbitration committee entirely in the background—to which questions might be submitted from time to time by the ministry if it found itself unable to agree upon them within its own membership. No runnin' to such a committee, you understand, with every little diffic'lty which came up in the Cabinet—that would attract attention, destroy all of the *in camera* value of such an arbitration board. But when a diff'rence had become practically irreconcilable—like the Governm'nt Bill about to be presented, for example—the chairman of this committee in the background would call a special meeting, in the strictest privacy, and see if a round-table agreement could not be reached. The Earl said that he was already on so many boards that another, more or less, would make no diff'rence to him—he would be willing to serve on such a board if we wished—"

"And of course, you all wished to know if he would accept the chairmanship."

"Er—quite so! Unanimous! Any man who could hatch out of the old bean any such idea as that conference was the only possible bet for such a chairmanship. He agreed—on the proviso that he could not be expected either to call a meeting or attend if he were at the other side of the globe upon his own affairs—but said that he would endeavor to keep himself informed as to the possibility of vital diff'rences coming up at any particular time and arrange to be somewhere in Europe if it appeared necess'ry to call a special meeting of the committee."

"And he was careful to see that you all returned to London in a different way from that by which you came."

"My word—aye! Four of his newest planes, larger than any I've seen in the continental air service, took us in so many batches. One was landed just outside Southampton, one not far from Windsor, one at Hampstead Heath, and another

down near Tilbury—all meeting three or four waiting taxies at the fields, an' each lot of chauffeurs fancied we'd come across from Belgium or France."

LADY MAY now considered that she'd squeezed her orange dry—and was confident Bromlaw had no suspicion that she'd gotten from him anything more than minor details of what she already knew. Nor had he the slightest concern in regard to the discussion. From his angle, the woman was herself by way of being a "political." He could have told her more, but supposed she knew it anyhow, and could be, himself, close-mouthed up to a certain point.

In order to leave no possible detail in his mind which might appear suspicious at some later time, she again went over to her radio-set and this time tuned in upon a group of the Royal Opera artists who were broadcasting, superbly, the finer bits of "Madama Butterfly." The set was a most sensitive nine-valve heterodyne ("tubes" being "valves" in the United Kingdom), reproducing the voices so powerfully that their strength alone would have made ridiculous any suggestion that the mechanism might not be altogether what it seemed. And of course nobody was going to force the lock of the lower compartment in the console.

Sir Frederick didn't reach Whitehall until after midnight. Seeing that nothing of importance was up for discussion, he went home to bed, his mind pretty full of the most fascinating woman he knew—"a woman with brains, by gad! Fancy—what a pal she might be to him in his political career if it proved that she really wasn't mid-Victorian in her ideas about marriage—all that, you know!"

The man Her Ladyship had decided upon as the best-paying market for her wares was James Kilraine—member of Parliament, off and on, for sixteen years—elected three times out of four, defeated only when it seemed desirable to have a representative not quite so permanently identified with the extreme Left Wing, so thoroughly in favor of "direct action" as an unfailing remedy for every political evil. A barrister, said to make a large income from criminal practice, a gambler and speculator with the luck to win where most men lose, a politician who had plumbed the depths of the nether world and was in close touch with elements of national discord—yet a personality which could be exceedingly attractive upon occasion, sufficiently so to move in the upper strata of London society when he wished to do so. He was not an easy man to get hold of at any specified time, but she knew his customary jungle-paths and tracked him down until she secured a promise that he would come to her on Friday evening.

When he presented himself, after ten, she made him comfortable in the same little den where she had talked with Sir Frederick. Then she drifted into a light, gossipy, disconnected chat on underground politics—betraying so much knowledge of wheels and machinations that he was astounded. Women easily fascinated him, but never got within touch of his cold, calculating brain. Lady May interested him, which was something few women ever had done before, and came much closer to his mentality. Upon one occasion he had paid her five hundred pounds for information which he used most effectively but which he supposed she had obtained by the merest accident without knowing anything more than that she had overheard certain statements by a man not suspected of having made them. Now, however, he began to wonder if she might not have deliberately led the man on to making them. Presently she asked if he had any idea as to who would be in the new Cabinet. And he replied:

"No more than the elephants in Regent's Park! The Government hasn't fallen yet. To be sure, I'd lay a hundred quid that it will fall, presently—but His Majesty wont have anyone in mind to form a new ministry until the occasion arises. Oh—perhaps he's far-sighted enough to be considering one or two—but even that is premature, as yet."

"What would you say if I told you that already he has asked some one to begin upon the framework, that every portfolio is now potentially filled—a workable combination which, probably, cannot be defeated upon any measure it presents?"

"I'd say you were balmy, Lady May! You certainly have no such sources of information as I—and all that is news to me."

"And—if I proved it?"

"I'll admit that you're the cleverest woman in England. Fact—I'll wager you a hundred quid that proving it is impossible!"

"Done! But I want a lot more than that hundred—and entirely aside from it.

What would the information be worth to you?"

"You mean—if you prove who's forming the Cabinet, and the probable selections?"

"The selections are known only to the man whom His Majesty asked to make them—and they're of no consequence. The man himself will accept no portfolio—but will be chairman of an arbitration committee in the background—all of them entirely unknown to the public—their decisions made in secret session."

"Why—why—I say! If I really grasp your meaning, that secret arbitration committee would be the real British Government! What!"

"Well, they're to settle only such questions as prove irreconcilable in the Cabinet itself—the committee only to be called upon some occasion where the Government was certain of defeat in the House—like the present bill, for example. If this new Cabinet and the committee were in existence to-day, that bill would pass! You couldn't stop it!"

"The success or failure of any such committee would depend almost entirely upon its chairman! If you really mean what I think I get from all this, that arbitration committee must be made up from a representation of every shade of political opinion in Parliament. Well—there's not one man in a million who could harmonize any such bear-garden as that and get a majority decision from it! If your proposed chairman can do it,—and such a far-fetched improbable scheme should go through,—he would be the Dictator of the British Empire—that's all! Oh, nonsense, girl—nons'nse! The thing's impossible!"

"And—if I prove it—to your entire satisfaction—what's it worth? Not what will you, personally, pay—but what can you collect from the—er—underground forces you represent—for me?"

"First—let me drop a very serious hint. You've no business whatever to know or even assume that I represent any 'underground force.' Things of that sort are dangerous. If the men concerned in them become suspicious that any woman knows too much,—no matter whether she plays their game for a while or not,—they'd cut her throat or do her in some other way with no more hesitation than crushing a cockroach. Let us assume that you've overheard something which it might be to our advantage to know—but which you yourself don't understand. Well, it might seem worth a thousand pounds, or might not. We'd decide when we heard it."

"Evidently I've taken my wares to the wrong market. Think over the possibilities of what I've told you! You say yourself that chairman would be a dictator—and I can assure you that he will handle that committee with very little trouble. I know the man's reputation. Now—do you and your—er—well, *friends,* really want such a dictator?"

KILRAINE lighted a fresh cigar—and sat studying her face closely.

"What's your idea as to a fair price?"

"Five thousand pounds to prove what I've just told you. Five thousand more if I am used in any way to break up such a combination."

"How would you break it up?"

"I don't know. We'll go into that later. Are you in position to accept my proposition—or aren't you?"

"Oh—my personal check is good for five thousand and considerable more. Fancy there'd be little question as to my being reimbursed from a fund at my disposal, more or less. Why wouldn't it smash the whole scheme if that chairman is killed—permanently eliminated?"

"Rather cold-blooded—what? And he's big enough to make it certain that his 'eliminators' would hang. The time for anything of that sort was before he got the committee together and suggested his scheme to them. As it is now, they're all very strongly for it—and he's much too clever a player not to have suggested to them at least two more men who have brains enough to be efficient chairmen if anything happens to him."

After a few moments' consideration, Kilraine wrote out his check for five thousand pounds and passed it across the table to her.

"You can say that I purchased some jewelry from you—nobody's business where you got it." Then she gave him the story in detail from the gazette paragraphs and her week-end in Devon to the pumping of Sir Frederick. Afterward she turned on the dictagraph—he'd no difficulty in recognizing both voices.

"Earl Trevor—eh? The devil! He's on at least twenty or thirty different boards—and they say he handles every one of them without friction. That organizing and arbitrating ability is what has piled up

"Give me that check at once or I'll take it from you—and I'll not be squeamish about the way I do it."

his colossal fortune. He would be a dictator—no fear! But—I fancy we'd best do without dictators for a bit. H-m-m—you're right about not killing him; it would be a bad play—make his memory that of a hero—make everybody keen to try out the ideas of such a man. As a daring aviator and naval officer, he's admired even by our crowd. No! Thing to do is give him all the rope he wants, but work to undermine him with every man in Parliament—'frame him,' as the Americans say, with even the men of his own party. And—I fancy you'd best let me have that scrap of paper with the sympathetic-ink mark on it—I can stir up suspicion against him with that."

"But—I haven't it! After Sir Freddy had examined the figures I'd roasted out of it with the electric, he very carefully stowed it away in his wallet. Had I attempted to keep that scrap, he'd have been suspicious—I simply didn't dare!"

"Well, it's unfortunate—that was the best bit of double-dealing evidence you had. At all events, I'll take down the names of those thirty-nine who sat around that table down at Trevor Hall. We'll commence at once—dropping a hint here, a pointed question there, an inference with the next man. Give me three months, and I'll wager they'll not get a quorum of that committee at the first meeting called! Now then—I'll just book them as you repeat the names—"

"But really, you know—I can give but the eight I recognized in the cars on the Exeter road! Bromlaw didn't mention a single one of the others! In fact, I saw that he was trying to keep in mind that he shouldn't do that in any circumst'nces. The rest of what he said he considered immaterial—but he wasn't talking as openly as that even with a woman he liked a lot! You easily can see that I couldn't ask for those names, or even hint for them—after having assumed the knowledge I did. It would have been practically admitting that I knew little or nothing of the affair after all! You see that—don't you?"

THE amiable Kilraine had been lounging partly on his back in the long easy chair by the table—his head bent forward, chin on chest, but his piercing eyes looking up at her from under the shaggy brows until they seemed to be drilling clear through her brain. This glance was like that of a basilisk—it didn't waver; nor did he say anything for a full minute. Then he slammed his pencil down upon the table in a gesture of barely suppressed wrath and straightened up in his chair.

"Aye. Possibly I do see! Er—will you let me look at that check again for a moment, please?" He reached over the arm of her chair as she smilingly shook her head.

"What I have—I keep."

"Oh, come! You're foolish! If you provoke me sufficiently, it's quite a simple matter, you know, to have you arrested

as a common forger when you present that check for deposit at your own bank. Let me look at it again, please?"

"Rather not! I know a man who'll cash it for me, and wouldn't seriously object to making you prove it a forgery. That may not be as simple as you fancy. Another point—you may not care to explain just why you gave me such an amount—it looks suspicious, in politics!"

"Er—just a moment, Lady May. Don't try either to play with or defy me—you had best try to realize the personal risk you run in anything of that sort. I'll admit, frankly, that you almost fooled me with a story so ridiculous and far-fetched, on the face of it, that none but a fool would believe it. You also had what seemed to be reasonable proof until one came to ask for the only sort of real proof which might be of the slightest use. At that point, your story and your scheme for getting money under false pretenses broke down—you had no such proof. And I recalled a rumor which has been going about that Bromlaw is deucedly hard up, recently—heavy losses, all that. Concerning yourself, I know—if it's not generally understood—that your income cannot possibly meet your expenditure, that you must raise money in one way or another to keep going. I was quite willing to play your game in that direction if you really had anything of value to sell—but see what it really amounts to! It's not unlikely that His Majesty may have talked with the Earl of Dyvnaint about sounding out a few of the statesmen, tentatively, with the possibility of a new ministry in view. But that a man of such overwhelming private responsibilities would consider scheming, by any such means as you describe, to make himself practically a dictator, is cutting it a bit thick, now isn't it? What? But you and Bromlaw made common cause and built up your bogey until it seemed to anyone in our political position to have substance and menace. You rehearsed your little discussion, here, and then recorded it very convincingly on your dictagraph. It was quite artistically staged—I'll compliment you that far. Now, young woman—listen carefully! There's nobody else in the house but your maid somewhere below stairs. Give me that check at once, or I'll take it from you—and I'll not be squeamish about the way I do it!"

The color slowly receded from her face, leaving but a red spot of anger in each cheek. She slowly drew the check from inside her corsage.

"I prefer that you do not touch me. And—and you really mean that you will take no action whatever against this stupendous scheme of the Earl's?"

"Our lot have no interest in fighting ghosts and chimeras. We believe in direct action—aye,—but against something which has blood to be let out of it. Come to me with something which isn't a nursery-bogey, and I may forget this little joke you've had at my expense. We generally are willing to consider a trade—for value received—not for moonshine."

SHE took him out through the hall to the door—found his hat and stick for him—let the man out of the house without a word. Her first reaction was that of anger so intense that she could do nothing but unconsciously walk up and down the hall for a time, softly hammering one clenched fist upon the other—thinking things which she didn't say aloud. After this had run its course a little, the question of finances intruded itself. There was no imminent danger of catastrophe in that direction—but unless her bank account somehow were bolstered up within a month or so, there would be. The wares she had to sell were worth every penny of what she'd asked—if the extreme Left could be made to believe her story absolutely true. But Kilraine, of course, would give enough of it to his fellows, in a purposely ridiculous light, to ruin her market in that direction. As she returned to the little den to put out the lights before going up to bed, she was considering whether any of the French politicians might be made to see a menace to them in such a scheme. Then, entering the room, she got a jolt which seemed to stop her heart from beating for a moment or so. In the chair where Kilraine had been sitting was a handsome man of distinguished appearance, in faultless evening clothes. He promptly removed the long brown cigar from his mouth—and was courteously on his feet with the smiling remark:

"You do not object, I trust?"—holding up the cigar. "Thanks. Wont you sit down and make yourself comfortable while we chat?"

She sank down into her chair, too much jolted from her usual poise to do more than murmur something about not having expected a caller.

"Er—quite so. Particularly, as I came in by the little door from the garden. Er—let me apologize for putting your dictagraph out of commission while you were in the hall. It was still running—so I fancy you had a good bit of evidence against Kilraine as well as Bromlaw, if ever you get the opportunity to use it. As for myself—er—fancy we must have met somewhere, though I really can't recall the time or place."

"You—you are possibly Earl Trevor of Dyvnaint? Your face certainly is familiar—even though it may be from gazette portraits."

"Er—quite so. Fancied you'd recognize me when the surprise had worn off. Er—if you ask me, I'd say Kilraine treated you rather badly, don't you know—though one must admit he was quite right in fancying your proofs none too good. Still—I think he went too far in concluding so quickly that you'd hatched up any such plot with Freddy Bromlaw to do him out of the five thousand. Seems to me I'd have been inclined to weigh the evidence more carefully before I proceeded to extremes—"

LADY MAY held up a hand haughtily. "One moment, please! I don't know that I care to discuss all that with Your Lordship. You haven't the reputation of being a sneak—I don't know how much or just what you may have overheard—in fact, I'm not particularly int'rested upon that point. But the glaringly evident fact is that you have forced yourself into my house uninvited—that your presence here, in the circumst'nces, is a gross intrusion—that you owe me an explanation of how you got here—and why."

"I say, Lady May—I shall be complimenting you presently! You go directly to the point without for a moment considering that I have very serious cause for complaint against you if I wished to take that tone—which, fortunately, I don't. You ignore that feature altogether—when it explains without embellishment my presence here. Er—suppose I just go over my interest in the matter—step by step? If you're fatigued already, I'm sorry—because we really must understand each other better before I leave."

The man was a gentleman in every tone, gesture or manner of dealing with her—and yet she sensed more real fear of what he eventually might do than Kilraine ever could have aroused in her.

"You evidently know something of my poor efforts in the line of fiction—I suppose it's no more than fair that I should listen to yours."

"Very good—we'll consider the efforts of both pure romancing, if you prefer. You see, Freddy Bromlaw is absolutely a man of honor with rather a wide influence in his county, but he never has been anything like a match for a clever woman. It's by way of bein' a joke among his friends. Not, mind you, that he'll tell 'em anything they wish to know, but as a fencer he's not of premier force—says 'yes' at times when even 'no' would be more damaging than saying nothing at all. Well, one of my chauffeurs reported having passed your car on the Exeter-Dartmouth road—when you seemed to be closely inspecting the guests in his own car—and that you followed others evidently with the same idea.

"I'd heard of you as a clever woman whose husband, formerly, was in the House, and that you were by way of bein' more than half a political yourself. Obviously, you were studying my guests at a time when we preferred, as a matter of courtesy to His Majesty, to avoid any public comment whatever. So I had a man from my Park Lane household come out and secrete himself about this place to see if my movements were merely of casual interest to you—or possibly something more serious. He reported your telephone conversation with Sir Freddy—holding the receiver of a pocket dictaphone against the glass of that window, yonder.

"Knowing that Freddy was a poor match for you, it seemed of enough importance that I came over and listened to your discussion with him. Considering the fairly truthful mass of informaton you had worked out concerning me and my guests, merely by inference and deduction, I fancy there need be nothing further said between us about 'sneaking' or 'eavesdropping'—you certainly had a long start of me in that direction. That talk naturally made me gather up considerable data concerning your resources and income—compelling reasons for getting money in any way you could. Which explains my making a point of overhearing your talk with Kilraine tonight. I didn't quite believe he'd altogether swallow your story, because, really, you credit me with ambitions which I'm neither young enough to cherish nor desirous of realizing. If my efforts succeed

in stabilizing this government somewhat more than is possible just now, you should be as well satisfied as any of us—but when a new ministry is formed, you'll find that some statesman like Balfour or Churchill has been asked to form it and has done so. At all events, your attempt to sell Kilraine what you thought you knew ended in the sort of row which will make his crowd take less stock than they might have, before, in any rumor of that sort about me or such politicals as I seem to be intimate with.

"Indirectly, Lady May—it seems to me that you've done us a service. On the other hand, I cannot overlook your decided ability in the line of political intrigue when any detail of it once interests you. Frankly, I'd rather count upon such a woman as a friend instead of an enemy. If at any time you attempted to blackmail me, I'd merely laugh at you. But you've not done that—and I'm quite at liberty to offer any assistance I wish in meeting your personal budget. So I drew, this afternoon, twenty thousand pounds in notes of which I've not taken the numbers—hoping that you will accept them to be used in making life a bit less of a strain than yours must be at present.

"This is by no means an annuity, you understand—just a lump sum to put you where your necessities need not influence your better impulses. If at any time you should turn up information of real value to me, I might purchase it for a bit more than others would offer. Now—er—do we understand each other? Are we to be friends—as I hope?"

For the first time in many years, she choked a little as she spoke.

"Your Lordship—I—I think you are the most wonderful man I've ever known! Any woman would be honored by the friendship you offer!"

"Er—thanks—awfully. And—er—I wish to say that I consider you one of the cleverest women I've come across."

Which leaves us—where? Did Trevor sidetrack and spike a most serious menace to a Government scheme so colossal that it's ridiculous to suppose it could be put through at present? Did Sir Freddy really manage a closer mouth than she supposed and fill her up with pure Arthurian legend? Will the next ministry in England be of the same old stereotyped pattern? (There would seem to be room for improvement.) We can but wait—and see.

The Back Trail

The man who wrote "The Evil Spirit" here contributes a vivid little drama of Western life that carries a real punch.

By ROLLIN

THE trail of Smither ran long, and extended over half a territory. It was as twisted and gnarled as the stem of a mesquite growing up from a barranca's boulders. It was a trail of success—as success was measured by a town of desert-hard men. The town was Samsburg.

Samsburg knew some of the incidents that had passed to make the more devious twists in Smither's success trail. It knew, for instance, how a pack train laden with goods for Sonora had crossed the border to meet its death in a little box cañon. It knew how Slade Williams, gunman, had fallen. And it knew how Henry Millard, ten years before, had lost his lands in the Gap in the Wall Pass. This last had been, in its way, a start in the career of Smither, his first taste of the spoils of robbery, and the feat itself had been simple. With a heavy gun he had simply granted Henry Millard and his ten-year-old son the right to live in exchange for a deed hastily drawn on brown paper.

Samsburg in no way condemned Smither; it watched, merely, as a many-eyed creature, with sun-squinted, desert eyes, marking the tide and way of his progress. Smither was hard, cunning, daring; more so than those about him, and in this way he was entitled to their respect. He also drew a faster gun. So he lived.

Samsburg saw Smither reach a peak in his devious success trail when he lawfully

BROWN

—for in ten years a variety of law had marched in across the desert—purchased the Trivoli House, a gambling and saloon hall which eclipsed by three-fold proportions all five of the others along Samsburg's single, dusty street. The sum of its price was large, and Smither, among other properties, sold the ranch at Gap in the Wall. The exact amount received for the lands —eight thousand, one hundred dollars— became rumor through the town. A slender, dark-eyed youth, who lounged along the street, heard the amount from one of the Trivoli House hangers-on, and the youth left town riding a fast, thin-legged, Mexican mule.

A MONTH passed. It seemed to the watchers that a change might have come to the fortunes of Smither. The Trivoli House, with an advertised bank of ten thousand dollars, went broke three times, and the house was put under mortgage to finally refund the sum. Smither fired the first two of his dealers, and shot —with a verdict of self-defense—the third. The news ran swiftly from mouth to mouth. The youth riding the Mexican mule returned, one afternoon, to Samsburg's single street, and the same evening an old man, sitting a very good horse, rode slowly into town, and tied his mount carefully at a hitching rail beside the mule.

Smither, sure of himself and his cunning, and the means he had taken to prevent further loss, nevertheless kept at the Trivoli House through the course of three heavy nights, pacing the hall and behind the gambling tables. His eyes had become red-rimmed and bleary, for, unlike his hired gamblers, he found it impossible to sleep during the daytime. He drank heavily to make up the loss.

He was at the bar, after dusk, in the act of taking a brandy when the youth approached him.

"You have need of a dealer?" asked the youth softly, at his side.

Smither whirled. He looked searchingly at the youth through squinted eyelids. He saw that the youth's hands—both hands —were white, and that they were also long and slender-fingered.

"Yes," he said, "I have. Who are you?"

"Jules. I am a good—dealer."

It did not occur to Smither at the time that Henry Millard, of the Gap in the Wall, had had a half-grown son ten years before, and that the son's given name had been Jules. He had probably never heard that name.

Smither studied the youth.

"My dealers must be good men," he said, in his precise voice. "Very good men!" He lowered his tone, still careful, precise, cold. "They must deal cards— so that no great loss comes to the house again. My last dealer, who did not do this thing well, died. You have heard?"

"Yes, I have heard." The youth, Jules, made a weary gesture as though he had heard this thing many times before, as though he were dismissing an argument. "Yes, I am a *good* dealer."

Smither drank his brandy. "We shall see!" The situation pleased him.

He led the way to a table set off in one corner of the room. The night was early yet, and the house was sparsely filled. He picked up a deck of cards, and looked again carefully at Jules.

"We will play a game," he said. "You are armed, Jules?"

For answer Jules drew back a side of his coat, disclosing the grip of a gun.

"Then, Jules, let us understand: You must win this game. So . . . . If I should *see* that you do not play fair—*see,* mind you, Jules!—I will call you. Then, Jules, you may go for your gun. It will merely be a case of the fastest draw between us, a dispute over cards, self-defense in the eyes of the law. You understand?"

Jules nodded again, wearily. There was nothing about his face to show that he heeded the significance of the words. . . . . Or else, that he had schooled himself to meet just this. His white fingers fluttered through a shuffle of the deck. He dealt the cards slowly.

An old man entered the doors to the Trivoli House. His eyes were furtive above a grizzled beard. He looked slowly about, blinking in the light of the hall, and shambled over to the bar to drink three whiskies in nervous, swift succession.

A moment later he stood leaning against the wall, looking, at a distance, on the table where Smither and Jules played a game of poker. His withered right hand twitched.

The old man did not move for half an hour. Smither, glancing up once, noted him; yet Smither saw nothing in the man to hold his attention—a withered desert rat come in briefly from some prospect hole in the hills.

Smither's success trail had been long, with as many twistings as the stem of a mesquite growing out of the boulders in a barranca. It was small wonder that some had grown hazy in his memory.

AND Smither had cause to be pleased when he rose from his chair. Figuratively, he had lost a thousand dollars, in the half hour, to the youth across the table. He smiled as he gave the youth a permanent table in the center of the hall.

At midnight he decided, as the house had been small and was already thinning, to go to his rooms and sleep. In the doorway the old man plucked at his sleeve.

"What do you want?" Smither asked.

The old man seemed a little drunk. "What d' I want?" he whined. "I wants action. Action from this-here place."

He drew a tiny, buckskin pouch from a breeches' pocket.

"That's what I wants—action!"

SOMETHING about the old man appealed to Smither's sense of humor. He smiled again, and led the man to the bar to have the dust weighed. He saw at the time that Jules was sitting idle, and that still further appealed to his humor.

"Fifty dollars," announced the weigher.

With a final gesture Smither sat the desert rat at Jules' table, and with a final brandy he went to his rooms to fall into heavy sleep.

He was awakened an hour later by a barkeep from the house.

"Smither! Quick—it's happened again. The new dealer, Jules! Eight thousand, one hundred dollars, lost to an old desert rat! Jules is gone. Eight thousand, one—"

Smither shut the man up. He sensed just what had happened before he could buckle on his guns, and he knew that this final loss meant ruin for himself—after ten years. Nevertheless, he read the note on Jules' table:

Value received—$8,100, gold—for the Gap in the Wall Ranch.
Henry and Jules Millard—father and son.

The throw went high, but Reed went straight up in the air and nailed it.

Photo from Wide World Photos

Trusting to Luck

The story of a college sprinter who is given a job in bush-league baseball—and runs and runs and runs.

By GEORGE STEWARD

TAKE baseball, fer example! Now there's a game that'll show what I mean. I was managin' the Bluejays in the Bird Valley League up in the wild backwoods o' Central Pennsylvania. It wasn't much of a league, but I had to start somewheres. There was six teams and they played through June, July, and August into hayfever time. The towns wasn't large, but they was baseball mad, an' if we got a thousand out to see a game, we didn't care a whoop about anything else, anywhere.

Well, my great idee came at the beginnin' o' my third term as Bluejay manager. I almost ended my first two seasons in a blaze o' glory, but got burned in the flare-up at the finish. I didn't feel none too good over it, and it didn't help some when the Bluejay owner says if I didn't end on top next season, I was through.

Well, I set down and done some thinkin' —lots of it. But I didn't get no brilliant burnin' ideas—not till the next June, anyhow. Then I read in the local newsspreader that Blodgett, a kid at a little jerkwater college about twenty mile away, had gone down east to the intercollegiate track champeenships, and run off with the hundred-yard dash in nine an' three-fifths seconds, close to the world's record.

That gimme an idea, and I started in on it. Even now I get a nervous, jellylike sensation when I think what a chancet I took, and what might of happened if that idea had got blight instead o' flowerin' and bearin' fruit.

I took a run up to that college and looked the kid over. He was just gettin' ready to go up for his *di*ploma. He wasn't a bit swell-headed, for a guy who'd just done the hundred the fastest it'd been run since Adam knew he had a pair o' legs.

"Say, Blodgett," says I, after conversin' a bit to oil my conversational wheels, "whatcha goin' to do this summer?"

"Goin' away and get me a job," says he. "I need some money to go to law school in the fall."

"Ever play baseball?" says I.

"Some," says he. "Back-lot baseball. Never amounted to much, though. Why?"

"You'll do," says I. "Want a job this summer?"

"Sure," says he. "What doin'?"

"Playin' ball on my team."

He looked thoughtful a minute.

"Nope," he says at last. "I aint good enough. Besides, I can make more money workin'."

"Now, see here, kid," says I, for him and me was gettin' real chummy. "I'll give you as much as you can make, and you can have lots of time off to yourself too. What you think you'd save this summer?"

He sat down and figgered awhile on board and room and salary. Finally, he says, "Two hundred and fifty dollars."

"Well," I says, "I'll give you three hundred dollars and keep for the summer. What say?"

I thought he'd fall, right off, but he didn't. Said he'd take time to think things over and let me know. But he decided all right, and came on the next week. I had to take him on as an extra. League rules allowed us only fifteen players, and I carried four pitchers, an extra catcher, and two extra fielders, one for infield, one for outfield. So I paid his salary out o' my own pocket, trustin' to luck to work him onto the pay-roll later on.

He went along out to the field the first morning after he came, and I sent him out to the grass, and hit him a few flies. Well, he might of been a fast track man, but just then he looked like three hundred dollars and a summer's keep clean wasted. Out of fifteen flies, he misjudged fourteen of 'em by running up too far, sometimes fifteen or twenty feet, and the fifteenth he did get under, but it bounced out o' his hands. Then I gave him a bat, and threw him a few. I never was no pitcher, mind, but that fellow swung like a broken garden gate; he never come within a foot o' touchin' the ball.

Oh, I was in for it, all right enough, but I vowed to see it through, and trust to luck, which is always a pretty safe thing to do in any circumstances. I gave the kid his rules of conduct; he was to practice his hundred-yard runnin' every day long enough to keep in top trim, only he was to run in a baseball suit and baseball shoes. He was to divide the rest o' his time tryin' to catch flies, and battin', and slidin' bases. He finally did get by the end of the season so's he only misjudged three out of five, and could hang on to the other two if he got his hands on 'em. But I'm precipitatin'.

He couldn't learn to bat, though, and he tried hard. I tried him buntin' then, and he wasn't so bad there, for he did have a good eye and used it. So I kept 'im practicin' bunts, and by and by he could bunt most as good as anyone on the squad. Which is sayin' a good deal for the kid; and then again it aint sayin' so much, either. But all I wanted was to get some way to get that kid on base, and then trust to luck, which is a—but I said that before. D'you see where I'm headin' for?

Well, the Bird Valley League teams came down the home stretch that year like a lot o' disorganized and badly scared racehorses. And it wasn't unusual, either. They always ended the season that way. 'Long about the third week in August, the Owls spurted, but the Bluejays kept right after 'em. And the crucial series for the pennant came again, with each team tied, forty-two won, thirty-five lost, and the Bluejays up ag'in' the Owls for the three final games. Hist'ry was repeatin' hisself again, all right.

THE first day the Bluejays looked through rose-colored spectacles. Big Robby was on the mound, and he was a rare bird. The Giants tried him out next season on his performance that day. Only one Owl got to second, and only two got hits. We didn't fare any better, either; for the Owls' hurler, Moose, was every bit as good as Robby, but Lammer Lamb, our third baseman—eighteen homers that season—connected with a fast out-curve in the

seventh, our only hit; but it was a circuit wallop, and we didn't worry none.

But the next day—ouch! The rose in the spec's turned to a purplish blue. I swore I wouldn't use Big Robby, and I didn't, but I used all the other three and the two sub-fielders as well. It didn't help none. They got fifteen runs—we got two on a relief twirler who was sent in to get a little exercise. And it was a lot worse than the score, too. Nieman, center-fielder, broke his leg slidin' into second, and my one lone substitute outfielder went in to play. It was a chance I was prepared for, even though I was sorry for Nieman, and that day the kid, Blodgett, went on the pay-roll an' became an official member of the squad.

So came the fatal third and deciding game—the crisis when our boys were due to bust, blow up, explode, fade out—anything but win that elusive, deluded pennant. During the night a rain from the east came, and up in those Pennsylvania backwoods that usually means nothin' dry except the Prohibition officer's house for a week. We played the second game on a Tuesday, and lined up for the third, Saturday. The kid looked natty in his Bluejay uniform, but he didn't say much and sat on the bench unconcerned. The weather had helped us some, too. It let Big Robby get a five days' rest; he needed it for what was to follow—trust the words I'm sayin'—and gave me a chance to fix up a big emergency patch for a team ready to blow out.

The day was fine, the weather was clean and warm, the field dry. And the crowd! Man, that place was packed worse'n a cattle-boat, and it almost seemed a crime to let pop-bottles and peanut-bags take up space that we couldn't utilize but wanted to. And the crowd—two thousand of 'em—was on cliff's edge, too. Little wonder, either, for it was the closest race ever staged in the Bird Valley League, and the Bluejays had come up for a do-or-die attempt. At least, it was that for the Bluejays' manager, and I certainly was thankful I had a little surprise party up my sleeve when the team would begin to blow. For it was dead certain to—always had before. And history repeats hisself. But I was trustin' to luck, which is the only—never mind.

Well, that crowd got their money's worth.

Big Robby and Moose pitched barrel-tight ball, but Robby cracked a wee bit in the fifth—a single, a sacrifice, another single, and I almost wept—an' not for my job alone, but the pride o' champeenship, when I saw the scoreboard:

Owls	0	0	0	0	1
Bluejays	0	0	0	0	

Big Robby recovered, but Moose didn't have to—he kept right on goin', and for eight innings the Lammer was the only Bluejay to get on base—he whaled out a double in our half o' the seventh. But it didn't do no good. The boys just wasn't hittin' Moose, and you can't get no runs off'n a good pitcher without no hits.

CAME the ninth, and with it some excitement. Robby done his part noble and hung up another horse-collar—his eighth—around the Owls' necks. Then was our last bats, and mebbe my last job. Big Robby and Brown didn't do nothin' with the stick but get out, and the Bluejay side o' the stands was sure a sick-lookin' crowd, for Wells, first base, was up next, and he wasn't noted for hittin'. But he done his bit, all the same, though he hadn't planned to just that way. He didn't step back on one of Moose's fast in-curves, and got the ball on his right wrist—broke it just s'if a two-ton truck run over it.

Now, you're thinkin' I put the kid on first to run, and he tied the score, but you're guessin' wrong. I sent down Hodges, my subs'tute infielder. Why? Because Lammer Lamb was the next guy up, and I give him orders to whale one out. And whale away he did, a regular brimmin' beauty, down atween left and center; and when play was resumed, Hodges was home, and the Lammer was roostin' on third. There was some noise, then, I'm tellin' you, for two thousand people to make, but there was more later.

And now I started to pull my stunt. Bloss, right-fielder, was next up, and all he'd done so far in the last three games was to strike out eleven times. What you think I done? Yep, sent the kid in to pinch hit. It was takin' a horrible chance, as you kin see. He was told to bunt, and I figgered on his speed to get him down to first, while the Lammer was bringin' home the winnin' run. But the egg didn't hatch. The kid bunted, all right, but he bunted a fly right into Moose's hands, retirin' the side.

I was up ag'in' it, sure, now. Hodges had to play first in Wells' place; I had yanked a outfielder for a pinch hitter, and my three

extra pitchers was poorer in the outfield than the kid was hisself. So I sent the kid out to right, and prayed the good Lord not to send any flies in his direction, or if He did, to make 'em one of the two out o' five the kid could hang onto.

The tenth began, and Big Robby workin' away nice for two outs. Then I got near-heart-palpitation, for Zimmer, the Owls' battin' ace, was comin' up. He was only two homers behind our Lammer for the season's record, and he sure could hit, any time and anywhere and anything. I signals the kid out in right, and he backs up ag'in' the fence. One strike! One ball! Two balls! Two strikes! and away went that pill into right. I wanted to shut my eyes but couldn't. The kid stood like a statue, it seemed, for a half-hour, and then began to run in. I thought he was makin' another hundred-yard dash, but suddenly he stops, and begins backin' up like a freight-train. The ball was over his head, all right, but he reached up and back—he was tall and rangy—and it came down in his glove, bounded four feet straight in the air again, and came down—in his glove and stuck. And it was lucky, too, for Zimmie was roundin' third when the curtain fell on that little drammer out in right field.

Ovation! The kid certainly got one from the crowd when he came in, but it didn't phase him none. He just smiled, sat down, and looked unconcerned and bored. But I kep' on prayin', nevertheless, if there was any more extra innings, he wouldn't get no more chances.

AND there was more extra innings. Big Robby and Moose was pitchin' as if they had just warmed up and was startin' in the game. They rivaled one another in makin' the scorekeeper chalk up goose-eggs, until the twelfth, and then they was considerable more excitement. Robby got his first two out, as per usual, and then that slugger Zimmer came walkin' out ag'in' to gimme more heart-failure. He did, too. This time it was a long, low, hard line drive out into right—anywhere but where it should of gone. The kid came tearin' in after the ball on the run, and made a stab for it, but it made a wicked bound. I'll do the boy justice; it was a hard ball to field, and maybe a good fielder would have muffed it just the same. And, remember, the kid wasn't a good fielder. It bounced up atween his two outstretched arms and over his head, and rolled—Lord, how that ball rolled! The ocean never had nothin' on it. I told you that kid was a world-beater in runnin', and he didn't lose no seconds chasin' that ball, but long before it got near the infield, Zimmie had trotted across home-plate. My eyes were so misty I couldn't see, but I knew the scorekeeper was makin' the scoreboard to read like this:

Owls	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Bluejays	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	

Big Robby was a great man in a crisis. He didn't break under this. It made him mad—mad, like a tormented rattlesnake—and he got his next man on three straight strikes. He was madder yet when the kid came in.

"You're a hell of a fielder, you are," he says. "Why the blankety-blank-blank—blank-blank didn't you field that ball and cut 'im off at second?"

He drew his arm back to strike the kid, and I grabbed it just in time.

"Here, cut it out," says I. "This aint no prize-fight; it's a ball-game. If you wanta hit somepin', go out and nail that pill. You're up."

As for the kid, this didn't phase him none, neither. He coolly sat down on the bench, but he quit lookin' bored—just unconcerned now. Well, it wasn't his funeral. I couldn't blame 'im; I'd hired 'im with my eyes open to take a chance, and I sure was payin' for it just then in mental agony o' the brain.

Robby took my advice—bein' mad helped him a lot, I guess, for ordinary he wasn't much of a hitter—he poled the first ball pitched for two bases. I begun to take hope, and courage along with it. A man on second; none out; only one run behind—I'd been in lots worse holes, even if I hadn't crawled out of 'em, nayther.

But Moose was a wise old bird. He kept 'em high. Brown bunted two fouls, and finally was out on a infield play, Robby still huggin' second in a lover-like embrace. Then along came our Lammer, like a lost ray o' sunshine on a cloudy day. He did his darndest, and it helped some—a long, high fly that fell just a foot short o' the right-field fence, which would of meant a home run, and the game and champeenship. But that foot done it. Their fielders watched the Lammer as ours watched Zimmer, and the ball came down in a pair o' Owl hands for Out Number Two. But Robby was away with the catch, and made third without havin' to slide none.

The Lammer's out brought the kid up

next. And the situation was almost the same—we was only *one* run behind now—as in the ninth, a man on third, and the kid up. History was repeatin' hisself again, and I was still trustin' to luck, which is—But to go on, I might of sent a pinch hitter in for the kid, to tie the score—mebbe—but this was the chancet I'd been preparin' for all summer, and no matter what happened now, I was due for a move in jobs anyway—either up or down.

And as matters couldn't be made no worse, I told the kid to bunt the first ball pitched, and signaled Roberts to come home on the squeeze. Well, the first ball pitched wasn't the buntin' kind, but the kid tried anyway. He got it near the handle o' the bat, and it rolled out on the field. It must of been a freak, all things considered, but it couldn't been no better if the Lammer himself had done it—and the Lammer sure could bunt as well as knock home runs. The ball rolled slow and steady down toward third, about a foot inside the line, and no sign o' going foul.

Big Robby was home almost with the split crack o' the bat tyin' the score. And Lord, how that kid did run! It was a joy just to see 'im. Neils, on third for the Owls, came in fast, fielded perfectly, and shot a cannon-ball to first, but it didn't do no good. Blodgett was there even before Neils threw the leather. Somethin' down in my heart began to tell me things, and one of 'em was that unless Moose threw three strikes in a row, the Bluejays was goin' to win a champeenship pennant before that afternoon was five minutes older. Our next man up—I've forgot his name; he couldn't bat anyhow—I ordered to look eager, but not to strike at anythin' on penalty o' death; he might of accidentally connected, and ruin our chances.

The kid was intelligent and watched signals. He took a sane, safe lead, and when Moose's arm came back to throw, he was off. He went like, like—well, like Neils' peg to first, and he slid just as a matter of form. He wouldn't needed to. The action of Moose's pitch, and Reed's catching and linin' down to second, I figgered, took two and a half seconds, but the kid was there fifteen feet ahead o' the throw. Dope it out for yourself. Two and a half seconds is about a fourth o' nine, the kid's mark for the hundred, and meant he could do sixty feet easily, even in a baseball outfit.

Moose's pitch was a strike all right, but the kid's steal must of got his nanny goat just a trifle—for stealing bases off Moose was as rare as findin' big pearls in river oyster shells. Anyway, his next was a ball, and again the kid was off on the third lap of the marathon. This time it was closer, but the kid slid in and was safe on a close decision.

I knew Moose was goin' t' throw two strikes in a row, and I give the last signals I ever give in the Bird Valley League. And the kid responded. He took a big lead off third as the second strike came in, for the Owls was playin' for the batter. As the hand of Reed, the Owls' catcher, came forward to return the throw, the kid started again.

I've seen lots o' pretty sights in my time but not many more than that kid runnin', especially for home. And it was a race, this time, too, I'm tellin' any who says I'm a liar and doubts my word. The kid's comin' shook Reed and deflected his throw a little, but Moose recovered quickly and did his best. The throw went high but Reed went straight up in the air and nailed it. The kid slid again, and then no one knew what happened for a minute—the dust was too thick t' see the umpire, and the crowd was too noisy to hear 'im.

The suspense was awful, and it seemed like a age till we could see—the kid was just risin' and brushin' hisself off, and the ump was standin' hands out, palms down—and I knew the kid had done it.

WELL, the crowd went rampagin' wild then, sure enough, and so did the whole Bluejay team, includin' Big Robby, and so did I, and so did everyone except the Owls an' the kid, and even he looked somewhat more excited 'n usual, but he was tryin' hard t' appear unconcerned.

The kid, though a hero, was through with baseball. He didn't want to join up for another season, and no one wanted 'im to, so every guy was happy. Of course, he got a nice slice o' champeenship money, and deserved every cent, too. He went on studyin', and is some big gun in legal affairs out Chicaugie way, now.

As for me, well, I got a better job next season, and 'ave been comin' up some since. I've been havin' pretty good luck, which is what I trusts to, takin' second division teams, and gettin' 'em over the column, among the leaders. Shouldn't be surprised if I'm holdin' the helm for the Phillies next season.

Trudy tossed her head defiantly. "Well, now that he's rescued, what shall we do about it?"

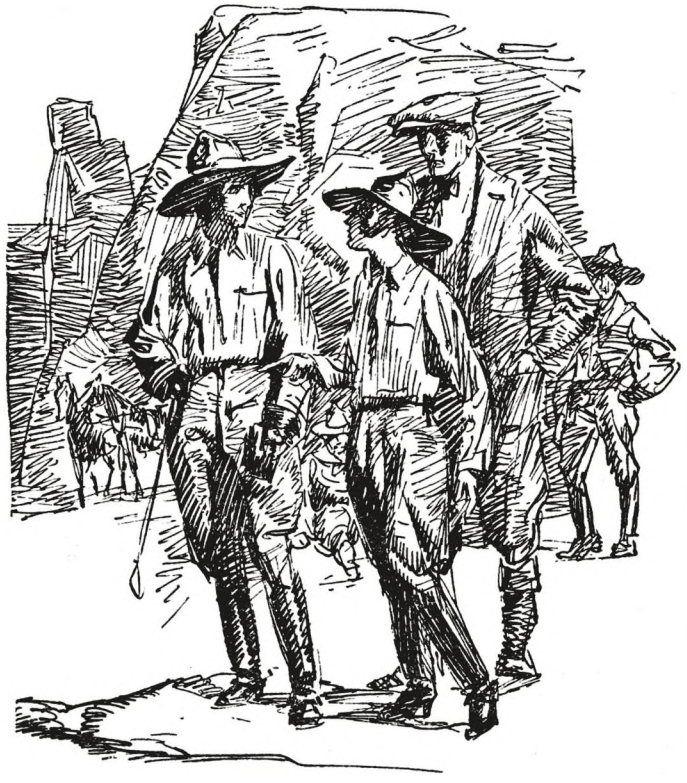
The Lost Frontier

The Story So Far:

"I'M through," announced John Masterson to his employers one fine day; no one could persuade the young engineer to return to the humdrum of office routine —and a week or two later he turned up in a remote town of New Mexico where, he had learned, the wild ways of the old West still found favor.

He obtained a job with a cattle outfit—and soon lost it when he refused to help waylay and murder some riders for a rival ranch. His next job was a peculiar one: he was employed by Big Pete Kelly, the town boss, to secure options on the ownership of these two rival ranches. The two owners, Hendricks and Kling, had lost heavily through their feud, but Kelly knew that under one ownership the properties would pay well.

Masterson went first to Hendricks' Sand River ranch—the outfit which had employed him when he first arrived and with whose riders he was on bad terms. His business, however, was with the owner, and Hendricks received him civilly and introduced him to his daughters, Ruth and Gertrude. That evening he obtained Hendricks' signature to a thirty-day option on the property. And he also secured a similar option on the Kling property. There came, however, to the Hendricks ranch a man named Cameron, who made a much better offer than Masterson's and the daughter Trudy tried to persuade Masterson to cancel his agreement. In loyalty to his employer Masterson had to refuse. When that night the impetuous Trudy tried to steal the papers from his room, Masterson thought it only prudent to hide them—choosing an empty box in a tree. And that was well, for next day he was kidnaped by the Sand River cowboys, taken on a long journey and held prisoner in a lonely cabin. After some days he escaped, but in making his way back became lost in the desert. *(The story concludes in detail:)*



Here are chronicled the stirring adventures of a man who discovered in a remote region of the Southwest a surviving fragment of the real old wild West. Don't miss this one.

By E. S. PLADWELL

Illustrated by O. E. Hake

A BLACK mongrel sheep-dog leaped out of a cañon late next afternoon and yelped at a scarecrow with a big hat, lurching around the end of a peninsula of gray-green sage which ran far down into the pink inferno of the valley whose far-away western mountains were turning to purple.

The scarecrow's boots flapped around his bare knees; his trousers were in ribbons; his shirt was faded and sweaty; his face was fringed with a stubbly brown beard which stood straight out like the whiskers of a veteran hobo. In his right hand dangled an empty canteen. In his left hand was a stale crust of bread. He was singing through thick lips, pronouncing the words with painful exactness, cocking his head to criticize mistakes.

The dog snarled and rushed at the scarecrow, who stopped and glared in surprise. The dog also hesitated. The man yelled with joy and swung forward. The cur drew its black tail between its legs and backed away, barking in wild alarm.

Masterson's sun-smitten eyes watched the tracks of the dog through the sand and brush, following carefully foot by foot for an uphill mile lest he lose sight of it. He staggered into the cañon, bolstered by a last reserve of sanity, keeping his blistered feet exactly in the dog-tracks till he rounded a hillock and blinked his eyes, looking upon a caricature of civilization.

In front of him was a square habitation made of faded grayish blankets on sticks. Alongside it stood the hood of a big six-cylinder automobile of the model of 1915, battered and sun-blistered, with one of its lamps askew and the other flashing with new brass and glass. From around the machine arrived the dog, then another, then a whole yapping delegation. Behind the mongrels ambled two savage-looking pigeon-toed individuals with beady eyes, hawk noses, greasy black hair, flapping hats, overalls, and shirts worn outside the belts. The savages' black eyes seemed murderous.

"Rescued, thank heaven!" gabbled Masterson. "Water! Gimme water!"

"No!" forbade the nearer and stouter Indian.

"But I'm thirsty!" Masterson touched his lips, then managed to wave toward the oven-hot valley. "Water—*agua*—" He touched his mouth again in pantomime. "You *sabe, agua!*" He cupped his hands and brought them trembling to his mouth, trying to smack his lips. "Thirsty—*mucho* thirsty. . . . . You *sabe?* I come long way; hot—*caliente*—oh, dammit, can't you understand?"

"Get out!" yelped the Indian, with a passionate gesture waving the guest away. "You go chase yourself! You go on! You white man! White man all crook—liar—robber—you get out of here!"

Masterson's red eyes widened with stark unbelief.

"You mean no water?"

"Na-a! You go on! Go home!"

THE dogs sensed their master's hostility and began to growl and snarl, weaving past each other, watching the bearded scarecrow who spread his legs apart and dully considered the shiny hot pebbles on the ground.

"This is funny," he mumbled. "Funny! How did you get this way?"

The Indian pointed a brown hand toward the auto.

"White man all crook! One time bum whisky, one time bum oil-stock, one time play poker and take ranch, now bum auto! You crook! White people all crook! Liar—sneak—take Injun money, give him bum auto, swindle, cheat—get out! Go to hell!"

Masterson tried to subdue the buzzing in his ears and the black spots which danced in front of his eyes. He focused his gaze on the redskin's face and hands, discovering black grease-stains of toil which he had not noticed before. They were on the Indian's cheeks and across his nose, like war-paint. It gave him a very martial appearance. The slimmer one was the same. Greasy tools were strewn all around them.

"I think I understand," stuttered Masterson. "It wont go."

"Ya-a-a!" corroborated the slimmer savage.

"Wait a minute. Maybe I can fix it!"

The stouter Indian started to speak but checked himself, and then his face contorted in a mean expression which resembled a leer.

"You fix'm, eh?"

Masterson wished he could qualify his statement. His knowledge of automobiles was only fair, but desperation made him speak like a hero:

"I can fix, sure!"

The Indian folded his arms and his mouth tightened in a cruel smile.

"All right. You fix, we give water. No fix, no water!"

"Gosh!"

For a moment Masterson stood swaying, wishful to lunge forward and die fighting; but he faltered, knowing his small strength, while his stricken gaze roved toward the auto again. At last he lurched to the machine, stumbled over tools and grease-cans, walked around the car, looked wisely under the rear end, got up, and circled around the thing again—when a sudden bright idea struck him.

He raised the right side of the hood and peered into a mass of dirty, gummy machinery while trying to fight down the dryness of his mouth and the weakness which gripped his limbs. He stared into the array of mechanical whirligigs, with the owlish stare of a drunken man half asleep. He nodded sagely, wabbling with the nod.

"I see what is the matter. I want a bed and a lamp."

"Bed? Lamp?"

Masterson compelled his faltering mouth to articulate clearly: "I will have to lie down under the car. There is no light down there. It is very dark. The ground is very hard. See?"

"Wrumph!"

They hesitated, but at length they started on their grudging errand, frowning and shaking their heads, sending puzzled glances backward until they went past the outer flap of the wikiup. That was what Masterson desired. He grabbed a pair of pliers, wrenched the aged radiator-jet open, made a tiny column of rusty water trickle downward through a hole in the bottom pan, and hurled himself between the front wheels, opening his mouth.

When the Indians returned with a mattress, their tattered guest looked up with a happy smile while the last of the radiator's contents splashed over his face and down his chest.

The larger redskin hurled the mattress to the ground.

"Ya-a-a-a! You liar! You bunk me!

You white liar, you crook, I kill you! I bust you on the nose!" He reached under his shirt. "Ya-a-a-a! Now you pay!"

Desperately Masterson slipped out from under the axle and grasped the heavy handle of a lifting-jack. It was a bar of iron with a thin edge, like a dull sword.

"Now you shut up!" he raved, finding his voice much clearer. "I got a drink—yes; now I'll help you. Behave yourself. I fix car, maybe. Come on. You turn crank. See? Turn crank."

The Indian's black eyes glared with hatred and suspicion, but Masterson kept pointing at the crank until at last the stout savage frowned and pointed likewise at the crank, delegating his junior to the job. Then the senior folded his arms and stood like a judge. His volcanic eyes flashed malice.

The slim Indian cranked. He cranked and cranked and cranked, while Masterson tested the spark-plugs and electrical connections, kicking away dogs that sniffed at his ragged legs. The wiring system seemed in good order, but never a throb came from the car. Masterson cogitated. He walked to the rear and looked at the tank. It was well filled. He cogitated some more. If the tank was full and the motor didn't run, perhaps the gasoline didn't reach the motor.

He turned to the stout Indian.

"Wire! Long wire. I clean out gas-line."

The Indian remained motionless.

"You bunk me some more, like mattress. No more. You go to hell!"

Masterson mopped his face with his weary hand, smearing grease across his nose.

"Phew! All right. Show me where wire is. I'll get it."

The redskin looked undecided. Then:

"No. He go. I stay. I watch."

Masterson nodded wearily.

"All right. Crank, then. Turn crank. Here!"

"You bunk me some more?"

"No. You turn crank."

The stout redskin allowed himself to go to work until the other returned, when Masterson shut off the gas-line, took it out, rammed his wire through it, pushed out plenteous dirt, and replaced the gas-line while his panting Indians exhausted themselves turning the heavy engine. He judged that shortly the redskins wouldn't be able to punish him, anyhow.

He turned on the gas. The slim Indian cranked.

Suddenly there was a pop, a roar, and the big machine waggled joyously from side to side as the motor whooped and then settled down to a rackety cadence. The sweaty faces of the two Indians registered disbelief, then amazement, then pleasure. They looked almost benign.

"The gas-line was plugged," explained Masterson, secretly thanking his stars for this miracle.

The stout Indian nodded. With cordial dignity he advanced and patted Masterson's chest, leaving black-hand marks.

"Good! You good man! All right. Fine. We pay. You good man. Come!"

They led the willing Masterson toward the wikiup. The stout and now beaming savage brought forth a tin bucket of water while the smaller one produced half a bologna, a loaf of bread, a tin of sardines, a bottle of maraschino cherries and a demijohn with a rich alcoholic smell which vied with the eternal odor of hot grease-wood outside it. The happy guest sat on a box and ate. He noticed he was in a cañon which possessed a tiny well, a few willows, three scrawny maltreated horses, a buck-board, and intimate Indian laundry drying on the willows.

His new friends spoke at length concerning their auto. He gathered they had bought it secondhand recently and driven it almost home when it stopped, creating an extreme amount of Indian virulence. Their ponies towed it into the cañon, where it balked every attempt to make it go. Masterson's miracle earned copious gratitude. Did he desire to go to town? Fine. Sure. They would all go. They wanted to speak to the fellow who sold them the auto, anyhow.

"Road over there, four mile," explained the stout Indian, pointing southward, then southeast. "Town over there, thirty mile. Two hours. I bust his damn' head!"

SHADOWS moved down in the brush at the end of the cañon. Masterson peered into the sage and saw that persons on horseback were advancing toward him. One of them waved. He arose and returned the salute eagerly. The travelers dashed up the cañon and in spite of their blurred outlines he soon saw that two of them were girls. The horses leaped over clumps of sage and came stamping past the auto, kicking up dust and pebbles. Ruth was in

the lead—a different Ruth, in dark riding-breeches, boots, gauntlets and wide cowboy hat. If she had seemed a trifle colorless before now, it was all changed. She was the leader. She halted her big chestnut horse and dismounted. Trudy, behind her, leaped off the black pony while it was still in motion. Beside her was Cameron, bleached and wan, as if the saddle hurt him. Behind Cameron were Shorty and Jim, both sullen. Masterson advanced to the leader, fearing that he looked like a wild man. She extended her hand.

"I'm so glad we've found you! How can we ever apologize?"

"I don't know," admitted Masterson, looking whimsically from Ruth to the others. "It would be a job. How did you hear of it?"

"There was gossip at the ranch, and of course it reached me. I was horrified. I made Trudy and Mr. Cameron ride out to that shanty—"

"You *made* them?"

She confessed it with a slight smile. He noted that her lips were not as curvy and whimsical as Trudy's, but they expressed more stability.

"Yes. This was an emergency."

"Oh! That's different, of course!"

"We found the dead bull and the canteens and pistol. We followed you into the brush, and then we lost your trail in granite until we looked down into the valley and saw the sun flashing on this."

She produced the white slide-rule!

"Thanks," he gulped, taking the thing, speaking in a voice that shook. "I didn't know it was lost. Thanks!"

There was a lull. Nobody seemed to think of anything to say. Purple shadows kept stealing up the cañon and softened the outlines of the lavender sage and the reeking brown greasewood. The sweaty horses pawed the ground, smelling the tiny well upstream, but they waited for orders. Masterson seated himself on a purple-gray rock. The stout Indian gave him a cigar with a gold band, and he lit it, waiting for the awkward situation to ease itself. At last Trudy tossed her head defiantly.

"Well, now that he's rescued, what shall we do about it?"

Ruth seemed to go on guard. She turned her head slowly.

"What is there to do but help him to town?"

Trudy swung around to Cameron, who stood disconsolate alongside his horse and did not see her glance. Cameron's long

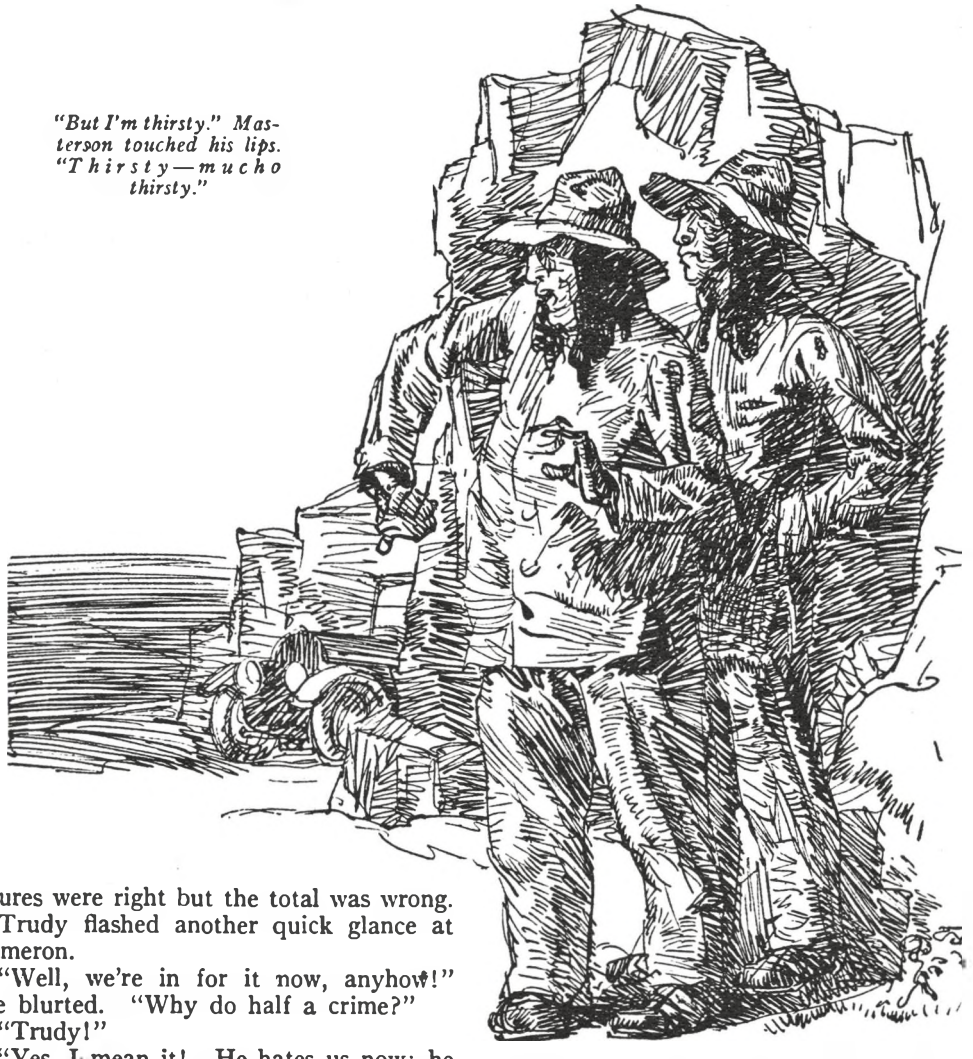
and bony face was dejected, and it wasn't because of Masterson's problem, either. He wore a gray golf-suit in lieu of riding-togs. Trudy puckered her lips and turned with her old pertness toward Ruth again.

"Well, do you want him to win through and sell us out?"

"There's no way to prevent it," warned Ruth.

"Oh, isn't there?"

Masterson watched the play of the lights on their faces; Ruth was quiet but alert, standing with shoulders back, eying her sister pleadingly. Her features were not symmetrical, and the nose was slightly tilted at the end; but these irregularities combined in some fashion to form a total which was kindly and not unbeautiful. Her contrast to the flaring little blonde imp in khaki was like a contrast between cool waters and skyrockets. He looked at Trudy's exquisite profile, wondering that a person of such marvelous outward symmetry should be the illogical one of the two. It didn't seem right. It annoyed him, like a mathematical addition where the



"But I'm thirsty." Masterson touched his lips. "Thirsty—mucho thirsty."

figures were right but the total was wrong.

Trudy flashed another quick glance at Cameron.

"Well, we're in for it now, anyhow!" she blurted. "Why do half a crime?"

"Trudy!"

"Yes, I mean it! He hates us now; he knows we did it; he can get the sheriff after us; the damage has been done already. There's no way out of it, is there? Why go to all this trouble and then back up?" She tried to beat down her sister's mute opposition. "Can't you see I'm working for Dad—can't you see that this means *everything?*"

Masterson interrupted, trying to take the wind out of her sails:

"I can see that Br'er Cameron has enlisted one young lady completely in his cause. He must have a very winning personality!"

Trudy scowled with impatience.

"Well, what of it?"

The man on the rock saw it was time to check her before unpleasant things started to happen. His voice, refreshed to full clarity, announced his attitude in no uncertain tone:

"It doesn't agree with my plans. Now that I have been rescued, as you put it, I'm going to unrescue myself and start tomorrow morning for town. We will dispense with the rest of your program. I don't hate you; I'm not going to call the sheriff; I'm not going to do anything except go about my business; and I'll ask you to suspend the rest of your war until we can work this matter out. Let it drop!"

Perhaps it was the acerbity in his voice, but Trudy's face failed to register peace and good will. Her eyes were wide, her chin high and her face red.

"I'll be the judge of that!" she retorted. "We're three to one! Three men to one!"

"Trudy!" commanded Ruth. "You're mad! Do you expect me to let you go on with this?"

The stubborn Trudy sent her a glance which was not sisterly, then bit her lip and

looked around. Cameron was out of action; Jim was indifferent, smoking a cigarette, sitting on the ground and roweling the sand with his spurs. Only Shorty was eager, watching Masterson balefully from under the brim of a flapping hat. Behind Masterson were the two Indians with greased faces, unutterably ferocious. Their attitude toward Masterson was plainly fraternal, with the white man by far the toughest appearing ruffian in the lot. Trudy realized the odds were against her.

"I can't do anything!" she exploded, stamping on the ground. "I can't do anything for Dad!" She whirled around, dragging her little silver spurs. "I'm beaten! Beaten! There's no way to handle this man!" She tossed up her vehement hands. "Oh, why didn't we bring more men?"

Cameron came to life, extending comforting arms; and to Masterson's surprise she went there and buried her head on his shoulder, so that it pushed back her broad-brimmed hat and made the faint daylight glint on her yellow hair. Cameron's hand patted her and his low voice came clearly, soothingly: "There—there, sweetheart, don't worry—it will all come out all right. There—there!"

There was a note of sincerity in the comforting tones.

THE amazed Masterson stared at them and then past them to the far-away purple-black mountains outlined against the fading sky, wondering at this marvel which made him feel resentful and wistful and isolated and uncomfortable—not that he cared much for Trudy, but that there was sincerity in the thing, so that it gained in dignity and made him an interloper. He felt like a person who had been shunted aside, as he watched their silhouettes. He didn't want to be shunted aside. Somehow he wanted to be up and doing something for himself. The loneliness of the desert, the heat, the tingling odor of sage and greasewood, made him forget his usual coolness and fall a victim to romanticism.

He saw Ruth also watching the pair, but it was too dark to see her face. He felt that he wanted to see her expression, so he arose and going alongside her, he watched with her, sympathizing mutely with her feelings in the matter—whatever they were—until he touched her hand and grasped it and held it tightly, and even more tightly, until at last she cried:

"Ouch! That hurts!"

He withdrew his hand hurriedly.

"Excuse me!" he apologized in embarrassment. "I didn't mean it!"

She watched the purple shadows of the mountains turning swiftly to blue, then black. After a time she spoke in a very low voice:

"No, I don't believe you did mean it."

His heart was beating somewhat rapidly, but he didn't know exactly what to say; so he said nothing. Out of the silence came Shorty's voice, speaking to Jim:

"If I'd had my way, I'd of bounced somethin' on his head, the big stiff! Girls is too gentle. If I'd of had my way, I'd of tamed him right at the start. Then we wouldn't of had all this trouble. I may get him yet. You watch! I'm gonna—"

Shorty became aware of his loudness and closed his mouth. There was quite a silence. Masterson became aware of faint yellow flickers dancing on the ground and the near-by brush. Up the cañon, the Indians had started a fire, and quickly the party moved there, forgetting Shorty. Masterson let the travelers and horses go past him while he loitered. Shorty was the last to start, making a detour toward the automobile, inspecting it briefly just as the stout Indian approached Masterson. The latter pointed at the machine.

"Watch out tonight!" he whispered.

The Indian stiffened.

"Huh!" he observed, and that was all.

But next morning Shorty and Jim were missing from roll-call.

The camp had slept well, for the travelers had all brought blankets and food; but when they gathered around the Indians' breakfast-fire, even the most urgent calling failed to bring the two missing men until finally the Indians beckoned the guests into their wikiup.

Shorty and Jim lay snoring on the frowsy blankets of an improvised cot. Their faces were red and full-veined, almost purplish.

"Stewed!" said Cameron inelegantly.

Masterson looked into the eyes of the stout Indian, who stared back. Then the white man held out a hand.

"Brother!" he said in admiration.

Ruth laughed. Trudy smiled wanly. Cameron slowly stroked his little sandy mustache.

"You win," he surrendered in a weary voice. "What's the use? I lose my job, of course, but still I've won something bet-

ter." Cameron patted Trudy's shoulder. "I agreed to make good or quit, and I didn't make good; so that's that!"

Masterson looked outside at the golden sunlight flaunting on a willow-bush where the horses were grazing beyond the tent.

"Who are you working for?" he inquired.

"Stern and Weston."

Masterson whistled. The Stern and Weston Construction Company was one of the biggest in the nation, perhaps the greatest of them all, with interests from the Atlantic to the Pacific!

"What in creation would they be doing up here?" he demanded.

"You mean to tell me you don't know?"

"Certainly not. I stumbled into this by accident."

Cameron's bony face assumed the self-satisfied expression which Masterson disliked.

"Why should I tell you, then?" drawled Cameron. "You can't expect me to give information to the enemy, can you?"

The frowning Masterson looked into his eyes, studying the man, trying to analyze this matter and piece it together. At last he spoke, slowly but without continuity, like a person constructing the parts of a puzzle:

"Stern and Weston Construction Company. . . . . Sand River is a river coming down through a narrow pass, just above a valley. . . . . A river in a narrow pass. . . . . A big river, for the desert. A dam, then. A big dam, holding back all the winter flood-waters for irrigation. . . . . Stern and Weston Construction Company wants to build it. But why should they try to get the ranch in the valley? Oh! They'd get prior title to the dam-site, just at the edge of the valley. . . . . And then they'd have a depot for materials and supplies. And the land would be first to benefit from the dam, and first to rise in value. A speculation for a contract, then —a paying speculation, whether they got the contract or not. If a rival got the contract, they'd own the valley and they could embarrass the rival to a fare-you-well! Great Scott! I've got my fingers on something big!"

AT first Cameron had looked tolerant, but now his mouth was open. He blurted:

"You're imagining things. Where did you get all this?"

"Just now. This minute. You told me."

"*I* did?" Cameron was astounded.

"Yes. Do you think that Stern and Weston play a piker's game?"

"If it was so important as you say, they'd have sent a high official."

Masterson laughed.

"And tip their hand? Would they? Oh, no. They sent a clerk." Cameron flushed, but the other's logic was inexorable: "They wanted to do it quietly, but you'll notice they told the clerk to make good or get out, didn't they? They dressed the clerk up like a wealthy tourist; they loaned him a fine automobile; they wanted to make it look casual, didn't they?"

Cameron's big bony hands made a mute appeal for quarter.

"Enough! For heaven's sake, man, must you strip away everything? Yes, I'm a clerk. Yes, they furnished the automobile. Yes, they did all this, but I never knew why until now. I swear it. I got orders to buy this ranch because the company wanted it. I jumped at the chance, naturally. The rest of it was over my head. I'm not a *Sherlock Holmes* like you!" He turned to Trudy. "Well, anyhow, I haven't made any false pretenses to you, have I?"

She went on tiptoe and kissed him.

"No, you haven't!" she told the world.

Ruth touched Masterson's arm.

"If all this is true," she argued in her low voice, "why should we sell our ranch for a pittance? Isn't that unjust?"

"It is," he admitted, looking down into her violet eyes. "It's wrong. I'm going to fight for a better deal, all around."

"But he's going to give our option to that saloonkeeper, just the same!" charged Trudy.

"At present I'm his employee!"

"Blah! Hew to the line, let the tears fall where they may. Oh, you sanctimonious copy-book hero, you give me a pain!"

This hit Masterson in his mental solar-plexus. It jabbed him so that for once he lost self-control and clenched his fists and yelled:

"You little scatterbrained idiot, can't you see that if my theories are true, your ranch is worth a lot more than even Cameron can give? Can't you see he was told to come here and buy it cheap, even though it was higher than I could offer? Can't you see that the whole business is now a mix-up, a botch, where anything is likely to happen? Suppose I'm able to deal with

the Boss; suppose I can get the option back; suppose we're able to put up the ranch to the highest bidder, and make 'em compete? Can't you see that you might get twice—three times—what Cameron has offered you? For heaven's sake, for your own sake, drop this wild-eyed attitude of yours, shut your mouth and listen to reason, for once in your life!"

It wasn't courteous, certainly, but—it got results.

Trudy sucked in her breath, and on her fine-drawn face was a look of such complete consternation that Masterson forgot his irritation and began to smile; and then she also smiled, somewhat wanly and wistfully, as though she was recovering from falling off a mental precipice and didn't know just how to climb back again. Then she surprised him. Slowly her hand went forward.

"Forgive me!"

He laughed and took her hand.

"And you wont kidnap me any more?"

"Never!"

"Very well, then; it's peace."

He turned to Ruth, just as a racket from outside advised him that his Indian friends had started their automobile.

"I'll let you know the verdict shortly," he promised; "for whether the news is good or bad, I'm coming back!"

"I know you will," she replied.

He said no more. He turned away from the entrance, into the sunlight. In one brief glance he noticed the bleary glare of Shorty, lying on the bed with eyes just opening. The crackling noise of the automobile was prodigious, but above it he heard the sudden shrilling of Shorty's voice, loaded with pot-valiant determination:

"I'm gonna sock that guy on the jaw right now!"

"No!" gasped Trudy.

There was a scuffle behind Masterson and then he heard Trudy speak with crisp authority:

"Shorty, you be a gentleman or I'll have to make an example of you!"

"Well, for the love o' Mike!" protested the amazed Shorty.

Masterson hastened to the car. As he got in, he looked back to the wikiup and observed the gray of Cameron's dusty golf-togs halfway into the sunlight of the doorway. The fat Indian saw the glance.

"He bad man?" inquired the redskin.

"No."

"He boss?"

"My boss? No."

"He boss girl?"

Masterson's grin went completely over his face.

"Never in a thousand years!"

CHAPTER IX

THE big car with its wild Indian pilot crashed over hot foothills, caroming off rocks and sage-clumps while its cigar-chewing chauffeur learned to drive by the trial-and-error method. The car finally landed by some miracle into a road leading uphill through a great chalky cañon which curved so abruptly that the Indian's face was soon running rivulets of perspiration as he fought the wheel.

Masterson attempted to take the wheel, but the Indian was stubborn, so that the white man's face grew whiter and the yelling redskin in the rear bounced like popping corn. And still the valiant machine rocketed onward. Masterson acquired admiration for it.

"Good car!" he shouted, while a precipice went past the right front wheel.

"Good driver!" chortled the Indian. "Me!"

The car bucked, strained and squealed, but the brown hand at the wheel was blessed with the fortune which favors the brave. In an amazingly short time the white man found himself whizzing over the sage-covered backbone of a ridge and looking down upon a familiar valley where tiny toy houses were spread along a yellow street almost below him. A train plodded along the railroad running across the valley. Its smoke ballooned up to a brassy sky.

The auto took the descent. Wild breezes assailed Masterson's face and irritated the roots of a chestnut beard which stuck straight out from his jaw. The machine took two hairpin turns by the simple method of ignoring the road, after which it recovered its balance and whizzed down past a six-horse freight-team and up to a curve in front of a house with a small picket fence. Biting out eight pickets, the car made the turn, passed a barn, avoided a cattle-corral, and leaped up a hillock where a little prim man in black was walking toward town.

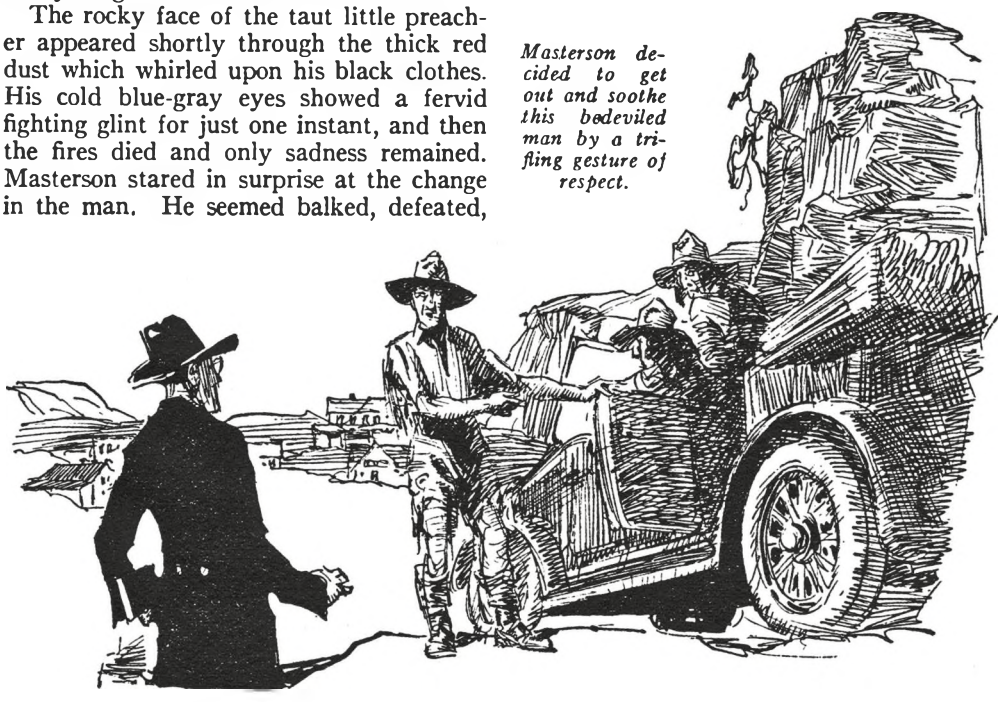
"Stop!" ordered Masterson. "Give him a ride!"

"Whaffor?" demanded the Indian.

"Minister! We may need a minister, anyhow!"

The Indian applied the brakes with all his lusty strength. *"Squee-e-e-e-e-e!"* Everything went toward the windshield.

The rocky face of the taut little preacher appeared shortly through the thick red dust which whirled upon his black clothes. His cold blue-gray eyes showed a fervid fighting glint for just one instant, and then the fires died and only sadness remained. Masterson stared in surprise at the change in the man. He seemed balked, defeated, weary and wistful—a pilgrim in a strange land.



Masterson decided to get out and soothe this bedeviled man by a trifling gesture of respect.

Masterson decided to get out and soothe this bedeviled man by a trifling gesture of respect, so he beckoned the slim Indian to the front seat and bowed to the preacher while holding the rear door open. The churchman's face lighted with pleased surprise. As he settled in the seat, there was a glow on his rock-ribbed countenance which the other had never seen before.

"Drive slowly," suggested Masterson to the Indian.

The redskin growled:

"Sure. I know. Preacher, no more fun!"

The little minister tightened his lantern jaw; but shortly his appraising glance turned toward Masterson, studying his face. Then he asked:

"Aren't you the young man who was present when Mr. Kelly impeached my motives that Sunday?"

"Yes," admitted Masterson.

There was a long silence. The preacher's voice resumed in sepulchral tones:

"I have searched my conscience; I have flayed my soul; I have prayed for light, for vision, for understanding, but I have never been able to see my fault; yet there must be a fault else my success would have been greater. Where is my fault? Where do I fail? Brother, can you tell me?"

Masterson's startled glance jerked toward the minister and then away to the town and the railroad station ahead.

"It's a tough town, I guess."

"History is full of churchmen who won tough towns. Xavier—Augustine—Junipero Serra—even Saint Paul; even the humblest missionaries in the small corners of the world. No, it is not that. Is it myself?"

The man alongside him flinched at the point-blank invitation, wondering what soul-searching loneliness, what baffled groping had caused this austere person to seek enlightenment from such a tough-looking tramp as Masterson. With a shock, he recalled the rough Boss of the gambling-hall, turning to the manufactured solace of "cheer up" signs in his office—a ruffian with a muddled soul reaching for light. And now the minister! Both pathetically human, enemies to each other, living on different planes of life, never to be compared in the same breath—but equally im-

potent when viewing their own shortcomings.

"I cannot tell you," evaded Masterson. "How could I?"

"You have a kind face. You seem an educated man. Both are rare hereabouts."

Masterson watched the sun flare on the wires of a fence alongside a green irrigated field. The railroad-station, with its string of empty freight-cars, was fast approaching.

"Speak!" commanded the parson.

Masterson chose his words:

"In the West, it's the man that counts. A man's calling means very little. If people admire him, it is all the same to them whether he's grocer, gambler or parson. There's no line of social cleavage. You came here as a minister—solely as a minister. That one fact put the odds against you. It's wrong, it's unfortunate; but that's the sort of town it is."

The preacher's lantern jaw tightened. Masterson had never before suspected how many muscles could wrinkle around one long, thin, embittered jaw.

"So you think I should seek popularity!"

Masterson watched the dingy cobwebbed windows of the railroad station pass by. The auto bounced on the tracks. The parson's voice became jerky:

"I see—I see. Popularity. It is a new thought. . . . . I had been the accountant for the Board of Foreign Missions for many years. I demanded this chance to enter the active work that my cloth entitles me to, but—"

"Great Scott! You too?"

"I what?"

"You also, deviled by routine—figures, calculating machines, office work—wanting to strike out, go somewhere, get away from it? My gosh, we're brothers!"

The Indian chauffeur applied the brakes with both feet, and the car halted in front of the ramshackle hotel. *"Squee-e-e-e-e-e!"* The breathless passengers piled out.

"I am greatly obliged to you!" acknowledged the little preacher. "What shall I call you?"

"You may call me brother!"

"Ah, yes. Brother—er—"

"Masterson."

"Brother Masterson. Ah, yes. We shall meet again." And the preacher, with a bow, departed, while Masterson stared at such an exhibition of unadaptable stiffness. The man just couldn't learn to unbend, even when he wanted to!

The Indians seemed to expect Masterson's further company, but he waved them away, with thanks. His mind was still on the parson.

"Good car!" he advised.

"You betcha!"

The car roared up the street at an unjustified speed.

MASTERSON went to the post office. He received two letters, one bearing the stationery of the Rusk Construction Company, the other inclosed in fine blue linen with a lurid colored lining. He put them into his pocket and sought a room at the hotel. It was the same little hot-box of a room as before, with the same woozy mirror, but the misshapen face which now stared at him was a chestnut-bearded apparition with ruddy cheeks and with peering eyes set in harsh lines earned by facing fierce suns. It was a ferocious face, a truly piratical face. Masterson decided to get rid of it shortly.

He sat on the bed and opened the Rusk letter first. It was from Jim, the chief clerk, and said among other things:

> Old man Rusk is branching out. The whole country seems to be building, as a result of the shut-down during the war. Better come back and get aboard. Expansion is the watchword. We are going to establish branches in Chicago, New Orleans, Salt Lake and Los Angeles. Rusk is going to need people to run those offices. He needs a good general purchasing-agent badly. I heard him moaning about it the other day. He wont make any overtures, Jack. He thinks you ran out on him, but I believe he would be in a receptive mood if you asked to come back. In fact, I'm certain of it. I've spoken to him. Forget your Wild West expedition, Jack. Come home. We need you.

"Good old Jim!" breathed Masterson, and read on:

> By the way, I see you are at Worth. That is only a few miles from Sand River, where the Government is planning to build a big dam and reservoir. It is a matter of millions. It is supposed to be a secret, but as usual there is a leak somewhere. Anyhow, old man Rusk would like to know what the job looks like before others hear about it, and if you can find time to run out there, a report would be greatly appreciated.

Laying the letter down, Masterson softly whistled. Before his eyes came the gigantic figure of the Boss, blocking the way; but he brushed it aside and took up the other letter.

It started off: "You naughty boy! How many good times you have missed since you deserted me! How we have missed you!" And then for two pages it gushed on, telling of parties and dances, of a new show, of an orchestra with ten saxophones, of a lovely sky-blue car that Papa gave her, of everything on earth that Masterson wasn't interested in and never would be.

He thrust the letter into his pocket and thought of Ruth, the quiet Ruth as against the charming Julia Rusk and the charming

"What's the idea? You figurin' to double-cross me?"

Trudy. He voted for Ruth easily enough, but into his mind came a question: Could he call himself in love with Ruth? All romantic authorities seemed to agree that a person in love was a person dazed, glowing with strange glows, seeing rainbows, running around with unnatural pulse and no appetite—mentally absent, with visions of the fair one floating before one's eyes. Masterson observed that his pulse was normal, his appetite was healthy, and Ruth didn't float. Plainly, then, he was not in love. He felt a trifle disappointed about it, so that he frowned and pawed the chestnut stubble whose itching hurt his sun-blistered jaw until he quit worrying over love and took his trouble to the barber.

THERE was tension in the town as he strode along the board walk. It was hardly noticeable, but loafers seemed quieter and voices were less zestful. There was an air as of something about to happen but nobody knew what it was. Even the sleek Italian barber lacked details.

"Trouble at the beeg place," ventured the Italian, jerking a thumb toward Pete Kelly's establishment. "But who knows what? Oh, well. There has been trouble before in thees town. Many times, she's trouble. Sure. Watsa diff?"

The figure of the big Boss appeared again before Masterson's eyes—much more dominantly than that of the gentle Ruth; and he wondered just how to handle the giant, now that the issue was at hand. Masterson had no program, nothing but a vague idea of getting better terms for Hendricks. But how? If big construction companies wanted that ranch, and the Boss held the whip hand, what could Masterson do about it? Tear up the options and defy the Boss? That didn't seem sensible. Not till everything else failed. No. Masterson had to find some other way. But what? He couldn't figure it, but his rising curiosity made him eager to confront the Boss and see what would happen. He found himself thrilling at unknown dangers, like a wolf scenting a prize surrounded by traps and spring-guns.

The presence of firearms impressed him when he entered the shadowed doorway. A lean-faced fellow with pistol at hip gave him a keen glance and might have stopped him except that the big Ferguson of the golden beard tapped on the outer door of the little blue office and soon beckoned Masterson inside.

Kelly was seated in his swivel-chair, smoking a cigar and dabbling with his accounts. He looked up and nodded at Masterson, who was surprised at the change in him. The pinkish face was harsh and harried. Tiny lines wrinkled the forehead above the little blue eyes. The eyes were cold, impatient, nervous, roving past the visitor and then toward the window.

"Hello!" grunted the Boss. "Sit down. Got them options?"

"No. Not here."

"Why not?"

"They're safe."

The Boss swung around.

"What's the idea? Are you figurin' to double-cross me? Hey?"

The quick tension in the room warned Masterson that now was the time to go carefully. He seated himself and took his time. From a card tacked up above the safe he received advice: *"Smile, damn you!"* He smiled.

"The options are hidden in a box at the Hendricks ranch," he reported. "You remember that the Sand River gang wanted to fight with me? Well, they caught me.

They gave me a merry time. Fact is, if I hadn't hidden the options, they'd have been torn up, long ago. They're in a box, right behind the Hendricks ranch kitchen."

"Good. How quick can you get 'em?"

"Right away, if I have to. Some of those Hendricks riders are suspicious, though. Can you give me some men?"

It was straightforward talk. Masterson was caught in the rôle of agent for this man, and there was no way out of it. He wanted to argue, to plead, ask for mercy and even plain justice for the northern ranchmen; but though his brain was reaching hither and yon for some coherent idea —any old idea that would work—inexorable Fate held him in a pincers-grip which he couldn't sidestep.

The Boss tapped on his desk with a pencil. His face was scowling. He growled out words that suddenly sounded like music in Masterson's ears:

"Naw. I aint got men to spare. Some of these town boobs have sent me 'nonymous letters that they're gonna get me. Losers—soreheads. They got cleaned out, and now they wanna fill me full of holes. I'm keepin' all my friends around me. I can't send anybody out with you. You'll have to handle it yourself!"

Masterson sat very still, trying to estimate this new lease of life. It was a reprieve, but not enough, and the Boss was in a surly, stubborn mood. Masterson's eyes widened with a big idea. He chose his words with extreme care:

"If I fail this time, what will happen to the poor bums you want to shelter?"

The Boss slammed a fist on his desk, making things jump.

"To hell with 'em! D'you think I'm gonna help 'em when some of 'em's tryin' to shoot me? Huh! Forget it!"

"Well, what in thunder do you want the ranches for?"

The Boss sat back. His chair squeaked. His face was weary.

"I tell you. I'm goin' after a profit. I meant what I said about startin' a place for bums and lungers"—he sent a defensive glance at Masterson—"even if you did think I was fillin' you full o' hot air; I was tryin' to be a good guy to everybody. See? But now, nix. They've got me sore. There's a profit in them ranches, and I'm goin' after the profit!"

"May I ask how?"

"Sure. I'll tell it to you, on the quiet. I learned there's gonna be somethin' doin' up in that country—a railroad or somethin' —and so I wanted to buy them ranches to help the bums, and hold the property for a raise in price meanwhile. Fair enough, wasn't it?"

Masterson leaned forward. He asked eagerly:

"And you're willing to sell at a profit?"

"Yep. Sure thing."

Masterson's mind began to work faster.

"That's funny. I ran across an outfit that wanted to buy the ranch while I was up there."

"You did?" The Boss whirled around again. "Say, can you connect with 'em? Right now?"

Masterson jumped up.

"My gosh!" he yelled. "You mean you want quick action?"

The Boss thought it was a protest. He slammed a hand on the desk.

"You bet I want it! Don't argue, now! I wanna get rid of the whole damned business! I got troubles enough! You show me ten thousan' dollars' profit, and I'll talk business to anybody you can dig up!"

"Ten thousand dollars!" gasped Masterson, amazed at the moderate figure.

"Yeh, not a cent less, see? It's ten thousand, or nothin'. See what you can do."

MASTERSON felt like a person living a queer dream. He arose and grasped the door-knob while ideas expanded within his brain.

"Wait!" said the Boss, delving into a drawer and producing a box of fine Havanas. "Don't get sore. You done good work. I aint a bad guy, Masterson. Have a cigar!"

Masterson took one. His voice trembled.

"You don't know half the story!" he murmured.

"Forget it! I'm busy! Go out and make good!"

Masterson departed, while several alert persons lounging in the big hall nodded to him. He returned the nods happily and went down the street, then slacked his pace and looked back in awe at the great ramshackle building upon the bluff.

"Some people go there to get cleaned," he remarked, "but I carried a horseshoe!"

He strode to the railroad-station and stood for a long time under the shade of its overhanging eaves, composing a telegram to Mr. Amos Rusk, President of the Rusk Construction Company, of Jersey City:

If you want to get in on the ground floor at Sand River, I can merge the two cattle ranches in the valley and can give you a one-third interest in a hundred thousand dollars' worth of property including dam-site for thirty thousand dollars, of which ten thousand goes to the man who holds the present option and twenty thousand to the present owners of the ranches to induce them to agree. Stern and Weston are trying to get the land but I have the prior rights. Believe I can form a land and cattle corporation which will be first to benefit from the new dam even if the Government condemns the dam-site or if we present it to the Government. Send quick reply as Stern and Weston have second choice. MASTERSON.

The telegram must have caused much discussion in the Rusk headquarters, for no answer came until next afternoon. Then Masterson read with eager eyes:

Close deal. Am wiring the money. Beat Stern and Weston at any cost.
AMOS K. RUSK.

CHAPTER X

LIGHTS were twinkling along the board walk as Masterson trudged up the street, with his plans fairly complete. The big hall on the bluff was illumined already, and customers thumped up the steps and milled through the doorway, oblivious to the armed guards who peered through the gathering smoke-haze.

Masterson went to the office of the Boss. A lamp above the desk sent glinting rays upon the man's face in such a way that the lights and shadows emphasized its worst features, so that it looked Hun-like, almost brutish.

"Well?" he snarled.

"I got your ten thousand."

"Huh! They jump at it quick! There's somethin' behind all this, but I aint in a position to look into it. All right, then. Ten thousand goes!"

"You'll sign?"

"Sure. When I get my money—not before!"

Masterson departed quickly, forced to content himself, for the time, but he chafed at the delay. The Boss' mood was changing for the worse, so the helpless manipulator tramped about the streets, worrying, waiting for the money order to arrive. Luckily it came next morning. He took it straight to the Boss, who was more gracious this time.

"All right. It's easy money. I release my option. You get it." He scribbled an acknowledgment which he handed to Masterson. "Good work. You get five hundred. You've earned it." He glanced out of the window and his face became softer as the light struck it. "Fact is, I'd like to have you work for me all the time, but that's out. I'm through. I'm cashin' in all my property. I want you to bring back my five thousand dollars deposit-money."

"Certainly. But why? Going to leave?"

"No. But I've got a sister in Pittsburgh. She gets most of everything—"

The man's words did not sink in at first; and then Masterson stared at him in surprise at such blunt fatalism. The man acted as if his interest in life was waning!

"If you feel like that, why don't you leave?" wondered Masterson.

"Naw. I'll fight it out. If I only knew what direction it was comin' from—"

It wasn't exactly fright; the little blue eyes of the Boss were not afraid; they were changeable and irritated, like those of an animal at bay.

"Don't look at me like that!" he exploded. "I've got a hunch about myself, that's all! You dunno what's goin' on under the surface in this here town. I do. Some of these people are ruined. They blame me. They're crazy. If they hadn't bucked my outfits, they'd have been ruined by somethin' else—they're that kind; but of course they blame me! Well, never mind." He extended a hand. "So long. See you later. Good luck."

"Good luck!" said Masterson, gently.

He did not argue. The last thing he saw before closing the door was the sign over the safe: *"Smile, damn you!"*

BUT Masterson was not smiling, and shortly he felt worse as he took the long road toward the Sand River valley. First, it was hot, reminding him of recent torrid experiences. Second, he discerned a flaw in his recent quick calculations, which soon threatened a first-class catastrophe. Suppose he was unable to persuade the warring ranchers to enter his little corporation? Suppose they let his option lapse, and then sold out to Cameron? What then? Why, he was trapped! Mr. John Masterson had spent ten thousand dollars of the Rusk Company's money without anything to show for it except a written release of a perfectly useless option!

He put spurs to his horse then. The animal's hide was running rivulets when

the worried rider arrived at the Sand River ranch and went up the lane toward the barn, where the big green touring-car was still parked. He raced to the gum tree behind the house, saw that his precious options were still there, pocketed them, and returned to see the whole household streaming out through the rear doorway. He noticed that old Hendricks had been recalled from his wild-goose visit to neighbors. Hendricks was rampant with curiosity.

"Well," he howled, "what luck?"

Masterson nodded at Ruth, Trudy, Cameron, and the Cameron dowager. He tried to assume the manner of a successful hero.

"Better luck than I expected!"

Cameron's long face looked longer, and he fingered his little sandy mustache.

"That's too bad!" he condoled himself.

"Come into the house!" commanded Hendricks. "Tell it to everybody!"

THEY gathered in the cool old parlor, with Masterson's brain racking itself for more ideas, in a mad last-minute endeavor to bolster up the original bright idea. He seated himself alongside the onyx center-table, pushing aside a red plush cover and an old family album while he whipped together all the plausibility and selling-psychology he could muster.

"I'll tell you, Mr. Hendricks: I hold an option which can make you sell for a very low price. You may still have to sell outright,"—which was true, for Cameron might get the ranch yet if things went wrong,—"but I believe I've made a better bargain for you."

He waited. They were all leaning forward. Trudy held Cameron's hand. Masterson spoke solemnly:

"I want you to sell me your ranch for twenty-eight thousand shares in the Sand River Land and Cattle Corporation, to be capitalized at eighty thousand dollars. In addition to this share in the corporation, I'm able to get you eleven thousand dollars in cash. The Government's going to build a big dam up at the gap. Your land's sure to jump in value. You can sell it now for twenty-eight thousand dollars, as per the original option, or you can be a one-third owner in a bigger corporation which will control everything!"

The old man fingered his wiry gray jaw.

"And I can git eleven thousand dollars' cash now?" he inquired. "Enough to stall off the creditors?"

"Yes."

"Mebbe you're aimin' to buy Kling's ranch the same way, eh?"

"I am. The corporation takes everything over."

"H'm. Who runs the corporation?"

"I do."

"Who's behind you?"

"The Rusk Construction Company, of Jersey City."

"Oh, my gosh!" groaned Cameron.

Trudy patted his shoulder.

"Never mind, dear; you'll get another job; they can't keep *you* down!"

Masterson glanced at the crestfallen young fellow in the tweed togs and outing shoes, while marveling at Trudy's faith. Masterson saw in him a person possessing outward gentility but with nothing in particular behind it; just an indolent, pleasure-loving chap of the sort he had seen often at Julia Rusk's jingle-jangle dances. Still, Trudy could be driving-force enough to make something out of him yet.

"We might need a chief clerk and accountant, for our little corporation," offered Masterson as a concession.

Cameron looked at Trudy. Trudy looked at Cameron, then nodded her blonde head.

"Why not?"

"But," protested the wabbling Cameron, "I thought you wanted to go to town!"

"Things are different now!" she smiled at him. "Aren't they?"

He said nothing. It was not necessary.

Masterson looked with twinkling eyes at Ruth, then at old Hendricks, who was hunched in his chair, wrapped in deep thought.

"Heh!" he cogitated. "How about Kling? D'you think the stubborn Dutchman's goin' to agree?"

"He'll have to. Otherwise he's sold out."

"H'm. It's a fair enough proposition on the face of it, but I dunno. Explain some more."

MASTERSON explained with extreme persistency. He explained until his mouth was dry and his collar wet. He explained until dusk, when Hendricks' slow handwriting made out a written agreement. But this was only half the job. Masterson desired the other half, so at dawn next morning he rode to the Kling place, where he went through the sour-milk smell of the yard and into the stuffy parlor with its stark crayon-enlargements of absent and

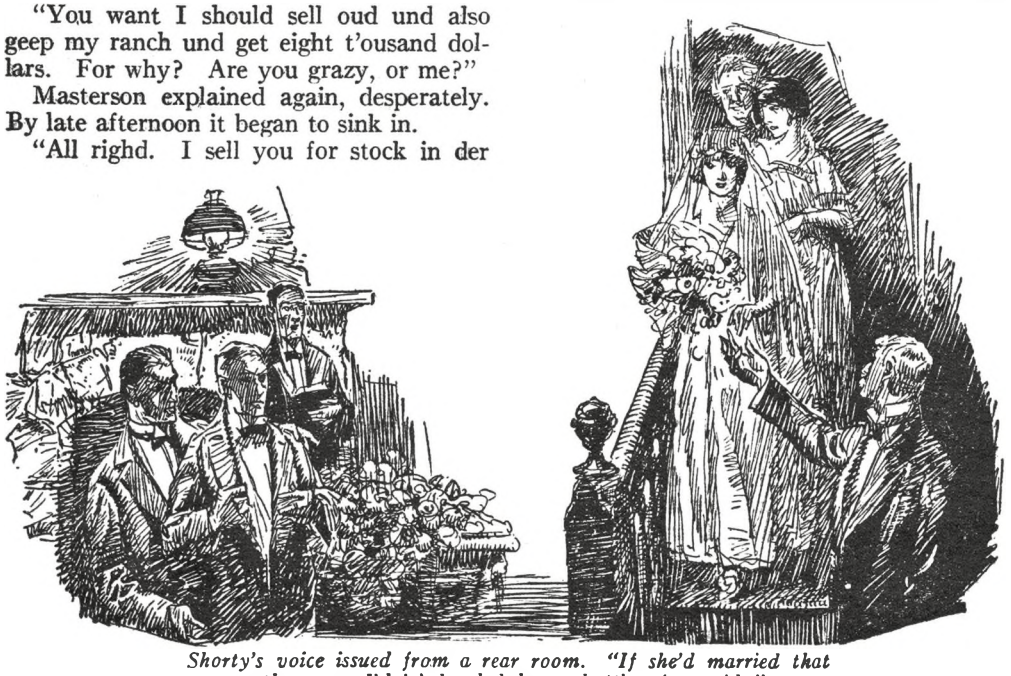
defunct Klings and their collar-buttons.

Masterson broached his plan to the little German, who scratched his gray beard and made the speaker explain some more. Then:

"You want I should sell oud und also geep my ranch und get eight t'ousand dollars. For why? Are you grazy, or me?"

Masterson explained again, desperately. By late afternoon it began to sink in.

"All righd. I sell you for stock in der gorporation, und der eight t'ousand dollars. All right. I go home to New York, und get out, away from dose tam Hendricks peoples what giff me hell und try to bust me for six years now. Sure. For eight t'ousand dollars, real money, I live four years, even if you go bust. It's better than here; sure! Nobody shoods nobody in New York."



Shorty's voice issued from a rear room. "If she'd married that other guy, I'd 'a' handed her a bottle of cyanide."

Masterson's heart was gay as he raced back toward Sand River, over the flat plain. Relief and triumph made the world joyous. The scrub cattle grazing amid the sage-clumps beyond the road suddenly looked sleek and prosperous to his eyes; the slanting sunlight turned sand and rocks into flashing pink jewels; the smell of hot greasewood was the smell of incense for victory. His work was nearly done. He, and he alone, had straightened out this situation. He felt the thrill which comes from good work, and with it a sneaking desire to join in the greater work which Rusk and his people were about to start.

After all, why not? Was there anything to keep him here? Ruth? He wondered. His pulses and appetite were normal; brain-storms were absent; he didn't like to leave Ruth, but his physical and mental condition apprised him that he couldn't be in love according to the highest romantic authorities. He didn't feel romantic. He felt cheery, satisfied, strong, confident that he had done well and was ready to start toward even bigger things; not through mathematics and slide-rules, but through handling the men who used those things. He took the slide-rule out of his pocket. It had retained its hatefulness. It reminded him of the smooth white belly of a rattlesnake; so he tossed it into the lazy grayish waters of Sand River, under the bridge alongside the Hendricks alfalfa field, and wondered what Ruth would think of him as general purchasing-agent for a nation-wide construction company.

RUTH was the first to see the change in him. There was moonlight in the Hendricks garden that night and the family sat on the wide old front porch, facing black-and-silver mountains beyond the trees, with the light of the open front door of the ranch-house glinting on their backs and making Trudy's yellow locks glow with soft fires. Ruth sat alongside Masterson, on the top step. She was very quiet, studying him.

"You seem happier tonight than I've

ever seen you," she ventured, at last. "Even your hair is lying down and doesn't stick up in all directions. You look as though you had dropped a great burden."

"I have," he confessed. "It's good. Now I know how a pack-mule feels when the day's work is over. Perhaps I'll be a different animal now. More restful, maybe. You've never had a chance to see me that way before."

"No. I haven't. If you were older, I'd have feared for your blood-pressure!"

"I know. I've been like a tomcat with its fur rubbed the wrong way; a tomcat with a tin can tied to its tail, chased around by a ravening wolf-pack, getting sections of hide chewed off at every step; but now it's past and I feel at peace. I can lie down and purr." He lit a cigar and stared past the glinting tops of the trees. "Peace! I really haven't had any for three years, until now."

There was a long silence. Old Hendricks, up on the porch, lit his corncob pipe and its caustic smoke drifted out from the doorway which the match flared redly on his fine wrinkled face. Then Trudy's voice came from alongside Cameron, on a lower step:

"Speaking for the wolf-pack, the wolf-pack wishes the honor of your presence at its wedding to be held night after next, in this house."

"What?" gasped Masterson.

"Hell, yes!" bawled old Hendricks. "They just can't wait. There's no fool like a young fool!"

"Why the haste?"

Trudy explained defensively:

"His mother has to go away, and she wants to see him settled, and we might as well start new anyhow, and that creditor keeps hanging around and I want to have a protector—"

"Protector!"

"That's catty, Mr. Tomcat!"

"I apologize, Miss Wolf."

"And so we're gonna have a highfalutin' shindig with all the didoes," growled old Hendricks. "The boys have gone to town to spread the news. I guess we might as well do it right; there's no way out of it, is there?"

"No," said Trudy.

"And you're to be the best man, we hope," added Cameron, turning to Masterson.

The latter was startled but he didn't know how to get out of it.

"What do I do?" he wondered.

"You comfort the bridegroom!" came the cynical voice of old Hendricks.

And so it was a splendid function.

THE little gaunt minister arrived in his best frock coat and a rented flivver. Relatives of the bride materialized from strange back-country towns and hamlets which Masterson had never heard of before. Buggies, flivvers and riding-horses cluttered the lane and spread far up the road, almost to the silvery waters of Sand River. Male guests clanked up to the front door and politely took off their spurs as they entered. Women and babies filled the back rooms. A saxophonist and a banjoist arrived in dinner-coats, driving a flashy machine. The Kling riders—phlegmatic blondes of German or Swedish extraction—came up the front steps, took off their hats, gawked at the splendors of a front parlor lit by ten lamps, and then retreated, to be herded back later by neutrals who arranged them along the outer wall, where they stood like dummies in their store clothes, wondering what to do with their hands. Kling was happily not present.

The Hendricks men, all dressed up, handled odd jobs everywhere but kept away from the fair-haired boys along the wall. Masterson was piqued by this lack of a get-together spirit, but he had other things to worry about. He had been lured into a chief roustabout's job. Guests needed chairs. A baby fell into an ice-cream freezer. Six dogs insisted upon inviting themselves inside. Uncle Joe Hendricks, from somewhere over the ridge, sprained his foot on the steps and had to have service. The women of the house were all upstairs, the bridegroom wandered around like a helpless automaton in a dinner-coat, and Hendricks gave jovial greeting to all his old cronies, bringing them privately into the back room. Masterson had donned his tabooed city clothes, and felt very distinguished; but he wished he had worn overalls.

Cameron confronted him at the back porch. Cameron's face was pale and his eyes agonized.

"Remember, old man, I'm counting on you!" he pleaded, in a husky voice. "It's an awful responsibility, this. . . . . You never realize it till you're actually up against it. . . . . A wife to support! No job! If anything were to happen—" He squeezed Masterson's hand. "Whatever it is, make it quick!"

He steered him down the lane and kicked him. "Attaboy! Do it again!" cheered somebody.

"Are you broke?" asked Masterson, kindly. "If so—"

"No. Not quite. It's panic, I guess. . . . . I can last a month or two; I've saved a little something; but it's too little. Still, I couldn't pass up Trudy, could I? No. Nobody could. I've been between the devil and the deep sea. . . . . If I'd only put this ranch purchase through, I'd be on Easy Street. . . . . Don't blame us for kidnaping you, old man—we were desperate; it meant so much to us; I felt I had to win; wouldn't you? . . . . She's wonderful; wonderful!"

Shorty came up the back steps. He wore black store clothes, an oversize collar, a red necktie, and the usual disgusted expression when he faced Masterson; but he brought news:

"There's a dog-fight up the line! Six horses ran away, an' two buggies are floatin' around in Sand River. What shall we do?"

"Get 'em out," advised Masterson. "Collect the men!"

Shorty disappeared, swearing softly. Masterson turned toward the distracted bridegroom and patted his shoulder.

"I understand," said Masterson, pitying the man. "I understand!"

The rear door swung open. George Wells came in with an armful of long colored cylinders.

"Rockets and roman candles!" explained Wells. "We bought 'em one time to stampede Kling's cattle with, but now we'll make it a *real* show!"

"All right!" gibbered the bridegroom-to-be, mopping his face with a silk handkerchief. "All right—all right!"

MASTERSON led him forward to the crowded old parlor-living-room, just as a faded young woman with spectacles settled herself at the organ near the wall. The bridegroom-to-be was shoved up in front of an improvised altar of flowers near the fireplace. Eight-score guests stared at him—until all heads turned toward the upper landing, where a flash of white promised immediate happenings. The gaunt little minister took his place at the altar. The great old parlor became deathly still; so still that the far-away bark of a dog could be heard from up the valley, and then a raucous masculine voice, just outside the window:

"Hurry up and help me get them damned buggies out of the river or I'll kick your pants in!"

The organ burst into the wedding march. Trudy appeared from above, like a white angel crowned by a golden halo, so gaspingly beautiful that even Masterson's heart missed a beat. Behind her was Ruth, in pink, and behind her the beaming dowager, flashing in an expensive green affair whose quality outshone everything in the room. The guests arose. Three hundred-odd feet scuffled. The bride's red-faced father met

her at the bottom of the stairway, then with slow steps he led her to the little altar.

It was over very quickly. The women clustered around the bride, and Masterson soothed the bridegroom. Chairs were shoved aside. The musicians in dinner-coats began to tune up. Ruth opened a rear doorway, disclosing a lighted dining-room filled with provender and wineglasses. There was a rush.

Shorty came in, dripping with water, followed by three splattered employes.

"Ya-a-a-a-a!" raged Shorty. "They didn't wait for us, dammit! Now it's over! Well, let's see what we can do about it!"

In a few minutes there was a howl from the rear:

"Here's to the bride! Wow! Celebrate, you damn' fools, celebrate—for we aint gonna be here much longer!"

THE orchestra began. The bride forced herself through the crowd and came to the stairway, where Masterson was standing alongside the minister. In her right hand was a big bouquet of roses from the front garden. Her left hand came down on Masterson's shoulder. Suddenly she went on tiptoe and kissed him.

"You're not such a bad enemy, after all!" she whispered, with flushed cheeks and wet eyes. "Some day we'll be friends, Mr. Tomcat!"

The room whirled around him and he felt his face hot, but folks were smiling and he managed to force a grin, just as the little blonde imp went up the stairs. Then she paused. There was an expectant hush. Trudy poised her bouquet.

Shorty's high-tension voice issued from the rear room:

"Just the same, if she'd married that other guy, I'd 'a' handed her a bottle o' cyanide! He's a lemon!"

The minister alongside Masterson stiffened to his toes and his face went white with recollection. For an instant Masterson, too, heard the great dominant voice of the Boss, using the same whip-lash phrase against this little churchman. It came like a sinister picture, but it was forgotten in a flash of rose-color as Trudy hurled her bouquet straight at Ruth, not by accident but by intention; and then the crowd engulfed Ruth.

The chairs were all cleared away. The room became a mass of crushed, hot people trying to dance. Even the Kling riders were swept from their corner and had to join it, so they trotted around helplessly, hanging on to partners, and looking most woe-begone.

Old Hendricks halted between dances. His face was flushed, his nose was red, but tears of happiness streamed down his leathery cheeks.

"It's like old times!" he roared, smashing down on Masterson's shoulder. "It's the old West, come back again! The old days—"

The crowd swept him away.

Trudy and Cameron appeared, in traveling clothes and carrying suitcases, racing downstairs. There was a yell, and the crowd surged to the doorway of the porch. Masterson went with them. As best man he should have helped the pair make a quiet escape, but he realized how poorly he was fitted for the job as he saw the hapless victims bent low to dodge the rain of rice and old shoes.

Suddenly lurid flashes leaped toward the porch-roof. Crackling explosions made the eardrums tingle as thirty revolvers banged in unison. Smoke swept across the doorway.

"It's the old frontier again!" choked Hendricks. "My God, she's not dead yet!" He threw his arms around Masterson, and hugged him in an ecstasy of joy. "Her mother's here tonight. . . . . My God, I'm young again!"

The bridal pair raced to the machine, a mob of joyously yelling friends pursuing them hotly. The headlights went on. The motor roared. The big car tore down the lane while revolvers sent flashes upward through the dust. A dozen riders leaped to horse and galloped after the machine.

Masterson went to the lane and watched it, then looked toward the rear of the house. Shorty and some others emerged. Their dark figures seemed to be unsteady. Shorty was carrying a large bundle in his arms.

" 'Rah for the bride!" he howled. " 'Rah for the bride! Whoopee! You betcha! Live long and prosper! Wow!" He lit a match. "Let'sh show 'em how to shelebrate! 'Rah for the bride!"

A sudden shrieking whirlwind of fire leaped out from Shorty straight into the open barn door.

Shorty went backward. The wild Niagara of flames—red, blue, green and yellow —whizzed around in every direction as he

let go. Women screamed and stampeded. Men yelled. A ball of green fire missed Masterson's nose and caused him to take cover behind a tree. A rocket sailed over the roof, leaving a trail of yellow sparks. Five red fireballs leaped through an open window into the house. Howling men rushed inside. Others rushed out. Four more roman candles ignited and sent their cheery fireballs pumping into the barn.

"What happened?" whimpered Shorty.

An ominous red glare appeared beyond the barn door. The cracks between the boards showed that the interior flames were licking at the whole structure, from floor to roof! Five tons of hay were on fire!

"Volunteers!" bawled old Hendricks.

"Save the house!" yelled Masterson. "The front room!"

MEN rushed around in every direction, looking for buckets. Some appeared with wet sacks and raced to the parlor. Others arrived with milk-cans and leaky soap-boxes. Another bore a cut-glass punch-bowl, the pride of the Hendricks ranch. The lane, the lawn, the garden and the rear of the house became populated with rushing, yelling figures reflected redly in the fierce glow of the barn, where several persons ran through the doorway, then out again. Five horses followed them, racing away as fast as their scared hoofs could travel.

Shorty sat on the ground, stunned by the quickness of events and probably by the whirlwind which had leaped from his smoking chest. Masterson, directing the formation of a bucket-brigade, almost tripped across him, and glancing down, recognized the obstacle.

A long series of unhappy events flashed into Masterson's memory and caused him to bend his full attention upon Shorty at last. His mouth tightened in a grim line. Exasperation and a great weariness of Shorty and all his works made Masterson reach down, yank him by the collar, pull him to his feet, and kick him.

He steered him down the lane, and kicked him. He kicked again. He kicked and kicked and kicked. He steered him past the front gate, and kicked him toward the middle of the road, and then kicked him some more. The great red glare of the barn, and the firebrands leaping high above the house and trees, gave plenty of vision to everybody. Shorty was traveling much like a kangaroo.

"Attaboy! Do it again!" cheered somebody; and the fire-fighters took it up till it swelled to a grand chorus.

Masterson took the advice and kicked the victim up the road past the line of snorting horses. For once there were no remarks from Shorty. Masterson finally desisted but Shorty kept going; and then the moonlight showed his figure hop-skipping along till it crossed the bridge at the silvery river, and disappeared.

Masterson turned away, filled with great happiness. Far down the road, beyond the glare thrown by the fire, he could see the faint red glow of Cameron's tail-light. Curiously enough, there were firefly-flashes in the brush near it. Abrupt flashes. There was dust and confusion there; the automobile seemed to be turning; its headlights came into full view and then weird shadows danced and enlarged in front of them. The dust-cloud rose high and made a black smudge against the moonlit sky. The headlights became twin shafts of brilliance stabbing into the dust.

Masterson hastened back to the ranch-house, where in the excitement nobody had noticed the confusion down the road. He sought Ruth, who was helping a well-organized fire-brigade which stretched from the barn to the pump at the rear of the house and to the windmill-tank farther back. Ruth's pretty dress was ruined by water and sparks; her satin shoes were soggy ruins, but she had time to notice him, and wave.

"Trudy's coming back!" he announced. "Something's happened. Come here! Look over yonder!"

The headlights were approaching fast but other objects came faster, dancing and leaping in front of them. Ruth grasped his arm and together they ran to the road. A few others followed, straggling along the lane.

"It's a fight," observed Masterson, while the east wall of the barn fell amid a shower of sparks. "Here comes somebody!"

A horse raced toward them, growing larger as it came nearer. The moonlight showed a dark form swaying in the saddle while other riders followed closely in its billows of dust. There were flashes and popping noises from these others, and something spatted a gate-post near by. Masterson drew Ruth close.

"What a night!" he cried. "What's next, I wonder?"

The nearest horse raced up. Its great

form was covered with lather and it seemed to be running wild. The man in the saddle swayed forward and dropped off, tumbling over and over, lying still in the road. The animal started toward the lane, snorted at the fire, reared away, and galloped northward. His stirrups bounced high as he went.

Ruth buried her head on Masterson's shoulder. He swung his arm around her and patted her, though he hardly noticed it, for his attention was diverted to several other directions at once.

A mob of riders clattered up to the lane, pulling their horses backward as they reached the form in the road. Behind them glared the headlights of the auto, and past these came more horsemen, a medley of forms spreading far into the sagebrush on both sides of the machine.

"We got 'im!" bawled a leader, in front of Masterson. "Dead as a door-nail!"

More riders galloped up. Wedding-guests with smutty faces straggled up from the glowing embers of the barn, as Masterson released Ruth and went forward.

"What's this about?" he demanded.

THE big leader, dismounting, turned toward Masterson, who saw the man's golden beard flashing in the firelight, along with his gleaming boots and spurs. It was Ferguson, the ally of the Boss. He spoke thickly:

"Dick Moore. Him and some others got the Boss. Trapped him. We're a posse. We chased 'em through the pass. The Sheriff's right behind us."

"The Boss dead?"

Ferguson peered at him.

"Oh—Masterson. I remember you now. Yes, Moore and a lot of fellows organized to get the Boss. They caught him in his private office. . . . . Well, I guess they wont do it again!"

Into Masterson's vision came a picture of the crude, brutal, groping, piteous giant with his "cheer up" mottoes and his vague plans for helping his fellow-men; and then came a picture of Dick Moore, the foolish ranchman who had gambled away his home to the Boss' professional card-sharps. So this was the end of them both! Masterson thought he saw the working of a great inexorable law, but his brain was too weary and numbed to pursue the thought.

"I'm sorry," he said, turning away, with his throat contracting. "Come, Ruth!"

"Wait!" she said, looking southward.

The automobile's headlights swung away obliquely, backed and filled; then the red tail-light appeared, and the machine began to retreat. Apparently Cameron had recovered his nerve and decided to continue his honeymoon. The shooting was over.

"Just a minute!" Ferguson left his dusty mob and approached Masterson. "I want to see you!"

The man with the golden beard kept his eyes toward the ground as he took Masterson's arm and led him away from Ruth. They walked down the lane a few paces while from behind came the champing of the bits of many horses. The dying firelight up ahead showed that the big Scotchman's face was tired and lined, covered with dust from a long and desperate ride. His manner was hesitant:

"The Boss knew this was coming. . . . . His friends would not believe it, but he knew. . . . . So he made out a will. He left fifty thousand dollars to start a home or something for the bums and lungers. . . . . He said he backed out once but he should have stayed with it. . . . . You and I are the trustees, and another fellow, Tom Jarvis."

Masterson whistled softly. Into his eyes again came a picture of the man who looked like the Beef Trust; a power for evil, a power for good, mixing evil and good by a queer chemical process in which the main ingredient was the whim of the moment! Deliberately evil, pathetically wanting to be good!

"What should we do?" wondered Masterson.

Ferguson spoke helplessly:

"I don't know. It's out of my line."

"There's a minister in the parlor; it's his kind of business; he's started some sort of charity already. Why not help him?"

Ruth had gone to the barn again. Masterson and Ferguson, with one accord, walked up the littered front steps to the silent parlor, where streaks of black and puddles of water tarnished the floor. Decorations stood awry; the broken punch-bowl lay at the foot of the stairway; a window-shutter was charred. The smell of smoke and water came heavily from outside.

The little gaunt minister was watching out of a window, with his hands clasped behind his long black coat. Ferguson halted and looked embarrassed, twirling his dusty big hat in his hands. Masterson perforce did the talking. The little minis-

ter's eyes became first incredulous, then wistful, and he spoke at last like a person seeing ghosts:

"And I am to be an heir to such a man?"

"Partially, yes," admitted Masterson.

The little preacher opened his hands hopelessly, somewhat piteously.

"I am a servant of the Lord; I try to be; but can it be that he too was one of these? I find it hard to believe!"

"He was, sometimes," judged Masterson, not trying to be funny. "Maybe we all are, more or less—sometimes!"

There was a long and awkward silence. Nobody knew what to say next.

"Your road has been made easier," blurted Masterson, at last. "You have the means to help those who need help. They'll look up to you. Is there anything more I can say? Could anything better be given you, to pave the way for your work?"

The little preacher—a man of routine thrust by Fate into the perpetual rôle of a stranger in a strange land—said nothing; but his lips parted and into his eyes came a great light. His right hand pressed that of Masterson; his left wrung Ferguson's, and then they left him; but as Masterson looked back from the porch into the empty room, he saw the gaunt little man kneeling in front of the little bower of flowers in front of the fireplace.

MASTERSON sought Ruth. Together they speeded the departing guests for the next two hours. Old Hendricks had been floored by his celebration; the dowager had been shocked into nervous prostration by it, so all the work devolved on Ruth and Masterson. Shortly the posse took its dead and went home. The dance-orchestra packed its things and departed in the sporty auto. Relatives cranked their flivvers and left with much noise and dust. Horsemen waved farewell in the light of the waning moon. The little minister and other house-guests went to bed. The lamps died down. Only a few of the Hendricks men remained, manning the pump and throwing water on the dead embers of the barn.

Masterson made the last round of inspection and finally he went through the little garden and up to the porch, tumbling wearily into a chair. The last voice was stilled; the life and color were gone. The place was quiet; abnormally quiet, with the deadening peace that follows the storm. Pools of water streaked the porch beneath him. He heard the gentle wheezing of the pump at the rear, and the tuneful splashing of the buckets; then footsteps sounded in the old living-room, and a shadow thrust itself into the doorway.

"Hadn't you better go to bed?" asked Ruth gently.

"I think we all ought to rest," he admitted, starting for the stairs with her. "You've done more than your share tonight."

She halted at the stair-landing and brought her left hand forward. In it was something which gleamed whitely.

"The boys took this out of Sand River tonight. It is yours. Isn't it lucky that we found it again?"

It was the same eternal white slide-rule! He took it gravely. Then he bowed his acknowledgment and broke the thing over his knee.

"I'm going to get rid of that darned thing now if I have to throw it in the stove! It's an obligation!"

"Oh!" she gasped.

It made him feel a trifle ashamed of his intensity. He hesitated, very close to her, remembering how she had buried her head on his shoulder just a short time ago. She seemed near and yet far; very tempting, all of a sudden. He knew he was on the brink of a radical declaration, but the glib phrases of the romantic experts failed to come to his memory at the right time. Groping, he found only a commonplace remark coming to his tongue: "I'm afraid Trudy's wedding was a little bit too wild for me. We'll do it differently: quieter, less racket and nuisance—we'll go East."

She looked up. Her eyes were startled.

"Why not?" he blurted.

With a little gasp which was a cross between a laugh and a sob, she whirled around and went swiftly upstairs; then she halted at the top of the steps and looked down. Her face was pink but her lips were smiling.

"What's the matter?" he inquired.

"It's shock, I guess," she admitted, to the banisters. "You'll have to do better than that!"

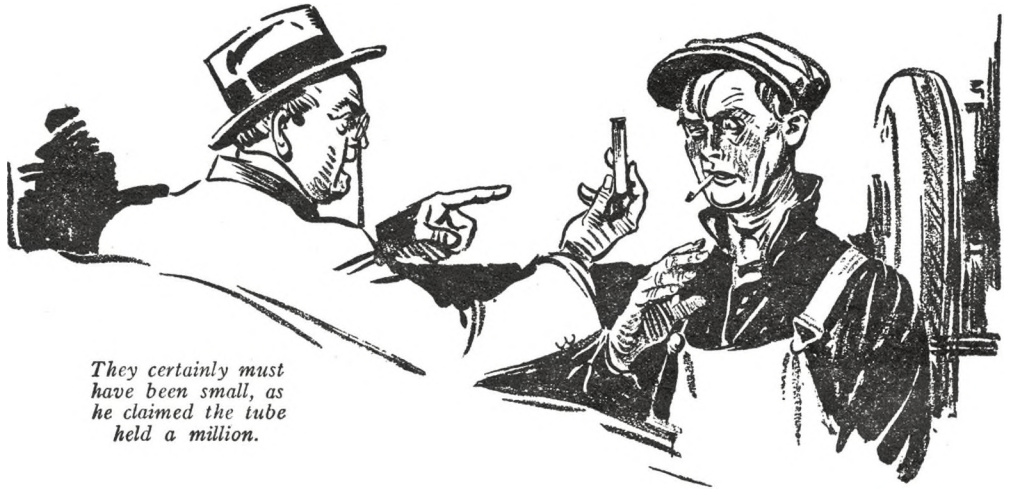
"I guess I lack the technique; isn't that it?" he groped, looking at her with hopeful eyes.

"Yes—it's certainly terrible!"

He started up the stairway at a run.

"To thunder with the technique! Ruth!"

The pump kept wheezing at the back of the house—but they let it wheeze.



They certainly must have been small, as he claimed the tube held a million.

The Bug in the Bonnet

A memorable episode in the checkered career of Ed, the garage trouble-shooter. There's a good laugh in this one.

By CALVIN BALL

Illustrated by Frank J. Hoban

WELL, Mister, if you're a bill collector, you're used to waiting; so you could sit down in the garage here—because the bill is for Caroline who is now upstairs, but says she'll be down soon. I don't know what she owes seven-fifty for, but I anyhow wouldn't expect to know as I have been under weather of late, and dealing with a M. D.

A old book which I picked up in the garage was written on the subject of M. D., and had a lot of reading matter in it that a mechanic like me couldn't understand. I don't know whether you ever saw one of these books, Mister, but it had pictures of germs in it, these pictures being of interesting nature and magnified to a large size. I was surprised to see some of these germs had whiskers.

Not being of the M. D. profession this was the first time I looked into such a book, and when I began turning over the pages the pictures got my interest. I didn't know before that germs had legs growing out from all sides including top and bottom, the one on the last page having also a forked tail which would have raised your hair to look at it.

The owner of the book was a man with a blow-out who came in for repairs, and when he left he took the book with him, not stopping to answer the questions which I asked; but he did say about these germs that they are called microbes, and are so small nobody can see them. He also let me take a squint at some live ones he had in a glass tube. I couldn't see them, and they certainly must have been small as he claimed the tube held a million. I got to thinking over this microbe subject; and anybody who has looked at the picture of one of them knows the have got a face you couldn't forget. With things like them flying in the air, I couldn't see how it happened that I hadn't caught anything since a good many years back when I had the measles, measles being the one in the book which had whiskers, and it's a wonder I lived through the attack now that I know what he looks like.

Well, Mister, it wasn't but a couple days after this event, that I noticed I was beginning to have a funny feeling. I have a sound head on me, as the boss often mentions, and so I figured at first it might be imagination on account of seeing these pictures the way I did; but after the second day I saw it was real. I was shaky and

couldn't work. I remembered how I had handled around the tube of these live microbes which the tourist owned, and with my brand of luck, one of these microbes must have stuck on me, and was probably by this time multiplied. The first one I told about it was Herman—Herman being the owner of the garage, and also I boarded with him as he lived handy upstairs. Herman gave me a odd look.

"I notice you eat your meals O. K.," he says.

"I eat all right, Herman," I told him. "But I don't feel able to work much."

"I have heard about this kind of sickness before," he says. "There's a lot of work piling up the last day or two, Ed."

"I see it," I says, "and I feel just as bad about this, Herman, as you do, because it's not my nature to dodge work."

"I know your nature pretty well by this time, Ed," he states, kind of looking at me and fiddling with his watch-chain, as he has a habit of doing. "You working this so you'll get a vacation?"

It is Herman's character to be suspicious when he thinks somebody is trying to crawl out of work, but as he is the father of Caroline, who I am going into matrimony with, the best plan is always to stay polite. So I says to him, "Well, Herman, I haven't lost any time since working here, and if I now go under the weather, and maybe the ground, it is something that couldn't be helped."

HERMAN walked away before I could explain anything further, and as I was gradually feeling more unsteady, I put down the wrench I had been working with, and started back upstairs. I couldn't put a finger on what was wrong, but at the same time anybody knows it when they are sick even if they can't explain it, and there was no mistake about I was developing a case of something.

When I got to the back stairway Jake Flimm from Junction City came in, saying he happened to pass by and dropped in to say hello; and Jake being a friend, I talked with him a while, and a little later explained the way I was feeling, also speaking to him about seeing this tourist with the book and the bottle of live ones.

"And don't jump to a conclusion that it's imagination with me," I says; "because I certainly know when I am a sick man."

"I wouldn't claim it's imagination," Jake says. "Epidemics are rampant these days; and if you handled a bottle of live ones as you claim, then maybe you have caught one."

"That's what I believe, Jake, and it's beginning to feel serious."

"Where do you feel it?" he asked, squinting at me like he thought he might see something.

"No specialized place," I says. "It's more general."

"Feel anything in the back of your neck?"

"Now that you mention it," I says, "it feels a little queer up there."

"That's what I thought," he says. "You got it in the neck! I know another one had the same kind of case."

"Who was he?" I asked.

"He used to live in Junction City, but he's been gone some time, Ed."

"How do you mean gone?" I says.

"Kline Brothers sent him back East, as that's where he came from. He had the same as you've got, and now I guess I better be moving along on account of other things to attend to—but I would say it's a good plan to look up a M. D. in Junction City, and don't lose too much time getting there, Ed."

"Is Kline Brothers the ones that runs the undertaker shop?" I asked Jake.

"They run both shops," he says, "as they've lately opened a new one, and business must be picking up with them, the way they're spreading out."

"If you see the M. D. in Junction City today," I says, "you tell him I'll maybe drop in to see him sometime before night."

I saw Jake was anxious to get away, and wouldn't stand close to me while he was talking; so I let him go and didn't ask any further questions, but by the time I got upstairs I was feeling pretty weak. When I walked through the kitchen I met Caroline.

Caroline has got modern ideas and is doubtful on all subjects until you prove it to her, and when I told her the circumstance of how I was feeling, and that I quit work so I could drive to Junction City to see a M. D., she looked at me still more skeptical than Herman did.

"You don't look very sick to me," she says. "You better forget about it and get some work done so we can get away early for the movies."

"I don't like to see such a attitude, Caroline," I says to her, after I made more statements about the tube I had been ex-

posed to, and saw she didn't believe much of it. "You are skeptical like your father, and it seems to run in the family."

"If you did pick up a germ," she says, "that doesn't make me believe you caught it."

"It's not a question of believing it, Caroline. When I make a announcement that I am sick it means that it is a fact, and I don't like to see somebody around doubting it. And besides, have I got a reason to bluff?"

"You'll get a vacation out of it," she says.

"Because it's necessary," I answered, "and this is not a matter to smile at, Caroline, as it's serious with me. I am getting something up in the neck, and this is a fine circumstance that Herman wont believe it."

"He is the one that's getting it in the neck," she says. "And if you want a few days off, Ed, why don't you take them? But don't make it worse with M. D. tricks."

It was no use arguing on this, because when you're going to get married the battles will begin soon enough, and if you start them beforehand, Caroline is the kind who wouldn't hesitate to mark me off the list, there being plenty others to step in my shoes if I let them.

ON account of feeling worse I skipped the next meal, and when I drove the flivver into Junction City I found the M. D. in his office, his office being a place which looked scientific, the M. D. looking the same. He listened to the circumstance as I described it to him, and also gave me a examination.

"The teeth is O. K.," I says, when he started looking at them. "The feeling I have is general, and weak."

He finally folded up the implements, but kept eying me curious until he at last give me his decision.

"You are very robust," he says, "and I find no ailment. Maybe that book you spoke of is working on your mind."

"Looking at the book didn't do it," I says, "as I am too bright to be fooled with imagination. But the tube of live ones which I held in my hand is a different matter, and that is where my trouble started, or I have made a mistake."

"Then maybe you made a mistake," he says, "as I don't see any symptoms."

"I don't know the name of them," I says, "and I don't know the tourist's name either, because if I did I would trail him down."

"Well, I'll give you a little tonic," the M. D. says, writing out a note for it. "You probably been working too hard, and will be all right in a day or two."

Remembering what these pictures looked like I didn't see what good a tonic would be, but I took the note to the drug man on the corner to get the bottle it called for, and was still more worried to see it was something green.

Well, Mister, I would never have believed that a mechanic of good constitution could get down flat with a ailment nobody understands, but after a week I was down and there was no doubt about it, even Herman beginning to see it was something real.

"Climb in bed with both feet," he says, "and make a good job of it."

I didn't give in to going on a bed until I saw the M. D. a few more times. He still looked puzzled, and insisted he couldn't see anything wrong.

"If it's one of those microbes," I says, "you couldn't see it anyhow, because it's too small. Where could I find a specialist?"

"You keep up this racket," the M. D. says, "and you'll need a row of specialists."

Well, when anybody has caught something as I had caught it, and not even a M. D. would believe it, it's no use keeping up a argument. I climbed on the bed when I got back to the garage, and this was the time when I didn't get up again like they expected, but stayed there three days flat, and getting worse. Caroline was a O. K. nurse, but she wouldn't make a success of such a profession, as she kept lugging in meals and insisted I got to eat them. I refused these meals, Mister, that being the way I felt. I spent most of the time looking at the wall paper from morning to night, and once in a while could hear Herman mention my name.

"What's he trying to do," I heard him say, "—run a hunger strike?"

I didn't pay much attention to Herman, but noticed that Caroline finally gave him a sharp statement about the way he was making these remarks.

"But between you and me, Ed," Caroline says to me confidential, "don't you think you're overdoing the idea?"

"How do you mean?"

"I mean you better start eating," she says, "or you'll forget how."

"Can I eat when I don't want to eat?"

"Then why can't I call the M. D. in?"

"And have him say again there's nothing wrong, because he can't see it! I am convinced there's a microbe at the bottom of it," I says. "I touched a tube with a million in it, and as I know what their pictures look like, I am not surprised that this is the way I feel. Also I have asked you before, Caroline; to find a microbe specialist. This is a serious time with me, and I am down where I can't find one for myself."

"There is no microbe specialist around," she says, "but if there was I would certainly have him here."

"It is 416," he says, "and I run a dray, but not at such a hour of the night."

NOW, Caroline is pretty bright on some subjects, but this was one point where she made a mistake because next day, by an accident of looking at a newspaper, I found out that there was a microbe specialist around, and that he lived at Elmhurst, this being a town thirty miles from Junction City.

I was certainly surprised to see this article and read it over several times, it saying that a new specialist on microbes had lately settled at Elmhurst.

"Caroline," I says, when I called her into the room, "by a stroke of good luck I have found a notice in the paper which at last proves that I was right about there must be a microbe specialist. There is one, and he lives at Elmhurst."

Caroline took the newspaper, looking interested.

"You could read it yourself," I says, "as it's printed there beside the advertising bottle of catsup. And the first thing to do, Caroline, is call him on the telephone."

Caroline copied the name out of the paper and went down to the telephone. She made a good effort to find him, because it was a half-hour before she got back and told me that the doctor only moved to Elmhurst lately, and did not yet have a telephone.

"But the new mechanic named Harry, which Herman hired, is downstairs," she says, "and as you have now found a microbe specialist, which is what you have been looking for, I can have Harry make a quick drive to Elmhurst, and bring him here."

I was encouraged to see that Caroline was ready to help, there being no doubt she was at last worried. She went down to see Harry, explaining to him the details about driving to Elmhurst, and it was a relief when I heard the news that he was on the way. It being a thirty-mile trip, and thirty miles back, I figured he would have this specialist here some time before afternoon. With the kind of mechanics you get these days though, you can't figure ahead, and by the time six o'clock came and Harry not yet back, I was certainly agitated.

"It maybe wasn't easy to locate him," Caroline remarks, "and the best thing for you, Ed, is to stop sitting up worrying about it."

It being a important situation with me, I didn't listen to this advice but stayed up waiting until after nine, at which time Harry must have arrived back as I could hear him talking in the garage below. Caroline later came upstairs, but no specialist was with her.

"He found the house," Caroline says, "but it took him a long time because this specialist only moved there lately."

"If he found the house," I says, "then where is the specialist?"

"He couldn't bring him because he was

out on a case and wouldn't be back for an hour."

I folded up my arms and looked at Caroline.

"Do you mean to say," I says, "that Harry hunted all day, and then didn't wait a extra hour for him to get back?"

"Harry didn't know it was important," Caroline replies.

Well, Mister, there was nothing I could do about it as it was night, but what I thought about Harry was something strong. Also the way Caroline acted about it kind of puzzled me. I can always tell when she is stretching the truth, on account of a habit she has of winking her eyes faster than usual. She doesn't know she does this herself; and as it's a good advantage to have, I never mentioned it. While she was talking about Harry, I noticed her winking this way, and it worried me some. I finally told her to let it go for one night, but to get Harry off in the morning for another trip, and this time he had better not come back without bringing the microbe doctor.

IN a country garage like this, time always goes slow, but the way the next day dragged while I waited for Harry was a record-breaker. With the middle of the afternoon arrived and him not yet back, I finally dressed up and began walking back and forth, that being the way I felt.

"I'm surprised to see you are walking around," Caroline says to me. "It's the first time for a week that you have done so, but you can't make Harry drive any faster by all these peeks you are taking through the window."

"A mechanic like Harry is enough to wear out your nerves," I says, "especially when anybody is down with an ailment like I am. And where is he?"

"It doesn't look as though you're down," she says, "from the way you are pacing."

Well, I didn't answer anything but kept walking, and at nine o'clock at night Caroline went downstairs to the garage, and in a few moments came back up with a announcement that Harry has got back. I was surprised to hear this.

"How does it come," I remarks to her, "that I didn't hear the flivver drive up, and I have been listening?"

"Maybe because the wind's blowing," she says.

"Then if he's here, where is the microbe doctor?" I questions.

"Harry didn't bring him," she states very calm. "He wasn't in when Harry got there, but they said he would be back at six. Harry drove around until six, but on account of running out of gas, he didn't get there until he was already gone on another case. So Harry let it go and came home."

I have not got a quick temper but this was once when something would have started popping except that nobody could talk when they are as mad about things as I was. I didn't like the way Caroline's eyes kept winking while she talked to me, and as I am one who gets to the bottom of things, I got my coat and hat off the peg and began bundling up for a night-time drive.

Caroline opened her eyes.

"What are you doing?" she says.

"What I am doing," I told her, "is putting on my hat and coat, because I have reached the limit, Caroline, and am going to find this microbe specialist myself if it takes all night to do it in. And if I was Herman, the way Harry would get fired from this job is something fast."

"I can't believe, Ed, that you are going to try a thirty-mile drive and thirty back. You must be feeling better."

"Things have gone so far now," I says, "that I will maybe meet the undertaker anyhow—and when I make up my mind to see a microbe M. D. I am going to see him."

I didn't waste time talking, but kept busy getting ready, and when she at last saw I meant it, she also got her hat and coat.

"If you insist on it I can't stop you," she says, "but you wouldn't be able to drive a car this distance, and what I will have to do is drive it for you."

Caroline being determined about it, I couldn't influence her not to go with me, so I got into the back seat, with her taking the wheel; and we took the Kingston Road which runs cross-country to Elmhurst.

Well, it was getting on towards ten o'clock by this time and pretty dark to be making such a trip, but when anybody has been sliding toward the cemetery as fast as I was, it was too important a case for putting off. I knew the road to Elmhurst, having been over it many times, as also has Caroline, and as we had got the address of this specialist from Harry, with directions how to get there, I figured we would make it before midnight, which

would be the right time to catch a doctor in.

The article in the paper didn't have a street address of the doctor, but where Harry said he lived was at 460 Cedar Street; and Elmhurst having only a few thousand population, such a number is easy to find.

IT was still a few minutes before twelve when we got to Elmhurst and located the number on Cedar Street. It was a brick house of good size, standing back from the road kind of quiet. The windows being dark, and there being no sign of action around, it looked like maybe the doctor had gone to bed; but as it wouldn't be the first time a doctor has been got out of bed on a emergency case, I didn't hesitate about going up to the front door and ringing the bell.

There was no results on the first ring, but after standing around a few minutes I pushed it again, this time using long buzzes and louder. A stirring around started inside, and after a while I could hear some one in the hall on the other side the door. The doctor didn't open the door, but somebody called out asking who is there.

"It's a patient," I says, "with an emergency case."

"You got a case?" he says.

"An emergency case," I hollered back. "Would you open the door as I want to see the doctor?"

From the sound of the voice I now figured it must be a boy, and when a couple seconds later the door slid open an inch or so, I saw that it was. He was peeking at me suspicious-like through the crack at the door.

"You want a doctor?" he asked.

"That's what I came for," I says, "and will you tell him I am here?"

"A doctor doesn't live here," he answers, still holding the door. "This is Meegan's house."

I looked through the crack at him kind of puzzled.

"A specialist is who I am looking for," I repeats to him. "I understand he lives here. Isn't this right?"

"This is Meegan's," he says, "and he is a plumber."

"This is 460 Cedar Street," I says to him, speaking fast, as I could see the door was slipping shut.

"It's 460," he answers, the door closing up another inch. "But no doctor lives here, and we are now asleep."

He had by this time got the door closed and I could hear the latch click on the inside. It looked like a mistake somewhere, and when I got over to the car and told Caroline the details she was also puzzled.

"You sure Harry said the number was 460 Cedar Street?" I says to her.

"That's what he told me, Ed, but do you think maybe he could have made a mistake?"

"It was a mistake when Herman hired Harry," I says, climbing back in the car. "Are you sure he located this doctor's house?"

"Certainly he located it," she says, starting the car back toward the main street. "It's now after twelve, but we passed an all-night lunchroom a few blocks over, and as they would have a telephone in such a place, wouldn't it be a good plan to call up the garage and talk with Harry?"

"All right then," I says. "And I'll do the talking."

Caroline drove to the lunchroom where we went inside and found the phone, and Harry sounded sleepy when he answered, but after I explained what happened and asked him if he was positive it was 460, he insisted that was the number.

"There is no mistake about it," he says, "as I was at the house myself, and the number is 416."

"You say 416?" I repeats, surprised.

"You got it right now."

"Harry," I says to him, "we have been looking for Number 460 because 460 is what you told Caroline."

Harry acted excited.

"Number 416 is what I told her," he says, "and that is where you will find him."

"Then you are positive this is now straight?" I repeats.

"You couldn't miss it," he tells me. "That is where he lives, and I know it on account of being there."

I hung up the receiver and went back to Caroline, giving her the facts of this mistake.

"He claims he told you right," I says, "but somebody got it twisted, and while I wouldn't say it was you, Caroline, it is anyhow very queer that such mistakes could happen."

"It will be one o'clock before we get there," she answers quick. "But being a doctor he is probably used to such hours, and we wont lose any more time."

It was a little house in the middle of the block, having a kind of tumble-down appearance and looking less like a doctor's place than the brick one we were at before. There wasn't any bell, but after pounding a while I woke him up, and a man with a mustache stuck his head out at me.

"I am sorry I got to bother you at such a hour, Doctor," I says, "but it is an emergency case with me and I came thirty miles to see you."

"To see me?" he repeats, rolling his eyes like he was wondering who I am.

"It's a microbe case," I says, "and as you specialize in it, you are the one I want."

"What you want me for?" he questions.

His head was by this time poked out far enough so that the light from the street lamp showed up his appearance. This bird didn't look at all like a doctor to me.

"Are you a doctor?" I says.

"I am the dray man," he tells me.

I stood there for a few seconds looking at him.

"Is this 416 Cedar Street?" I asked him finally.

"It is 416," he says, "and I run a dray, but not at such a hour of the night."

I looked back at Caroline where she was sitting in the car, and in the meantime the man began shutting the door.

"Before you close it up," I says to him, "could you tell me is there a doctor specialist living in the neighborhood?"

"There is a hospital in town," he says, "but no doctor lives *here,* as the transfer line is what I am in."

Well, I will say I was pretty mad when I crawled back into the car, and the more I thought about it, the more I was convinced there was a nigger on a fence somewhere.

"It's a dray line at this place," I told Caroline, giving her a sharp look. "It's getting plain that something is cuckoo about where this microbe M. D. lives, and I can only say, Caroline, that if Harry is the one who is at the bottom of it, he is certainly going to explain something when we get back to the garage."

"It's a long trip we have made," she says to me, "and if Harry found this specialist's house then we ought to find it also. Ed, why don't you talk once more with Harry over the phone, and this time listen close so there wont be any mistake?"

Well, Mister, on account of it being dark I couldn't see whether Caroline was winking in a natural way, and anyhow it is not my nature to be suspicious of a woman until I am sure of the facts.

"Drive back to the lunchroom then," I says to her, "but if you are hinting, Caroline, that I didn't listen close, then you are wrong, because this deal looks like it has got something else wrong with it beside I didn't listen close."

I got phone connection with the garage again. Harry answered, and the way I spoke to him he knew I meant it.

"Harry," I told him, "this chasing around in the night-time has gone far enough. I want the facts about whether you know where this specialist lives or whether you don't."

"I know where he lives," he tells me, "because wasn't I there twice myself?"

"If you know it," I says, "then how does it come you are giving me a plumber and a dray man?"

"I gave you Number 416," Harry says, speaking in a slow way so I couldn't get it wrong; "and it is on Cedar Street at North Elmhurst."

I kind of blinked my eyes.

"Harry," I says, when he finished speaking; "what was that last crack you made about North Elmhurst?"

"That's where he lives," he repeats. "North Elmhurst."

I stood there for a second staring into the phone. There was no doubt about it that Harry was the hairpin who was mixing things up, and when I see somebody is stringing me, it was a lucky matter for Harry that he was at this minute thirty miles away.

"Are you listening, Harry?" I says finally.

"I am listening," he tells me.

"Where I am now at, Harry, is Elmhurst, and not North Elmhurst, and do you realize that North Elmhurst is a different town and ten miles away?"

"I realize it," he says.

"Then, Harry," I states, "you are certainly one who is going to realize something else when I make a quick trip back to the garage. I am not the kind to go on a goose-chase for any mechanic, and you can depend on it there is going to be some action!"

I hung up the telephone, and taking Caroline by the arm, started walking her to the machine, but she pulled back and stopped.

"We have driven all night," she states,

"I would like to see the time, Caroline," I says, "when I could not make a mechanic like Harry see stars."

"and do you think I am going to drive thirty miles back without first something to eat?"

Well, Mister, I was certainly mad about things, but to tell the truth about how I felt, I was also kind of hungry myself, as a drive like the kind we had would make anybody that way. I didn't answer her, but when I heard her telling them how long to cook a steak, I says to him to make it two of them while he was at it. With another drive still ahead of us I figured I would need it.

THE way this trip had so far gone had upset my temper pretty bad, but when the meal came sliding on the table I was surprised to see that I finished this steak in quicker time than Caroline; and when I afterwards finished other parts of the meal and lighted up a cheroot, I certainly felt O. K., except that the longer I thought about Harry the more upset my temper got.

"Get into the back seat," I says to Caroline. "I am going to make this drive to the garage myself, and it's going to be one of the fastest drives you have witnessed in many days."

She didn't answer, but she knew how I felt about things, and she climbed into the back without any objections. The way I stepped on the gas, it is lucky the gears held out. The explanations I gave Caroline over my shoulder were short, but the way I mentioned Harry's name to her was enough to show her what kind of a deal was coming.

The distance back to the garage was never burned up faster by any machine, and when we pulled up to the door I was out of the car and into the garage before Caroline could talk. The longer I think about anything the madder I get, as that is the way I am.

I bounded up the back stairs three steps at a time, and when I got to the room where Harry slept I banged open the door without knocking.

But to my surprise the room was empty, Harry being gone, baggage and all. Herman by this time had heard the racket and was looking out from his room.

"You trying to find Harry?" he inquires.

"Herman," I says, "where is he?"

"You will have a hard time finding him here," Herman says. "He quit his job a hour ago after you last telephoned, and by

this time he must be in Junction City or maybe on the train going elsewhere."

I walked back into the dining-room, where Caroline was waiting.

"Well," she says, "it's daylight. Did you find Harry?"

"Caroline," I told her, looking at her in a way that meant business; "this chase we have been on is a fraud from start to finish and I would be a dumb one if I couldn't see it. I don't know who is the cause of it, but Harry is one bird who was into it, and I can only say, Caroline, that it's lucky for him that he got away safe before we got back."

"You mean you feel like fighting?" she asked, kind of winking her eyes.

I lighted up the extra cheroot which I had brought back, and blew out a cloud of smoke.

"I would like to see the time, Caroline," I says, "when I could not make a mechanic like Harry see stars. And I am the one who could do it!"

Caroline kept looking at me in a curious way.

"I am glad you are at last feeling O. K.," she says. "When anybody can eat steaks the way you can, and drive a car thirty miles at the clip you drove it, and then jump out looking for a fight, he certainly must be cured!"

Well, Mister, it didn't look reasonable for me to again go on a bed; so it being daylight anyhow I did a little work in the garage, and was surprised to see from then on that I picked up steady. But when I went to the Junction City *Journal* a few days later and asked them where this microbe M. D. lived, showing them the newspaper with the notice in it, but no street number, they said this notice was false, and had been printed there by somebody else after their paper was published; and when I looked closer I could see this was a fact, as the notice was printed in the blank space beside a bottle of catsup.

Well, Mister, I don't know why Caroline doesn't come down to pay that seven-fifty she owes you. Let me see the bill and what is it for. . . . .

It's a printer's bill for Caroline, and it says: "Due for job printing on catsup ad, seven-fifty."

Well, Mister, I wouldn't need an X-ray to see through this, and as Caroline is so slow in appearing, I will pay it out of my own pocket, and I guess that's what she is figuring on anyhow.

The Silver King

By

BIGELOW NEAL

THE bosom of Clear Creek lay calm and unruffled under the hush of sunset. A great golden flare in the western sky shot radiating pillars of varicolored light above the horizon, diffusing a soft orange glow among the cottonwoods and elms that lined the shore. On the surface of the pond inverted images of the timber-lined banks stood out clear and distinct and among them the reflection of a fleecy cloud moved slowly from shore to shore.

The yellow light among the taller cottonwoods grew fainter and fainter, fading at last to the deep green of twilight. An eagle, soaring in from the prairie, dropped lightly among the branches of a box-elder, and from out in the timber came the sharp cries of roosting magpies.

Twilight deepened to dusk, and dusk to the impenetrable, mantle-like darkness which so often precedes the rising of the moon. From the brush along the shore sounded the pattering of snowshoe rabbits and the chattering of beavers. A small tree toppled and fell with a crash; then came the sound of ripping bark as the beavers gathered their evening meal from among the tender branches. Once the brush parted and a doe with her fawn came down to the water to sip long and contentedly.

IN time the moon rose, climbing above the cottonwoods to bathe the pond in mellow light. The muskrats were gone but beavers still worked among the trees, shattering the silence with their thumping tails

The gifted author of "Captain Jack," "The Coyote," "At Bay" and "The Field of Amber Gold" will take you on a delightful wilderness excursion in this fine Waltonian chronicle.

and chattering teeth. From the underbrush came stealthy sounds and the occasional squeals of startled mice. At times the glaring yellow eyes of bobcat or lynx gleamed across the water. Once a slender brown animal gliding along the shore left the air musky with the odor of mink. Toward morning the water in the cove moved again and a great fin cut along the surface, submerging in the deeper water of the pond.

With the rising of the sun, the bottom of the cove became clearly visible from above. A clam, moving on his inch-a-day-schedule, had crisscrossed the bottom with narrow furrows. Overhanging grasses curtained the borders and furnished concealment for a host of miniature fishes sporting in the shadowy background. A lumbering carp came from the pond to begin his endless nosing and sucking among the grass roots. Time after time he circumnavigated the cove, sometimes in his eagerness lifting himself half out of the water. At last he tired of his search and moved out to the middle of the cove. From his new position he beheld something which demanded attention: on the sandy bottom, partially protected by a tangle of beaver-gnawed sticks, a hollow had been scooped out and this depression was nearly filled with a pale gelatinous mass, swaying from side to side under the impulse which keeps even apparently still water in constant motion. It happens that no self-respecting carp ever resists the temptation to eat another fish's eggs, and so the yellow scavenger started toward the bottom. A few inches from the eggs he paused, then with a flash of yellow was gone—and none too soon, for there came from the depths of the pond a sudden flash of gray and white, and a shadow like that of a submarine moved in a circle before the cove.

Days passed and grew into weeks with but little outward change in the jelly-like mass clinging so tenaciously to the bottom of the cove. Perhaps they grew a shade darker with the passage of time, but aside from the change in color, their appearance was much the same as in the beginning. It would seem that they had been left to their fate for apparently nothing approached the cove. And yet sometimes in the dark hours of night a great body hovered above the eggs and the ventral fins of the guardian male or female gently fanned the gelatinous cluster below. Again in the hours when the eggs seemed to have been left unguarded a long, menacing, gray shape lay on the bottom of the pond and watched, with eyes which never blinked or wavered, the entrance to the cove. Even the turtles, encased in their armor of shell, had learned the terrific driving power of the shadowy monster, and the cove became a place to shun, a place set apart by the danger-signs of nature.

At last came the great day. A shaft of sunlight played into the cove and illumined the cluster of eggs. They became as living things, vibrating restlessly and pulsating under the dynamic forces of life. Suddenly an egg burst like an over-inflated soap-bubble, one minute an egg, the next minute a watch-charm-size fish—a queer

little fellow, at that, for he carried the yolk-sack suspended beneath him and he swung on a slender thread of membrane, a miniature sausage balloon.

By night the mass of eggs, as such, had disappeared forever and in its place had come a wriggling, ever-shifting cloud of youngsters; rising, falling, drifting this way and that, but always held together in concerted action by those invisible cords of desire and instinct. On the bottom of the pond a long gray shadow moved slowly in ever-widening circles. A few hours more and the long vigil would be over. The watchers of the deep would move on about the business of life and the offspring of their concerted effort and guardianship would be left to shift for themselves—to live or to die as their varying fortunes might dictate.

AND now enters the hero, or to be exact, now enters one which is to become the hero, for there is nothing particularly heroic about a tiny fish scarcely half an inch long, hiding in abject terror beneath a clamshell. What became of his brothers is written only in the book of nature.

The day which marked the third after their hatching had proved the Waterloo of the tiny host. Some misguided instinct led them to leave the cove, to see and to explore. Most of them saw, but too late. He of the clamshell, however, had found a haven of refuge and remained there, the sole visible representative of perhaps fifty thousand eggs.

For the first few days the little fellow lived on the remains of the egg-sack and knew no hunger. When the yolk was absorbed, he felt the necessity of something to eat and found that nature had provided for just such an emergency. He found that water is something like a basket of grapes packed in sawdust. In between the molecules of water were two substances in which he was interested: one of them was composed of tiny particles of air, the other was a myriad of inconceivably minute plant cells. Nature had equipped him with a mouth and gill structure designed to separate the sawdust from the grapes. In other words, he filled his mouth with water and extracted the air and food, then opened his gills and ejected the water. This source of food, coming from an invisible empire, made it possible for the youngster to remain beneath the clamshell until he had developed speed, strength and self-reliance, and until he had learned something of the water-people about him.

In the beginning he hovered well back under his bony tent, starting and half burying himself in the mud at the first suggestion of movement from without. In time, however, he learned to catalogue the sounds and vibrations which came to the sensitive nerve-centers along his sides. Even in the blackness of night he learned to tell the sluggish movements of the catfish from the lightning-like darts of the whitefish and perch. Familiarity with these sounds bred a certain contempt, for he also learned to judge the distance from which they came and when nothing moved in the vicinity of his shelter, he sometimes swam out into the light of day, to sport a while on the sandy bottom.

One day he was nosing along the bottom in search of minute shellfish. A perch saw him and charged with the speed of lightning, but the little fellow was not caught off his guard. Calmly waiting until the yellow fury was almost upon him, he dodged with even greater speed. Time and again the heavier fish repeated his charge but the results were nil. The youngster moved twice to the big fellow's once, and out of this encounter came confidence. He lost his fear of single enemies and if they came in numbers he simply dodged beneath the clamshell.

How long he might have remained within reach of the protecting shell is problematical, had not an unforeseen incident cast him out and on the mercy of nature once more. A snapping-turtle, wandering along the pond, inadvertently stepped on the clamshell and tipped it over. Its occupant wriggled from under the scaly monster and struck out in search of a new home. Here instinct intervened and led the little fellow miles upstream. Through ponds and narrows, over beaverdams and over shallows where the water gurgled among rocks and shells, until at last he came to the headwaters of Clear Creek, to a place of bubbling spring-water which never froze in the coldest winter, a place where the big fellows seldom came. Here, under cover of moss and water-grass, with no enemies more dangerous than black-backed suckers, he lived and ate and grew; at the end of his first year he was nearly three inches long. He moved out of the shallows into the deeper water. Two years more and he had become that which nature had intended him to be—a wall-eyed pike,

or as science says, a pike-perch. For the purpose of this story we shall call him a pike, for as such he was known by the fishermen of Clear Creek.

In the ponds at the head of Clear Creek the young pike lived the first ten years of his life. By that time he weighed ten pounds or more, and had become a great silvery king among his kind. Then came the wanderlust, the imperative call of something he did not understand; but he answered it—one day he set out on a new voyage of exploration, this time downstream toward the river.

Where Clear Creek leaves the prairie and enters the timber along the Missouri it changes its course, paralleling the river for some little distance, as though in an effort to maintain its crystal purity to the last moment. But there comes a time when the laws of gravity rebel, and the sparkling waters of the smaller stream are forced to submerge their identity in the writhing yellow flood of the great river. At the point of their actual junction there is a wavering curtain of sand, a curtain which hangs across the mouth of Clear Creek, marking the end of clear water and the beginning of those dark, whirlpool-tortured depths which lie beneath the turbulent flood of a mighty river.

One day the Silver King came to the curtain of sand and hesitated. Behind, lay miles of clear ponds and ripples, clear, deep, sandy-bottomed pools and shell-strewn shallows; ahead—he knew not what. On one hand, the home of his youth—on the other, the dark curtain of mystery which shrouds the future. For a while he moved in circles, for the breaking of home ties is ever hard; but at last the call of instinct proved the stronger. With a thrust of his powerful tail he drove himself on, through the curtain and down under the rushing, sand-laden waters.

YEARS passed and became decades. Decades moved beyond the span of human life, to become centuries—and still the Silver King did not come back. Yet somewhere far to the westward, perhaps in the icy streams which lace the slopes of the Rocky Mountains, he lived and watched the march of the seasons.

When one writes of the lion, the wolf or the beaver, time is of little consequence. They come, they stay a little while and go. The average man outlives them five to one. It is slightly different with the birds. The golden eagle may live as long as man, still the human mind can grasp its earthly tenure. With the reptiles and the fishes, however, the passage of time cannot be measured by the lives of men. In the swamps of the Southland there are alligators that were probably well past the days of their youth when Richard Coeur de Lion flaunted the banners of Merrie England before the walls of Acre. The alligator may be an extreme example but he is closely seconded by the snapping turtle and he, in turn, by the pike, the pickerel and the muskellunge.

When the Silver King left the mouth of Clear Creek and set his face toward the mountains, the prairies belonged to the buffalo and the red man. For an hundred years it remained in their possession. With the next century came a change. White men filtered through from the East and began the unequal contest which was to end only when the wild things of the prairie were driven from the stage.

During the centuries the mouth of Clear Creek had moved many times but always there remained the dark curtain of sand and the roar of the great river. At last there came a new day and with it the return of the Silver King. One morning the curtain of sand parted and he was there.

Slowly, majestically, in apparently effortless motion, the monster pike came back from the land of Somewhere. Swimming close to the surface where the sunlight sparkled in iridescent splendor on every plate in his armor, he moved with the dignity of the submarine. Denizens of the deep which once he had feared now gave way before him. There was nothing to dispute his path. Even the glittering-eyed snapping-turtles, sometime lords of Clear Creek's sandy bottoms, withdrew their heads to the protection of age-old armor and watched the big pike's progress in wonder, for his eyes, too, glittered and when his mouth opened, the sunlight struck fire from row after row of needle-like teeth.

A mile or so from the mouth of the creek, the Silver King came to a deep pond where overhanging trees threw deep shadows across the water. There he stopped. On the way upstream, his gills had been working steadily; now they ceased and a pearl-like string of air bubbles drifted in a swaying column toward the surface. He was going to the bottom to rest and no longer needed the buoyancy

of his air-bladder. Little by little he allowed the air to escape and as it came from his throat and so across his gill filaments, it rendered breathing temporarily unnecessary. The columns of bubbles became longer and longer, as the big fish sank, finally dying away altogether when his long body came to rest on the bottom of the pond.

IT was in the early twilight of a summer's evening that a tall man wearing high rubber boots and carrying a rod and reel, picked his way along the timber-lined shores of Clear Creek. It was the time between the last call of the curlew and the first cry of the nighthawk, the time when the first of the evening breeze brings fitful shimmers of protest from the heights of the cottonwoods, and cool air moving across the water dissipates the heat of day.

Slowly and cautiously, using every care neither to jar the bank nor to expose his presence by unnecessary sound, the fisherman worked his way from point to point. And always, as he advanced, there came a tapping sound from the water before him, a faint splash, dying out in ever-widening ripples, then the low metallic whir of a reel; while out over the pond a small green frog moved erratically, by fits and starts, until under the end of the rod he leaped into the air and sprang away on a new flight.

Once the fisherman stiffened, for as he lifted the frog from the water, a perch leaped into the air, to fall back and disappear in a triple splash. From far out in the timber came the distant call of a voice, repeated at intervals, with more of impatience at each repetition, but the man in the rubber boots shook his head. From experience he had learned something the others did not know. He had learned that the time for the big fellows is during the last five minutes in which one may see his line, just on the borderland of darkness.

Again and again the little frog sailed out over the pond and as often came back. Now even the small whitefish ceased their jumping and the carp, with their eternal smacking along the shore, lapsed into silence. To outward appearances, all life in the pond had ceased, for not a ripple, not a sound, not even the pointed nose of a mud-turtle, broke the smooth, glassy surface. The form of the fisherman became a tense shadow among the trees, for experience had taught him still another lesson. He knew well that the small fellows and the carp do not break off in their feeding without a reason. Somewhere, something was wrong. Down in the still green depths, a new actor was coming upon the stage and he carried the menace of danger to the water-folk.

Minutes dragged on. *Tap, tap—swish —tap, tap!* The frog was darting feverishly from place to place, while the fisherman leaned far forward, staring in hard-eyed fascination at the flashing spoon. And then it came—the thing before which the crashing of an elephant or the dying roars of a lion pale into insignificance: the sudden and unheralded strike of a great fish; a flash of white, a wild surge of foam, and the snap of powerful jaws! As the muscles of the fisherman jumped to violent contraction, his heart momentarily stopped beating, his breath came in gasps, and he cried out in an uncontrollable spasm of excitement, *"God a' mighty!"*

Overhead the hook and leader cut through the air with a shrill whistle and lodged high among the branches of a plum thicket. Now the fisherman became something akin to a maniac. Regardless of thorns, he pulled on the line until the prickly mass of boughs came within reach. Regaining the hook he stopped and jerked the cover from his frog-can—but the can slipped from his nerveless fingers. *Patter, patter,* he heard the little green fellows leaping to safety among the underbrush. He scoured the bottom of the can with his finger, but it was empty. Then he saw a small, dark spot moving in the brush. With a long plunge he crashed through bushes and briers, landing on his stomach, the dark spot underneath him. Cautiously running an exploring hand beneath him, he withdrew it triumphantly—he had one bait, his last frog; for those others in the brush might as well have been in Halifax.

Tap, tap—swish, swish—the spoon was at work again, out and back; leaping like a thing of life, sinking sometimes almost to the bottom, then up and on a long slant to dart along the surface. Minutes passed and nothing happened. Again came the impatient call from the timber, followed by the staccato roar of a motor tuning up; still the fisherman clung to his task.

"Just one more strike, and maybe—" Suddenly it came again, this time a violent tug from under the surface. The slender steel bent double. "God a' mighty!"

Again the song of the reel, the high-

pitched whine of whirring metal. Under the fisherman's thumb, the silken line leaped away into the night with a speed so great that it felt hot to the touch, blistering like white-hot fire. Nor could he run along the bank, for the brush forbade. Now he could see the bare metal of the reel; a few more turns and the line would snap, or snarl hopelessly in the back-lash. With all the strength in his hands, he pressed on the racing line—and won. Far down the pond he heard the waters part with a roar. He saw a monster fish—whiter than the foam below. Then the water surged back and the line fell slack. Desperately, now, he wound in the silken thread, but the Silver King was coming back and his speed was greater than the reel. The fisherman saw him pass, a great wave pushed by a form of flashing white. Suddenly the line was taut again. He held it for an instant and again came the scream of the reel. Fifty yards upstream the big fish turned once more. Now he was slowing down, not from lack of strength, but because he had lost his first insane fear. By dint of a supreme effort, the fisherman recovered his line. He felt the weight of the monster pike and pulled gently, for trickery might win now where light tackle would fail. Gazing down into the water he saw the big fellow coming into the shallows. Dropping the rod, he grasped the line and gave a mighty heave. The great fish started toward the shore but the fisherman's foot slipped and he, in turn, lurched toward the creek. They met head on in the shallow water under the bank. The fisherman drove an arm into the mud clear to the shoulder. The fish turned and darted down the creek. For the last time there came the hum of the running reel, then the rod jumped into the air; there was a violent jerk and the line fell slack.

After a time the fisherman waded to the shore and emptied the water from his boots. Rewinding the line, he found it all there but the hook, the leader having broken at the outer end. Climbing the steep bank he set out toward the sound of the running engine. As he walked he wiped the mud from his neck and shoulder, exclaiming, "God a' mighty! What a fish!"

ON toward the river sped the giant pike. For the first time in his long career, he knew the fear of death. Of the oft-met dangers lurking in the shadowy depths of creek or river, he felt the contempt of long familiarity, but for this thing which struck out of the darkness, through the agency of food; this all-but-invisible something among the shadows of the shore, which had jerked and pulled relentlessly, tearing at the tender lining of his mouth, he felt the blind, unreasoning terror of something he did not understand.

Swimming just under the surface, high enough to miss the snags of the beaver feed-beds, low enough to avoid the muskrats and waterfowl, the Silver King surged on. A beaver working on the spillway of his dam started back in sudden fright when a huge silvery body shot through the air and dropped with a violent splash into the rapids below. A buck, drinking from the stream, snorted and sprang away in fright, when the water surged and broke beneath his nose. But now the pike had almost reached his goal. Already he could sense the great body of rushing water ahead.

Rounding the last bend, he drove forward with all his might on the last stretch to safety. And then he struck something invisible, yielding but impenetrable; a thing that bagged and billowed under his impact, that cut at his mouth and gills like fine drawn threads of wire. Wheeling in a new frenzy of fear, he darted back upstream but again he was brought to a stop, for the clinging meshes of the net were entangled behind his gills. Then began a struggle that turned the creek to a churning mass of foam. A wild lunge tore the net loose from its anchorage on one shore and for a moment the Silver King thought he was free, but the floating net entwined him hopelessly in its great folds.

Still the old warrior fought on. Hour after hour throughout the long night he fought, until his muscles refused to contract; then he rested, only to fight again. Toward morning the pace began to tell. His movements grew slower and slower and his breath was coming in short, quick gasps, for the twisted threads under his gills were getting in their deadly work. Finally came the mercy of unconsciousness—the Silver King had made his last brave fight.

Dawn at last. With the first pale light along the eastern horizon, a hush settled over the timber. The wild people of the night—the mink and the bobcat, the porcupine and the mountain lion—vanished in the gloom of the underbrush. For a time the silence was intense. Then a bird twittered high in the branches of a cottonwood,

there came the pattering of busy rabbit feet on dry leaves, and the whirring flight of grouse leaving for the prairie.

The light in the east turned to gold and a flaming globe hung among the treetops. There was the low purring of a motor as a car glided from the timber to stop on the creek bank above the net, discharging a load of excited men who scrambled through the rose-bushes and kinnikinnick, down to the water's edge.

At the head strode a man in high rubber boots. It was the fisherman of the night before, he of the broken tackle. At the water-line they halted in amazement. Instead of the long line of bobbers stretching from shore to shore, they beheld a billowing snarl of net and floats and tangled driftwood. From out of the mass came occasional flashes of yellow and white as carp and perch and black-back suckers struggled fitfully against the entwining meshes.

The man in the rubber boots stepped into the water, and grasping the net drew it gently toward the shore. A sluggish splash from under his hand and he stopped to disengage the blue-white form of a channel cat. Slowly, with infinite patience, he removed the finned beauties, one by one, tossing them to join a rapidly growing pile upon the sand. But now he stopped and grew rigid, every muscle tense, gazing with fascinated eyes into the depths below. The men along the shore craned their necks as he was doing and they saw that which no Clear Creek fisherman ever saw before. They saw the steel-gray sides of a giant pike, glistening in silvery phosphorescence from the clear, cold depths of the pond.

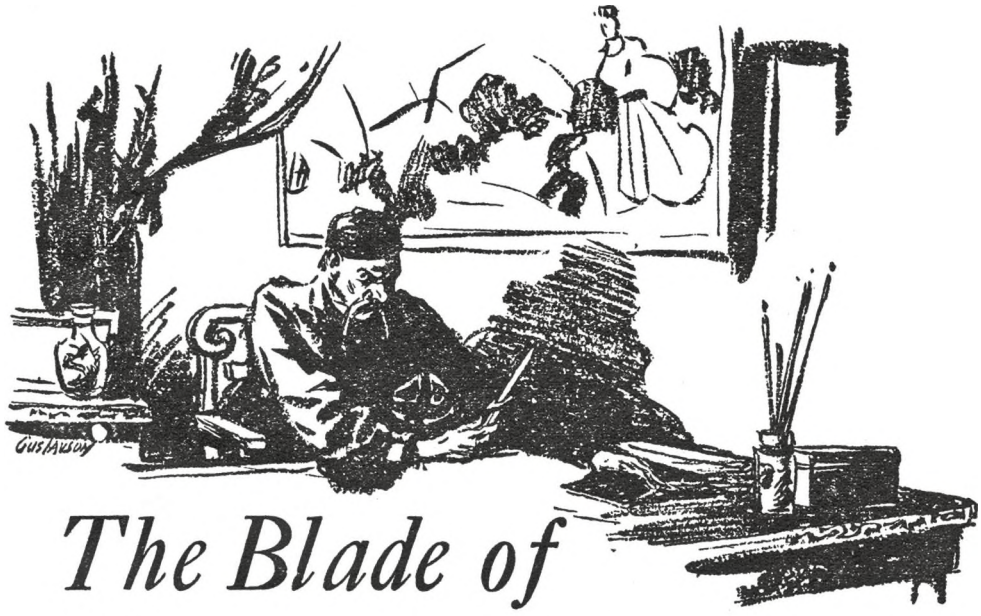
And now the fisherman resumed the slow drawing of the net. One false move might prove disastrous, for the great fish floated free except for the suffocating bundle of meshes about his gills and head. Cautiously, inch by inch, he drew the exhausted monster shoreward, momentarily expecting the meshes to lose their hold on the gills; but the Silver King had made his last struggle for freedom and the shadows were fast closing about him.

SLOWLY the silvery warrior came from the bottom of the pond and out into shallow water. Bending low, the fisherman thrust his arm below the surface and slipped his fingers through the gill slits. Carefully loosening the choking strands of the net, he lifted the Silver King from the water and stepped ashore. The great fish opened his mouth and gills in a convulsive gasp for air and the fisherman had a momentary vision of a slender barbed hook anchored far back under the gills. This then, was the gallant fighter he had met the night before! One of the other men rushed forward to help carry their catch to the car but hesitated and came to a halt, for he had seen a new expression on the face of the man with the rubber boots. It was no longer the face of a sportsman, for the instinct of the killer had died—it had become the face of a soldier who finds a gallant enemy caught in a trap where bravery is of no avail. Already he was turning back toward the water. They saw him lay the gasping, dying fish on its side and gently remove the hook. They saw him wade out, waist deep, into the stream and lower the fish until it was just under the surface, supported by the upturned palms of its captor.

Minutes passed before the great fish stirred and then, little by little, the gills began to open and close. Slowly at first, then faster and faster as the cold water swept over the gill slits, the pike took up his almost suspended breathing. He was swaying from side to side on the supporting palms like a drunken creature, but every rush of water carried fresh invigoration and the call of life. Gradually he became steady. The needle-like spikes on his back rose and stood erect. The drooping fin near the tail spread wide like an open fan and began a slow movement from side to side.

Now the fisherman very gently withdrew his hands and the pike floated free. His sense of balance was still imperfect and for an instant he wavered. Then the fins under his throat began to vibrate like the underslung motors of a dirigible, and as the group of men watched, he began to move out over the surface of the pond, in a great circle, gradually gaining speed as he went, until above the channel he turned and headed downstream. He was gaining strength now, his powerful tail coming into action. A moment more, and he reached the mouth of the creek; ahead of him the boiling, rushing surge of the Missouri.

Following along the shore, his late captors watched the great pike dip down toward the sand-laden depth. One last flash of sunlight on the silvery scales, one last shimmering thrust of the mighty tail, and the curtain of sand closed in. The Silver King had gone back to the centuries.



The Blade of a Thousand Treacheries

The author of "Gar Sing Makes a Profit" and "The Return of Stiletto Sofie" here gives us another vivid and picturesque Chinatown drama.

By LEMUEL DE BRA

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

GAR SING WO sat alone in his gold-and-black studio above the Prosperity and Tranquillity Curio Store. On the carved teak table that served as his desk lay open a much-thumbed copy of "The August Sayings of Sz Loy Pow." Beside the book was a silver bowl that, at the beginning of Chapter I, was filled with preserved ginger, but now, near the end of Chapter III, was almost empty.

In the shadows back of the ink-block and the jar of bamboo brushes, where casual visitors would not observe it, lay an old dagger. The thick handle was of stained ivory, the curving hilt of tarnished silver. The short two-edged blade was wide but drawn to a needle point. In this blade, near the hilt, were three Chinese characters. Few residents of San Francisco's Chinatown, had they ever seen this ancient dagger, could have read these characters, for they were written in the old classic form.

Gar Sing Wo picked up the dagger and with a bony thumb wiped the dust from the blade. In a whisper that echoed weirdly in the gloomy studio he read: *"The Blade of a Thousand Treacheries."*

The hand that held the knife trembled as Gar Sing Wo looked down at the book. Aloud, he read again a verse that he knew almost by heart, but whose sinister significance had dawned on him only that morning:

> *How like a shadow is one's past! In the morning of life, with a song on our lips, and the way bright before us, we march on toward the rising sun; but in life's evening hours, when the hot sun of our youth is behind us, we behold on the path ahead, a dark shadow that grows ever larger and larger and which no man can escape.*

"Ts-s!" hissed Gar Sing Wo savagely as he flung the book from him. "Sz Loy Pow was a fool—and a liar! There is no shadow! And if there is, I will not see it. As for the past, the years have not

tarried and cannot return." He looked at the dagger again and, with a shudder, laid it down. "The years," he muttered, his bony fingers curling to his thin gray beard, "twenty years—"

OF a sudden the studio reverberated with a loud rapping on the hall door. Gar Sing Wo started violently, and whirled to face the hall. Slowly, as he stared at the door, his long slant eyes grew narrow and dull, his face expressionless as a mask. "I am a fool," he muttered; "yes, I am a fool. *There is no shadow!*"

Then he called loudly: "Who is there?"

A muffled voice answered: "It is I—Lau Kee Tsoi."

Lau Kee Tsoi! The second child, and the talented one, of the rich and noble family of Lau! Less than two weeks gone, the father had been laid away in his lacquered coffin and sent to Canton for burial in the cemetery of the Laus. Ah! Young Mr. Lau would want advice about settling the estate. There would be a nice fee in that!

Gar Sing Wo arose, shook out the folds of his gold-and-purple mandarin robe, and from a shelf took a silk study-cap with a red button that had once adorned the cap of an emperor. The cap set precisely on his head gave Gar Sing Wo the appearance of a learned and dignified scholar. Unlocking the door, he swung it wide.

"Enter my poor home, Lau Kee Tsoi!" he said in the grave tones of a Buddhist priest. "How strange that I should be thinking of you at the precise moment that you rapped at my door!"

Briskly, Lau Kee Tsoi stepped in. For a Chinese he was unusually tall and big-framed. He wore American clothes with the poise of one familiar with the best tailors. A hat of black velour, the brim turned down on one side, softened the lines of his dark face. He took the stool Gar Sing Wo indicated, and got out his cigarette-case.

"I was passing your door, honorable Gar," said Lau Kee Tsoi in tuneful Cantonese, "and I thought I would stop and inquire after your health."

"That was very thoughtful of you," Gar Sing Wo said, smiling blandly. "You are like your father. He was always doing things for me. *Aih,* his liver was large with benevolence! I suppose he left you the greater part of his fortune."

Lau Kee Tsoi's father was a sharp man who never did anything for anybody unless there was profit in it, and he had said many times that if the truth were known, old Gar Sing Wo ought to be hanged. Gar Sing Wo knew all this; and Lau Kee Tsoi knew that he knew it. His bronze eyes narrowed thoughtfully as he lighted his cigarette, turning it around and around in his thick fingers.

"Now, that is a very strange thing!" Lau exclaimed, smoke billowing from his mouth and nostrils. "As you know, my father was very businesslike. He had adopted many of the American ways. He—"

"*Aih,* that was the only thing on which we ever disagreed! But pardon my disrespect—proceed with what you were saying."

"You and my father never agreed on anything," declared Lau Kee Tsoi indifferently; "but that is neither here nor there. As I was about to say, my father made a will, disposing of all of his property. He kept the will in a secret drawer that is somewhere in his private office. This office, as you may remember, adjoins his bedroom. No one ever entered the office but himself; hence no one has ever seen the secret drawer but my father and the man who made it for him. That man, I have learned, is dead.

"My father spoke of this drawer many times, saying that he kept his will there, and that some day he would show us how to find it. But as you know, he was a very careful man; and he did not like to share his secret with others. So—when he dropped dead some two weeks ago, he took his secret with him."

GAR SING WO clicked his tongue. "*Ts*—you cannot find the will because you have been unable to find the secret drawer?"

"That is the situation, sir."

Gar Sing Wo reached for a piece of ginger. So *that* was why Lau Kee Tsoi had come to see him!

"How unfortunate!" mumbled old Gar over a mouthful of sweet ginger-root. "Of course, you have searched diligently?"

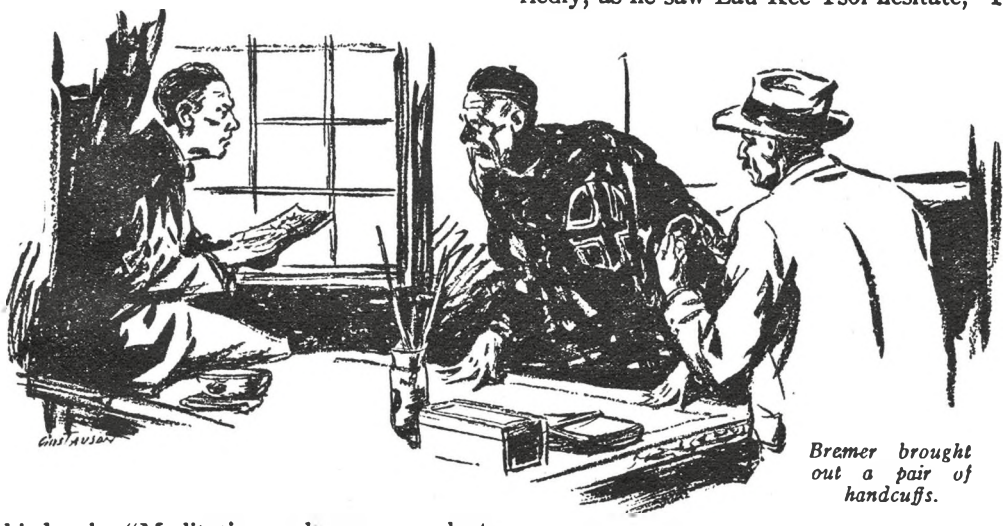
Lau Kee Tsoi nodded.

"We know that the secret drawer is there, but we have been unable to locate it. Of course, we have not gone so far as to pry anything open forcibly. As you may have heard, Father's room is very beautiful and contains much costly furniture and many priceless antiques—"

"Which he got cheap by lending small sums to unfortunates whom he knew could never repay."

"And," went on Lau Kee Tsoi, ignoring that thrust, "we hesitate to use force lest we break something that may be of even more value than we think."

Gar Sing Wo leaned back in his chair. "You are quite right," he said, nodding his head. "Meditation and proper conduct will open many doors that do not yield to bluster and vulgar force. In coming to me for advice, you have shown your father's excellent judgment. I have been told that the estate would appraise about two hundred thousand dollars," he lied easily.



Bremer brought out a pair of handcuffs.

Lau Kee Tsoi felt certain Gar Sing Wo had never heard any such thing. It was pretty well known in Chinatown that Lau King was worth about a hundred thousand dollars, all of which would eventually go to his eldest son, Lau Kee Tsoi.

"What gossip!" exclaimed Lau, smiling. "My father was really a very poor man. I doubt if his estate is worth—say, twenty-five thousand. Still, whatever it is, until we find the will, I cannot touch a dollar."

"I understand. And of course, I can help you."

"How much?" asked Lau Kee Tsoi quickly.

"My customary fee," said Gar Sing Wo after a moment's meditation, "for a case like this is—ah—two thousand—"

"Haie! That is too much! I—"

"But since your father was my friend, I would accept fifteen hundred—"

"I can't pay it! Think of all my father did for you when—"

"Or as low as one thousand if paid in advance."

"I will pay you seven hundred and fifty. No more!" said Lau Kee Tsoi decidedly.

"Let us not stoop to vulgar bargaining," said Gar Sing Wo quickly. He had intended to hold out for at least three hundred dollars. "Give me the seven hundred and fifty. Of course," he went on hurriedly, as he saw Lau Kee Tsoi hesitate, "I will return the money if I do not find the will for you."

Thoughtfully, Lau Kee Tsoi flicked the ash off his cigarette.

"I will give you a check for one hundred dollars now," he said finally; "and I will sign a paper agreeing to pay you six hundred and fifty dollars more when you find the will. That is my final proposition."

"That is much better," muttered Gar Sing Wo, hiding his disappointment. "In fact, I was about to suggest that very thing. Only I was going to say—"

"Write the paper!" cut in Lau Kee Tsoi sharply. He arose, looked at his watch, then drew out his check-book. With his fountain pen he scribbled off a check.

Carefully Gar Sing Wo scrutinized the check. Then he slowly opened a drawer, dropped in the check and took out a sheet of rice-paper. He took a bamboo pen from the jar, moistened it on the ink block, and began brushing characters in the simplified running business script. The paper finished, he looked up. Lau Kee Tsoi was at his shoulder, but he was not looking at what Gar Sing Wo had written. He

was staring at the old dagger by the ink block.

"Here is the writing," said Gar Sing Wo quickly. "Let us—"

"Where did you get that thing?" demanded Lau Kee Tsoi, picking up the knife.

"That? Oh, that is an old curio. I've had it for years. I do not remember—"

"And look at the writing on the blade! Old classic Chinese! What do these characters signify, Mr. Gar?"

"I do not know! I can't read them! Here is our agreement—I have signed it."

Lau Kee Tsoi laid down the dagger and took the sheet of rice-paper. With Gar's brush he made the three characters that comprised his name. As he flung the paper on the desk, he asked:

"Say, did you ever kill anyone with that ugly thing?"

"What foolish talk!" exclaimed Gar Sing Wo angrily. "Let' us stick to business. Well, I have your check, and the contract is signed. That is all," he finished as he put the contract in the drawer with the check.

"That is all except to find the will," corrected Lau Kee Tsoi. "What do I do now, sir?"

Gar Sing Wo smiled blandly.

"My son, I know precisely what you should do; but it is best that I do not tell you at this hour. Just as there is a right time and a wrong time to plant a field, so there is a right time and a wrong time to impart wisdom. Come to me at this hour tomorrow."

Lau Kee Tsoi frowned. A moment he sat silent, staring at the floor; then, without a word, he jumped up and left.

Gar Sing Wo, astonished, stared at the door that had slammed shut behind Lau Kee Tsoi. Presently he snatched up a padded hammer and struck the gong that hung over his desk. A Chinese youth entered.

"My son," spoke Gar Sing Wo kindly, as he drew out the check and endorsed it, "take this at once to the bank and deposit it. Then do not disturb me. I must meditate."

The boy gone, Gar Sing Wo took a piece of ginger and reached for his worn copy of "The August Sayings of Sz Loy Pow." "It is a problem," he muttered as he thumbed the pages. "Since Lau Kee Tsoi was willing to pay more than twice what I expected, finding that secret drawer may be more difficult than I thought. I wonder if that check is good! I wonder why the son of Lau left so unceremoniously! Was he thinking that between now and this hour tomorrow he might find the drawer himself? That would be unfortunate for me! Or—maybe—" The old man's voice died as though there had been a sudden constriction in his throat. For a long, breathless moment he stared at the old dagger; then, jerking the drawer open, he swept the knife in, and snapped the drawer shut. "I am a fool!" he muttered, and bent to his book.

Three pieces of ginger later Gar Sing Wo jumped like one startled from a sound sleep. Thinking of that check, of the secret drawer, of Lau Kee Tsoi's queer actions, and of the Blade of a Thousand Treacheries he had finished the third chapter of the "Sayings" without really being conscious of what he was reading. Now, suddenly, the significance of the last verse burst upon him. He read the verse aloud:

When you are faced with a difficult task, remember that wisdom lies in these things: Knowing what to do; and getting the proper person to do it. Does one get a chair-mender to set a broken arm?

"Ha-a!" breathed old Gar exultantly. "Am I a mender of chairs? No! Well, no more am I a searcher of other people's houses!"

Again he struck the gong. A servant entered.

"Go, Lim, at once to the Customhouse. Speak privately to the loud-voiced official whose business it is to search for smuggled opium. Say that I wish to see him here immediately."

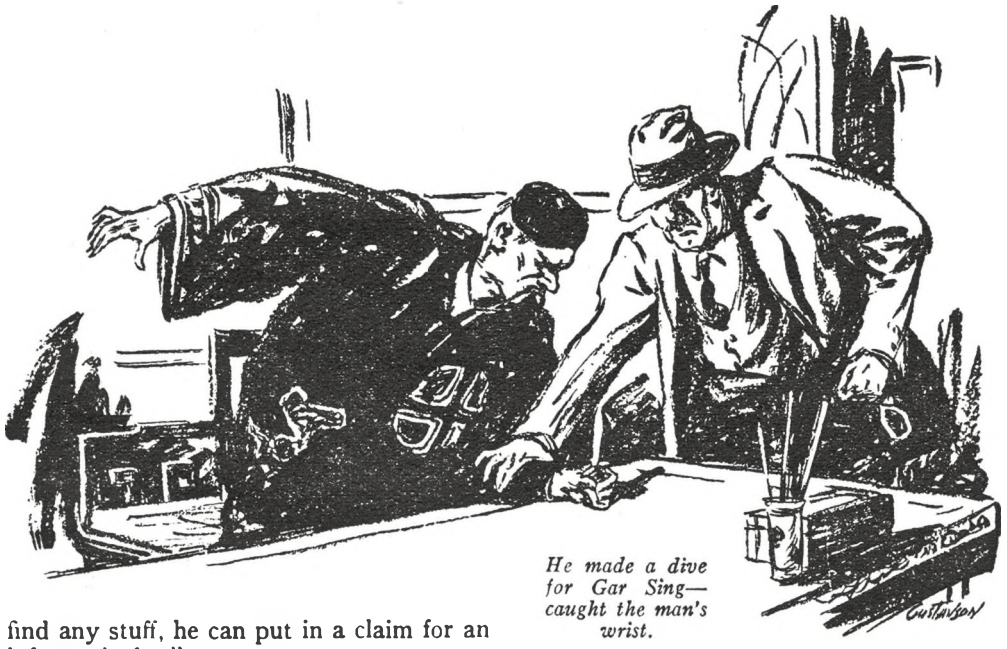
PRESENTLY United States Customs Agent Dan Bremer perched himself on Gar Sing Wo's teak stool and lighted a cigar. "What does the old bird want?" he asked Gar Sing Wo's boy.

Gar Sing Wo had found it profitable to pretend that he did not understand English. For one thing, the use of an interpreter gave him more time to consider before replying to a question.

"Ask the official what he will pay if I tell him where he can find smuggled opium."

The boy quickly put that into English. Bremer chewed his cigar thoughtfully.

"Can't pay a red cent!" he declared finally. "Strictly against the rules. But if we



He made a dive for Gar Sing—caught the man's wrist.

find any stuff, he can put in a claim for an informer's fee."

"Tell him," said Gar Sing Wo, concealing his disappointment, "that I had no thought of accepting payment from a friend. I merely wished to know what value he would put on my information. Tell him that I am glad to do him this favor, knowing that some day he will be glad to do something for me."

"I sure will," Bremer told the boy.

"Now listen closely, my son," said Gar Sing Wo. "Tell the official that in the office of the father of Lau Kee Tsoi, named Lau King, and which was used privately by Lau King whilst he lived, there is a secret drawer containing smuggled opium. Say to him that Lau King was a very clever but a very wicked man; that for years he dealt secretly in the smuggled drug. If he wishes to know why I am informing on him, say that Lau King was my enemy and did me many wrongs, but that I feared to inform on him while he lived."

Very carefully the boy put that into English for the Customs agent.

"Lau King!" exclaimed Bremer. "Why, I can't believe it! I knew the old bird well. Fine chap! So is young Lau. There must be some mistake."

"Honorable Father," said the boy in Cantonese, "the official does not believe what you say."

"Then," growled Gar, "tell him to walk his way and not look back. I can easily find some official who will believe."

Bremer gestured emphatically with his cigar. "Oh, I'll take a crack at it, don't worry! But there'll sure be a blow-up if I land the goods. *Tong* wars have been started on less than that!" He arose and slapped on his hat. "I'll get Weeks to bring up his junk. If there is a secret drawer there, we'll locate it without much trouble."

"One thing more!" spoke up Gar quickly. "Impress upon the official that he must search very carefully, for if he destroys anything and does not find any opium, Lau Kee Tsoi will sue him for heavy damages."

"We wont make a scratch," Bremer said over his shoulder, his hand on the doorknob.

"Also," went on Gar, rising, "you had better explain to him that Lau King kept the smuggled opium *only* in the secret drawer. Therefore, when he finds the secret drawer, he should search no further. Moreover, he must not come here again for many days."

As the boy put that into English, Bremer looked around quickly. A moment he eyed the old man keenly. Then: "Tell your father that I understand," he said. "Yes," he went on to himself, when he had closed the door, "I know damned well I understand!"

THE long afternoon waned slowly into a chill, murky evening. As the sun went down into a bank of fog rising off the Pacific, the buildings across the street flung their shadows over the studio of Gar Sing

Wo. Annoyed by the growing darkness, and uneasy because Lau Kee Tsoi had not come to report Bremer's visit, Gar Sing Wo struck the gong and ordered lights.

"Sir," said the servant, "you said lights. Don't you mean a fire? Are you not going to sit by the fire and smoke and watch the shadows, as is your evening custom?"

"Shadows!" cried old Gar savagely. "There is no shadow! I—I mean—I mean I want lights! Give me lights and don't annoy me with chatter. Hold!" he called sharply as the servant, after turning on the lights, started to leave. For a moment Gar Sing Wo sat in dreamy silence, pulling at his scant, white beard. "Lim," he spoke more kindly, "I am growing old—and foolish. I have—dreams; I see visions of things I thought long buried with the years. It is a bad sign."

"You are not well, sir. Now a little *ng ka py* would be good for you. Shall—"

"Hold your tongue whilst I speak! Lim, if anything should happen to me, I charge you to take care of the boy. Strange how that nameless waif has taken hold of my wicked heart! When I think of him, I wish my life had been different. I wish—bah! How I chatter like a frightened old woman! Lim, I am taking care of you and the boy. When the time comes, go to Wong at the bank. He will tell you all. And remember, the boy must never know! Teach him to follow only the upright path; and then—maybe—when he is old he wont see—"

A SHARP rap on the hall door interrupted. Gar Sing Wo jumped, and whirled nervously to face the door. "It—it is Lau Kee Tsoi," he whispered. "Go, Lim!"

The servant left. With an effort Gar Sing Wo regained his composure. He arose, and swung the door wide.

Customs Agent Dan Bremer strode in! Behind him came Lau Kee Tsoi.

"Ah!" breathed old Gar, smiling blandly. "It is Lau Kee Tsoi! I was thinking of you just as you rapped," he went on, speaking Cantonese. "Who is the white foreign devil?"

"You may as well speak English!" snapped Lau Kee Tsoi. "I have told Mr. Bremer everything, and he has told me everything. He suspected you, so confided in me. I saw through your scheme. A very clever one, I admit. Agent Weeks, with his measuring rods, stethoscope and other paraphernalia was less than an hour finding the secret drawer."

Gar Sing Wo continued to smile blandly. "I—I am pleased that you worked together. My only desire, of course, was to help you. You—ah—found the will?"

"Your only desire," Lau declared emphatically, "was to slander my dead father, and to make a profit out of me. Well, your sins have turned against you. In the drawer with the will we found this!"

With a dramatic, accusing gesture, Lau Kee Tsoi drew from his pocket a folded sheaf of Chinese paper. The paper was covered with characters and apparently was very old.

At the same instant Customs Agent Bremer reached beneath his coat and brought out a pair of steel handcuffs.

A dead silence filled the room. Gar Sing Wo sat like one carved from stone. Only the eyes, narrow, cruel and flaming, betrayed his tremendous agitation.

Again Lau Kee spoke: "My father knew all. And everything he wrote here in this paper, that I, his son, might know. For years you have robbed our people with your tricks. You are guilty of a thousand treacheries against—"

"A Thousand Treacheries!" breathed Gar Sing Wo, glancing fearfully at the drawer of his desk. "It is a lie—a lie!"

"It is true!" declared Lau calmly. "My father, who knew all, has written it here. And he tells here, that years ago, with that old knife that lies on your desk, you—"

"Pa lok!" shouted old Gar in Chinese. "Stop!" Wildly he glared at Agent Bremer, at the handcuffs in Bremer's hands; then he turned to Lau Kee Tsoi: "It—it is all a mistake," he said in Chinese. "Let me see the paper! Let me see it!"

"Oh, no! This paper goes to the police. I have already sent for Detective Lyons. He should be here any minute. Before he comes, if you have anything to say—"

Lau Kee Tsoi broke off as Gar Sing Wo turned to his desk. A trembling hand groped over the desk, found the drawer.

Slowly, a fraction of an inch at a time, hesitating between each move, shaking with some terrific emotion, Gar Sing Wo began opening the drawer.

Into that drawer Lau Kee Tsoi had seen old Gar put their contract. He did not know that in the same drawer Gar Sing Wo had put the Blade of a Thousand Treacheries.

The drawer partly open, Gar Sing Wo

stopped. He drew up; his body tensed. Then his hand darted into the drawer.

BREMER saw the move, saw the flash of a blade. With a shout, he made a dive for Gar Sing Wo. He caught the man's wrist, but—a fraction of a second too late. Turning the knife so that the butt of the handle rested against the desk, Gar Sing Wo drove his whole weight against the needle-sharp point. Deep into his chest sank the Blade of a Thousand Treacheries.

"Haie!" shouted Lau Kee Tsoi, seizing Gar by the shoulders. "What are you doing? Ah, why did you do that?"

"Get a doctor!" ordered Bremer. "Quick!"

Lau Kee Tsoi reached up to strike the gong; but at that instant Lim, the servant, came running in, a startled question on his lips. "Get a doctor!" Lau ordered.

They eased the old man to the floor. Lau Kee Tsoi made to remove the knife, but Bremer caught his hand. "Don't touch that! Wait for the doc!"

Lau Kee Tsoi, tremendously agitated, again broke out in high-pitched Cantonese: "Why did you do this? Ah, how piteous! Why did you—"

"Listen!" ordered Bremer. "He's trying to say something!"

"Promise me—promise you wont tell the boy," pleaded Gar Sing Wo in almost perfect English.

"We promise," said Lau Kee Tsoi; "but—"

"Listen—before it is too late! I—I am not Gar Sing Wo. I am Gar Bock Louie. In Canton I was a gambler, a cheater at the tables, a hired assassin for the dishonest officials who lived by squeeze. How many men I slew with this blade, and flung into the river, I—I cannot remember.

"Then—new officials came. I had to flee for my life. I went to Mexico and paid a smuggler to bring me across the border, for I could not come in legally. Traveling only at night, I came finally to the riverlands where my brother, Gar Sing Wo, was working in the gardens of your father, Lau King. My brother had been here many years. He had a paper permitting him to remain.

"I asked my brother to hide me, but he was always stupidly honest and he refused. After he had talked with your father about me, he said I must leave at once. I told him I would leave the next morning; but that night while he slept, I stabbed him to death with this knife and flung his body into the river. Then I took his registration paper and fled to Seattle. Since I greatly resembled my brother, whose photograph appeared on his registration paper, I had no difficulty passing myself as Gar Sing Wo.

"But years later I had trouble with the police and came to San Francisco. And one day I met your father. He thought I really was Gar Sing Wo, and that I had fled because I had killed my wicked brother. He said he didn't blame me, and that my secret was safe with him.

"Why he betrayed me, I do not know. But what he has written there is mostly false, as you know now. My brother Gar Sing Wo was a good man. I am sorry I killed him; but I am glad that I have cleared his name. The shadow—the shadow is not so frightening now. . . . . Don't —don't tell the boy—"

The hall door was flung open. Lim, followed by an American doctor, entered.

Within two minutes after the physician removed the knife, Gar Bock Louie breathed his last.

"I WILL take this ugly knife," said Bremer when they had notified the police of the suicide. "The dicks will want it. And you'd better give me that paper, too."

Lau Kee Tsoi looked down at the sheaf of old Chinese paper still clutched in his hand.

"By the gods, Bremer! I had forgotten! . . . . Say, my father did not betray this man; I hatched the whole scheme. You see, I was incensed at him for slandering my father's name, and I thought I would give him a good scare. Also I had the idea he would bargain with me, offer to exchange our contract for this paper, which would save me six hundred and fifty dollars. I didn't take you fully into my confidence, for I wanted you to play your part well. For the same reason I objected when you said we should call the police. I had seen that knife on his desk, and it gave me the idea. But—I never dreamed—"

"Then—then that paper—"

"Is just an old order for seed potatoes and onion sets."

"Well—I'll—be—damned!" breathed Agent Bremer. "Huh! Seems to me the old bird said something about being 'fraid o' his shadow. Gets 'em that way sometimes!"

Vanishing

A cowboy's novel of cowboy life—so we can best describe this lively, but thoroughly authentic novel. For Jay Lucas has been a cowboy and professional hunter and writer of events which he well knows at first hand. Be sure to read this.

Illustrated by William Molt

THE dense cedars parted, and a powerful cow-horse turned into the rutted road and headed toward the straggling little town a short distance away. Ben Jurney twitched his bulky shoulders, and straightened up stiffly in the saddle.

This, he thought, would be his last time to ride to town as Sammy Hopkins' range-boss. How he had come to love the range and his job in the short time that he had been there! Yes, and the queer, lovable little cripple who was his employer!

He heard another horse approaching in a sleepy running walk, and raised his head to see Dick Brooks, one of his men from a distant camp, approaching slowly. They met with a cheerless mutual "Howdy!"

"How's everything goin' over your way lately?" asked Ben. He tensed, and watched the other narrowly, dreading the answer.

"Why—why," Dick hesitated, "all right—I reckon."

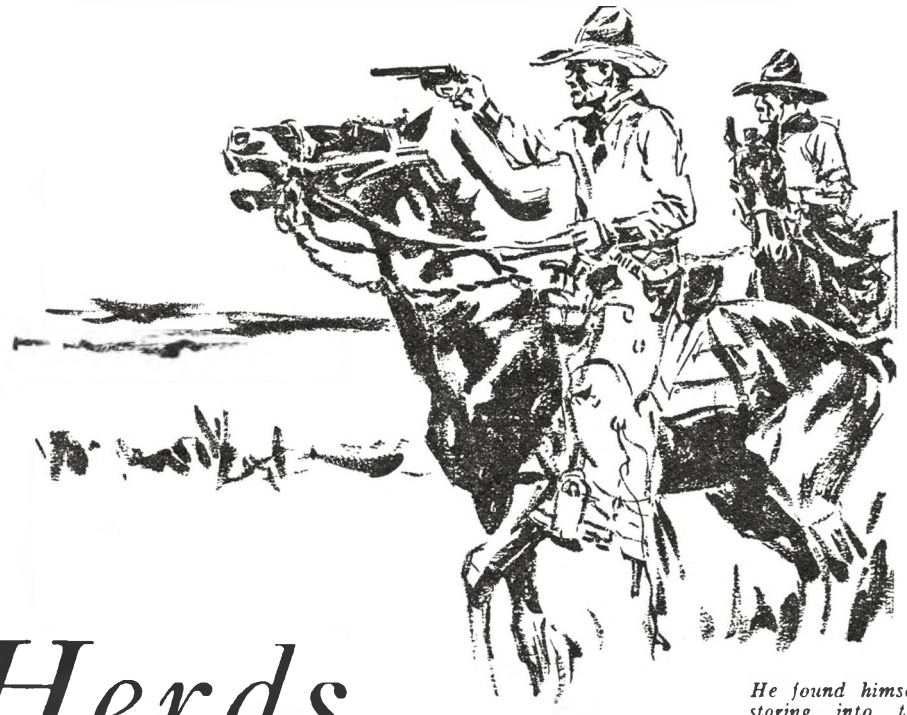
He did not meet Ben's eye, but sat staring at a rut in the road. After a moment's silence, he asked:

"An' how's things around headquarters?"

"I—why—all right, I reckon."

For an instant the eyes of the men met, and each read in the other's a momentary determination to put in words the thing that was troubling them. But their eyes drifted apart, and with a quiet *"Adiós"* each went his way.

That was just the trouble! The thing was too weird—too impossible—to be put in words! No one could say positively that anything was wrong on the range, but everyone knew in his heart all was wrong. And everywhere was that queer feeling of uneasiness! It was not only the Circle T; when you met a Four Bar man, or one of the boys from the Flying O, he would stare at you suspiciously, just as you stared at him, and then drop his eyes to the ground dejectedly, just as you dropped yours. There would be little conversation, a few brief, jerky sentences, and he would ride



He found himself staring into the barrel of the pistol.

Herds

By JAY LUCAS

on. And if you pulled yourself together and looked back after him, you would see him slumped dispiritedly in the saddle. For everyone knew that cattle were going—whole herds of them—but no one knew where. They could not be driven off in such numbers; that was out of the question. It was as though the ground was opening and swallowing them, and then closing again, not leaving a trace.

Of course Ben could conceal the truth from little Sammy—could put on a brave face and bluff. But Ben was not built that way; one glance at his rugged face and square chin would show that. He would tell the truth—that cattle were going by droves, and that he could not stop it, could not even guess what was becoming of them. And then little Sammy would tell him kindly that he must go—to make room for a man who could run the outfit properly.

Ben stopped his horse in front of the saloon. There could be no mistaking the high-pitched voice that came forth upraised in unsteady song.

"Hey, cook!" Ben called.

Still the singing continued.

"What is it Sammy called him?" mused Ben. Then he remembered, and leaning over his horse's neck, called again:

"Hey, Jim! Come here a minute, will you?"

The song died away gradually, and after a short pause, just long enough for a hasty drink, a figure appeared in the doorway. A chubby, red-faced figure it was, with a cook's white cap, and a once-white apron askew around the waist.

"Well!" Jim grinned cheerily. "If it aint the new foreman himself! 'Light an' have a drink with me—they sure have fine tequila here now!"

"Thanks, Jim, but I'm in a hurry. I only wanted to know if Sammy's at home. I want to see him in a hurry—important."

"Reckon he's at the house. I told him to have dinner cooked for me at one o'clock."

"Nice way to do the boss! If he'd any sense, he'd fire you!"

"Say!" Jim became menacing. "Better not say Sammy Hopkins aint got sense while I'm around, 'less you want a lickin'."

Ben twitched his bulky shoulders, and

tried to hide a grin from the fat little cook. Ben stood six feet two, and most of his hundred and ninety pounds lay in the neighborhood of his broad shoulders.

"Easy, Jim! I'm not sayin' a thing against old Sammy an' if you don't get in a fight till some one does, you'll never get a black eye."

"Aint that the truth! Whitest man in Arizona! Why, he's had another busted cowboy stayin' with him a week now, an' sleepin' in his own bed with him. Aint ol' Sammy a prince!"

BEN presently turned up the side-street and headed for a huge, barnlike green frame house that overlorded the smaller buildings of the "cow town." This was the residence of old Sammy Hopkins, wealthiest and most powerful cow-man of the country, a man who, starting at middle age with a battered saddle and a tattered camp bed wrapped in a "tarp" as capital and surplus profits, had built up a tremendous cow-outfit that stretched over many a broad valley and many a rugged mountain. The house overlorded, but it surely differed from its owner: for old Sammy was the idol of the Southwestern ranges, his house always a home to the cowboy out of work or sick, and no personal questions asked. Over many a distant camp-fire, at the tail of many a chuck-wagon, his name was spoken almost reverently.

"Hey, Jim—come an' get it or I'll throw it out!"

It was the old chuck-wagon dinner-call, coming from the house. Then Sammy himself appeared in the doorway, a pot in one hand and a big mixing-spoon in the other. He was a small, shabby little man, with a bad limp in his right leg, and a wrinkled face seamed by the suns of many deserts and the frosts of many mountains. He cocked his head, birdlike, to one side, in surprise at seeing his foreman instead of the incorrigible cook.

" 'Scuse me, Ben—'scuse me! I thought you was Jim—he's drinking a little ag'in."

"I saw him. Don't see how you can stand for his foolishness!"

"Oh, Jim's all right, as cooks goes. Cooks will be cooks." Sammy cocked his head to the other side. "Anyways, he don't get drunk more'n once a month or two, an' nearly always leaves some cold chuck that I can warm over till he sobers up—so I can't see as I've anything to howl about. I wish he wouldn't sing, though!"

"Does he?"

"Why, aint you heerd him when—" Sammy suddenly paused, cocked his head first to one side, then to the other, and then grinned slyly at his range-boss.

"Well, mebbe yo're right—mebbe yo're right. But he shore does try like hell! How's the outfit runnin'?"

"Not any too well. I wanted to tell you—"

"Well, wait till we eat. Always keep yore troubles till after you eat—you'll eat more, an' be able to look at things clearer. Come in; it's all on the table." Sammy limped across the floor.

Ben stepped gingerly over the carpet, pushed his big hat under a lounge out of the way, and seated himself timidly at the table in a chair with upholstery a foot thick. Despite the surroundings, including the pink-bordered napkins, the meal was that of the range—biscuits, *frijoles*, stew with a name that wouldn't look well in print, and the other things that go with these. The napkin embarrassed Ben for an instant, until he saw his host calmly throw his to the other end of the table. Judging this to be the correct procedure, he followed suit heartily, and with a deep sigh of relief reached for the blackened tin bean-pot which held the place of honor among the gaudy chinaware.

CHAPTER II

"NOW, son," demanded Sammy, after they had returned to the living-room, "what's the matter on the Circle T?"

Ben sat staring dismally at the floor a long time before he spoke:

"Spooks, I reckon."

"Heh!"

"Doggoned if I know—that is, I don't know how to tell you." Ben stared at his cigarette. "We're losin' cows, an' lots of 'em. I don't know just how many, an' there's no way to find out—I don't know how many head are in the outfit any more than you do. If calves are missin', you can tell it by the mothers; but cows—well, I just know that a lot of 'em are goin', an' that's all I can tell you."

"Maybe they're jest drifted somewhere to better range?"

"No, they're just naturally gone—clean gone."

"Maybe the wolves are gettin' them? Or maybe a few bad grizzlies drifted in—

a grizzly shore can play hob with grown stuff once he gets started."

Ben shook his head, and again stared at the floor.

"No,"—he raised his head slowly,—"it's not varmints; there's too many of 'em goin' all at once, for one thing. They're just goin', an' that's all. I can't miss any particular ones—I never had a good memory for cattle—but they're thinnin' out, an' fast. An' it's the best of them that's goin', too—fat stock, an' some of the best breeders among the old cows. A varmint wouldn't pick them that way."

"But where the heck would they be goin' to? You can't steal grown stock these days an' get away with it—'ceptin' drivin' a few off in a trail herd once in a while, or butcherin' one for beef. There's a brand-inspector at every shippin'-corral now. An' anyhow, if anyone tried to drive 'em any ways, some cowboy would know my brand before they got a mile off the range, an' I'd hear about it. You must be wrong—they jest have drifted back somewhere in the cañons where there's more feed."

"No,"—Ben shook his head stubbornly,—"they aint drifted nowhere; they're gone, an' doggoned if it aint the queerest thing I ever heard tell of. It's got so that whenever I look at a cow I expect her to blow away like smoke—that's how they're goin'."

"Well, what do you expect *me* to do about it? I told you when I hired you that it was up to you to run the outfit, an' that's jest what I'm payin' you for. If I have to help you, I might as well try to run it myself, an' I crippled an' not able to ride." Sammy spoke softly.

"In other words, I have to find out what's goin' wrong, an' stop it right away, or get fired. Don't you think I'm doing my dangdest?" There was growing anger in Ben's tones.

"That's jest it!" Sammy leaned over and placed a kindly hand on the younger man's knee. "Son, don't you see how it is? I like you, but you have to keep the outfit together for me or lose your job. If you let me go broke, what can I do, at my age? I could never build up another herd, an' I'm too old to hold a cowboy job, besides bein' crippled. Don't you see how it is?"

Ben thought a moment before he answered:

"You're right! I hadn't looked at it that way. You're paying me two hundred a month—four times more than I ever got before, an' more than I can ever get again—an' nacherally you expect me to keep the outfit together for you or let a man do it that can."

OLD Sammy rose and hobbled over to the yellow roll-top desk that was the pride of his life. From a pigeonhole he withdrew a slip of paper which he handed to Ben.

"Ben, here's yore pay up to the first—I'd have give' it to you sooner but that you wasn't in town. You came here the sixth, but I paid you for a full month—it was easier than tryin' to figger out them six days; I never was no hand at figgers."

Ben took the check and glanced at it in surprise.

"Didn't you make a mistake here?" He offered the check back. "You paid me too much."

"No, son, I raised you to two-fifty the second day you worked here, when I saw you was worth it. An' I don't stop at that, either. A good range-boss is hard to get, an' is worth good money."

"Well,"—Ben was dubious—"that's more than any cowboy's worth. I aint takin' money I don't earn."

Sammy grinned and waved the check away again.

"See here: if you run the outfit, an' make it pay,—do all the work while I'm loafin' here in town,—I think yo're entitled to a good whack at the steer-sales, an' yo're agoin' to get it."

"Well—" Ben put the check slowly in his shirt pocket. "I shouldn't kick. But I see I've got to find out what's going with the cattle, or lose the best job I'll ever have."

"You'll find a mare's nest, Ben, an' that's all. Grown stock can't be stole to amount to anything these days."

"Maybe if you— Say—would you be able to ride out with me tomorrow an' look things over? I'm new to the range myself, an' so are all the other boys. They tell me you know every cow you have. Maybe you can get an idea of what's wrong. If I'd anything to start on, I could go ahead, but the thing looks spooky to me."

"We-ll—I can ride a little; but I was to play a checker game with Jim tomorrow—he's been braggin' that he can beat me at it. But I forgot. He's drinkin'. Shore, shore—I'll ride out with you; it's as good a way to waste my time as any other. You

can't steal grown stock now, an' that's all is to it."

"Fine! Now I feel better. I think I'll go down an' see if there's any news in town." Ben dug his hat from under the lounge.

"I'll go with you. I have to send that fool Jim home to his dinner or he'll forget to eat it—he's that way when he's drinkin'. We can wash his dishes after we get back."

SAMMY shuffled to his room and returned with his hat. Something about his movements attracted Ben's attention. He watched him critically as he returned.

"Say!" He spoke impulsively. "You said you were goin' to be crippled all your life, but you're gettin' around twice as good now as you were a month ago!"

Sammy grinned happily before he answered: "Yes, son, jest about twice, I think. I didn't want to say anything till I'd see if you noticed it, or if I was only jest imaginin' it. Doctor Craigie has been doin' somethin' to my hip—rubbin' it, an twistin' it, an' shootin' some stuff into it with a needle."

"Craigie? Oh, that English feller that owns the outfit next to the Circle T. They say he's about the best doctor ever hit Arizona when he's sober, but that aint any too often."

Sammy shook his head sadly. "That's shore the truth! I reckon his folks sent him out here to get him out of the way. My idee is that he got in trouble back there. He'd likely be a pretty good sort of feller if he took care of himself, but now he's to where that he runs with Mexicans an' tin-horn gamblers because the white men wont have nothin' to do with him. An' with all that, he seems to think he's twice as good as anyone else."

"How did you come to get him to work on you? I'd heard that your outfit kinda had a run-in with him an' his foreman."

"Well—Lem Spink, his foreman, is a skunk; but I aint goin' to say nothin' ag'in' Doc himself, seein' as how he's easin' up my busted hip, an' he aint to be blamed no how, for he's 'most clean crazy from drinkin'. He had a row with poor ol' Doc Jones one day, and laughed at him, callin' him a poor horse-doctor. Jones gets back at him by sayin' that he'd pulled me through without havin' to cut my leg off, an' he told Jones that just proved he was no doctor, or he'd have me as sound as ever in a month. Jones tells him it couldn't be done, an' the upshot of it is that Craigie offers to cure me jest to show how easy it was."

Sammy stared absently at his cigarette an instant, and continued:

"I didn't want to have him work on me, seein' as we'd been havin' trouble, but Jones says it would only be right to give him a chance to make a fool of himself. Besides, Craigie bet me five thousand he'd have me as well as ever in less than three months—he said he might do it in less than a month, if everything worked right. Looks like I lose the money an' win a good leg. The first three weeks I couldn't see any difference, but a week ago somethin' seemed to pop in there one day, an' it's been kinda thawin' out ever since, a little at a time."

"Good for you, ol'-timer!" Ben clapped him heartily on the shoulder. "I hope when the three months is up you'll be ready to fire me an' take charge yourself again."

CHAPTER III

AS they approached the saloon, they quickened their steps: they could hear the voice of Jim, the fat little cook, raised in trembling rage, the blind, almost tearful rage of the badgered and helpless.

"Turn me loose! You, Lem Spink, turn me loose! I aint big enough to fist-fight you, but wait till I'm sober! It'll be shoot on sight, Lem Spink, you dirty, cowardly yaller skunk. My gun is as long as yours, if I aint as big!"

The sound of a scuffle came to them.

"Turn me loose, you two-faced horse-thief. I'll tell on you, Lem Spink, which I never did before! You don't remember me, but I was ridin' for the Box T in Nevada when you was foreman of the Flyin' Triangle, *an' stole horses from your own outfit*. I never told on you here, because I like to mind my own affairs, an' didn't want you to lose your job with Doc—I like to mind my own affairs. But now I'll tell everyone—an' I know more about you, too. You, Lem Spink—how did you get out of the ja— Oh-h!" It was a groan coming from between clenched teeth.

For an instant Ben and Sammy paused in the doorway. Beside the bar Lem Spink, a huge, athletic brute with a prognathous jaw and thin, curved nose, held the arm of little Jim in a torturing hammer-

lock. Lem was grinning with a fiendish mixture of pleasure and rage, as Jim's teeth bared in helpless fury and pain. Beside them stood Doctor Craigie, Lem's boss. He was probably not over forty, but his once-handsome face, made gargoyle-like by years of wild dissipation, might have been that of an old, old man. There seemed to be something wrong with the pupils of his eyes, and his skin had a queer yellow color, but these symptoms were unknown to the men of the wholesome mountain ranges. He now flicked his spotless cavalry boot with a riding-crop—of course he would not deign to wear the dress of the common cowboys—and smiled approvingly on his foreman—if smile it could be called, that twisted half-baring of the teeth.

Suddenly Jim's lips closed, and a pained grin parted them again, as his eyes fell on the doorway. His broad red face looked almost happy.

"Ben," he called, *"I'm one o' yore outfit!"*

Without a word Ben quickly strode across the floor, his face paling with anger, and confronted the bully. With a sweep of the hand, he threw his wide hat and big silk neckerchief into a corner out of the way. A hasty jerk to tighten his belt, and he was ready.

Two faces suddenly bobbed over the edge. Colorado Martinez collapsed over his dropped rifle.

Lem quickly released Jim's arm and turned his back to him. Here, he saw, was an opponent of different caliber.

"Hello, Ben!" Lem spoke placatingly, although he could scarcely have been called afraid, for he had a great advantage in weight. "You aint goin' to interfere in this, are you? I was only havin' a little fun with Jim, an' no hard feelin's. Both of you have a drink with me. Have a drink, Jim—you too, Sammy."

"Jim's one o' my outfit, an' I always stick with my outfit through hell an' high water." Ben's low voice rumbled like the roar of a distant lion.

"Oh, well!" Lem was philosophic—wasn't he the larger? "If that's how you feel about it, let's hop to it."

"Hey!"

Little Sammy had quickly dodged behind Lem, into whose hand Doctor Craigie had been covertly pushing the thong of his heavy riding-crop. Sammy quietly but determinedly seized the neck of a whisky bottle, and faced Craigie.

"Think it'll rain today or not, Doc?" he asked, quizzically cocking his head to one side innocently as a babe.

For an instant Craigie's lips twisted and trembled in an expression evil as sin, and he balanced the heavy crop as though to strike. Then in his eyes, deep-set in the

impassive mask of his lined face, appeared a faint, distant twinkle, like the last glimmer of a dying camp-fire. He placed his riding-crop on the bar, rested his elbow near it, and answered Sammy in quiet, cultured tones that sounded out of place here in a frontier barroom:

"Really, I don't think so. Rather likely to hail, to judge by the rising temperature, and the electrical tension of the atmosphere just at present. Just local, though, I hope?"

It was a question that Sammy understood.

"Yeah, jest kinda local." Sammy glanced toward the foremen of the two outfits, and rested his own elbow on the bar near the Doctor's, in sign of neutrality.

The bartender leaned wearily over the bar to the two silent opponents—after having hastily swept all bottles and glasses out of reach of them.

"Say," he murmured wearily, "couldn't you boys do that outside jest as well?" The fight, even the shooting-scrape, had been repeated too often in his presence to cause more than mild annoyance.

"No!"

With a roar, Ben charged, head down between his shoulders, like an angry range bull. The other met the shock without flinching, and the fight was on.

FOR a few minutes both men battered savagely. There was no science, no guarding, just a hail of battering blows, any one of which would have dropped lesser men unconscious. For a long time this continued, without either showing signs of weakening or of superiority. Then they sprang apart, panting, sweating, blood-covered—tacitly consenting to a minute's breathing space. Now the bartender was leaning breathless and open-mouthed across the bar—never before had he seen such a battle. Doctor Craigie covertly pushed his riding-crop across the bar, so that it dropped unnoticed at the back out of sight. With glowing eyes he turned to Sammy:

"Damme, sir, it's a fight! Fifty dollars on Spink!"

"Called."

"Spink! Fight fairly!"

With a disgusted grunt of, "Fair, hell!" to his boss, Lem charged, head down, as Ben had done before. But his superior weight sent Ben sprawling, and he stumbled over him, unable to check himself.

"Good man, Spink!" Craigie was leaning forward breathlessly, clutching Sammy's arm.

"A hundred on Spink!"

"Called."

"Two hundred!"

"Called."

"Spink!"

"Stay, Ben!"

Lem had wheeled back with a roar. But Ben was scrambling to his feet with the agility of a panther. He ducked under Lem's flying arms, and gained his feet in time to face him squarely as he turned again. For an instant they stood glaring; then both charged simultaneously, and met with the shock of arena bulls in a death battle. A wild, crushing blow on the forehead made Ben reel for an instant.

"Good man, Spink!"

"Ride 'em, Ben!"

Lem's head rocked from a crashing fist to the chin. Then again it became just a confused circle of pummeling fists. Clothes were torn, features were swollen and blue, and knuckles were battered and bleeding.

For unmeasured minutes the battle raged silently but for the dull grunts of the fighters, the shuffling feet, the soggy thud of blows. Suddenly old Sammy yelled:

"You got him, Ben!"

It was true. Lem was weakening rapidly. Another smashing blow to the point of the jaw sent him down sprawling against the hot stove. For a fraction of an instant he lay there, dazed. Then, with a wild yell of pain and fury, he sprang to his feet. And in his powerful hand was grasped the heavy iron poker. It flew in the air over Ben's head. A gasp of dismay from Sammy. A groan of disappointed sportsmanship from Craigie. An oath from the bartender.

Then in an instant it had happened, just a fraction of an instant. A dull, soft crash. Lem dropped like a log, fresh blood oozing from the spot on his temple where the whisky-bottle cast by the bartender had caught him.

For a moment everyone stood dazed, it had happened so quickly. Then with a bitter oath, Doctor Craigie started to walk quickly from the room.

"Wait!" Sammy stopped him. "Aint you goin' to look at him?" He motioned toward the inert Lem.

"No!" choked Craigie. "The yellow cur! I believe he's dead—I hope he is!"

But against his will he allowed Sammy

to drag him back. He hastily examined the wound on Lem's head:

"Just stunned. Nothing wrong. Throw a bucket of water on him, and throw him out the back door."

He picked up his riding-crop, which the bartender had replaced on the bar, and again strode quickly toward the door. There was respect, if not admiration, in the eyes that followed him. A clean sportsman, drunken sot though he was! But in the doorway stood a little Navajo boy, his eyes round in his round bronze face. Craigie's riding-crop caught him cruelly across the shoulder, and Craigie's hand dashed him sprawling into a corner, although there had been plenty of room to pass.

Ben took a quick step after him, but paused, and blankly returned the blank glances of the other men. Then, with a sigh, he took his hat and kerchief from Sammy, and followed him and Jim from the room, leaving Lem to the practiced administrations of the bartender.

CHAPTER IV

NEXT morning Sammy and Ben jogged steadily westward toward the Circle T. They had ridden in silence for some time, their eyes, with the habit of years, noting every creature that moved within miles of them. They had just passed the Red Hills Wash, when Sammy drew a small slip of paper from his pocket and silently handed it to Ben, who glanced at it and handed it back.

"A check from Craigie, for two hundred. What about it?"

"He'd bet me two hundred on Lem in that fight you had. He must have mailed the check last night; I got it this morning."

"Sure quick to pay! I like to see a feller that pays what he owes as soon as he can."

"That's the funny thing! He'll pay a bet right on the spot—never lets it go over a day or two; but they say he wont pay his bills at the stores, that he ought to pay first. They say that when he hired Lem Spink for foreman he bragged, one day when he was drunker than usual, that he'd hired him because he was the best thief to be got."

Sammy paused reflectively.

"Yes," he continued, "he said the cowmen of the country were bunglers when it came to stealin'—that he could steal cattle if he wanted to so that he could never be caught, and never give anyone reason to suspect him. . . . . He couldn't do it, though—not nowadays. You can steal a few calves—most cow-men do; but you can miss them too easy for anyone to steal many an' get away with it."

"But grown stock?" Ben's voice was tense.

"Heck!" Sammy chuckled. "Still seein' things? I tell you, grown stock can't be stole now, except drivin' one or two head off in a trail-herd, or butcherin' one for beef once in a while—an' what cowboy is willin' to eat grown beef? Son, why don't you pinch yourself an' wake up?"

They rode in silence for some time, until Sammy spoke again, pointing to a distant ridge ahead of them:

"Ben, see them four cows over there on that ridge? I aint seen any of them in a year an' a half, but them two at the far side is Circle T; the one next us is a Lazy Rafter from over on Bear Creek. The other two grown ones are Triangle Bar—Doc Craigie's. I never saw the yearlin', o' course, but I'll bet she's out of an old mottle-faced cow of mine that used to run back near Poison Springs two years ago—I can see the likeness."

"Huh!" Ben was incredulous, and hastened his pace until he reached the cattle. They started to run, but he loped around them, and threw them back to Sammy, who held them up. Both men rode around them slowly, studying them carefully, then turned their horses back into the road, allowing the cattle to trot off. Ben broke the silence:

"Lord!" he exclaimed. "What do you think o' that! Not see a cow for two years, an' then tell her calf from her! Knowin' the others was bad enough—even those that don't belong to you. But tellin' that calf!" His amazement silenced him.

Sammy chuckled gleefully. This was his one spectacular accomplishment, this uncanny memory for cattle, and he took a childlike delight in "showing off." Any cow-man can amaze a town man with his memory for stock, but the man who could amaze a top hand like Ben! Sammy chuckled again, his face wrinkling like a puckered apple. Twice more this was repeated, Sammy gleefully and unfailingly calling the brands as soon as he got close enough to distinguish the markings of the cattle. Then they approached a lone young

cow browsing on oak-leaves beside the trail.

"Now, see that one," Sammy chuckled. "I never saw her only once, when she was teeny little calf. Me an' Sam Pierce branded her at the old Wagner place with the Circle T. Her mother was an ol' crump-horn that used to run in Coyote Flat, an' her gran'mother was a cow with a big white spot on her left hip that I bought from the Horseshoe outfit when I started the brand."

"*Don't* go back no farther!" gasped Ben. Sammy chuckled again.

As they approached the cow, Ben, whose eyes were the stronger, glanced quizzically at Sammy. Another few yards, and the happy grin left Sammy's face, to be replaced by a look of childish hurt and chagrin.

"Wrong, ol'-timer!" exclaimed Ben. "It's a Triangle Bar."

Sammy stared at the cow in almost tearful dismay for a long time. Suddenly he flared up:

"Doggoned if I am! I *know* that cow! Don't I remember her? There's something wrong somewhere!"

"Well!" Simultaneously both men loosed their rope-strings and reined their horses slightly away from each other.

"Heel!" called Sammy, straightening the coils of his rope.

IN a short time the cow was stretched on the ground, held motionless by the well-trained horses which, with toes dug in the earth, and curved backs, threw their weights back against the ropes. The men dismounted, and carefully examined the brand, feeling delicately among the long hair for other scars. At last they raised up and returned to their horses, allowing the frightened cow to trot quickly away through the scattered cedars, head high in the air, and long white horns waving. They coiled their ropes in silence, and tied them back to their saddle-horns. Ben, sensitive himself, could not look at Sammy, whose embarrassment at his mistake was a little short of pathetic.

"Heck, ol'-timer," Ben said impulsively, "that's nothin'—we all make mistakes, an' you hadn't seen that cow you was thinkin' of since it was a teeny little calf. Anyway, you've seen men so much alike that you couldn't tell them apart."

"Yes, son," —Sammy shook his head wearily,— "but not cattle. Son, I'm gettin' old—gettin' old. I can't take care o' my outfit any more—I see that now; it's up to you to keep it together for me, or let it fall apart. I wont fire you now, no matter what you do, for I'm gettin' too old to be any good any more—too old!" His voice trailed away, sounding indeed old and weary. His confidence in himself seemed to be gone.

Suddenly both men wheeled, as a sardonic chuckle came to them. Doctor Craigie and Lem Spink had ridden from behind a big cedar, and sat grinning evilly at them. The sound of their horses' approach had been deadened by the sandy earth and cedar humus.

"May I ask," said Craigie, with a sickening mockery of politeness, "what you mean by treating my cattle so roughly?"

Ben and Sammy looked at each other in silent dismay. Lem Spink spat a dirty brown stream, and wiped his chin with the back of his hand.

"Find anything wrong with that Triangle Bar brand, Ben?" he asked, leering spitefully.

"I thought," stumbled Sammy, "—I thought it was a Circle T. I jest made a mistake."

"You thought," sneered Craigie, "that I'd be such a fool as to try to work over a brand, didn't you? Well, let me tell you, Hopkins, that while I *might* steal cattle, as all you cow-men do,—one has to hold his own,—I possess intelligence enough to steal them by some more original and less obvious method than *that*."

Sammy, red-faced, did not answer. The red was mounting to Ben's face too, but it was the red of anger—he could not bear to see old Sammy badgered thus.

"And in the future," continued Craigie, "I shall thank you to keep your ropes on your saddles when you meet any of my stock. I know very well that you're not going to brand any calves for me—with *my* brand."

"Huh," snorted Sammy. "Are you accusin' me of stealin' yore cattle?"

Craigie sneered.

"Show me the cow-man who doesn't steal when he gets a good chance! Whatever you may be, Hopkins, I know that you're no liar: can you honestly say that you've never branded Circle T on a calf that you've known to be out of one of my cows?"

"Heck!" grunted Sammy. "I'll tell the truth: I've let big calves of yours go maverick, and *then* put Circle T on 'em.

"Well," she chuckled, "Ben Jurney himself, the bad man from Conchitas!"

That's not stealin'. If you don't brand your calves before they're weaned, you've no right to 'em."

"But," taunted Craigie, "haven't you ever really stolen—helped the cows wean the calves?"

"No sir!" roared Sammy. "I never stole a critter in my life!"

Craigie stared, the sneering grin leaving his face. He knew Sammy too well to doubt his word for an instant—the thought of doubting it never entered his mind.

"Well, I'm damned! And you built up that big outfit! Can you tell me of another cow-man anywhere who you think doesn't steal every time he thinks he can do so safely?"

Sammy shook his head. "Yes, they about all steal, all right. But it's the custom, and a cow-man about has to do it to hold his own—unless he rides all day and all night to keep his stock branded up before the other feller gets them—as I did. I don't hold it against a man to steal calves a little, jest so he don't go too far with it."

"But don't you realize that in allowing my calves to go maverick, and then branding them Circle T, you're stealing—taking property of mine that I'm legally entitled to, and you have no right whatever to?"

"That's shore cattle-stealin'," murmured Lem Spink sententiously, aiming a stream of tobacco-juice at the purple flower of a loco-weed, and wiping the drippings from his chin.

For a moment Ben stared at the slimy brown mass desecrating the freshness of the flower. Ordinarily he might not have noticed it, but now it made his lips tremble queerly, and the red rushed faster to his face. That dirty brown smear on Lem's chin! Dirty!

"You dirty skunk," he roared, twisting half around in the saddle, "not another word out of you! Sammy's an old man, an' I'm fightin' his fights for him; an' if you open yore dirty mouth again, I'll finish what I started to do yesterday, an' smash every rotten bone in yore body—you yaller mangy coyote!"

This was just what Lem Spink wanted—this was not town, where fool laws made one leave one's gun off. And he had a grudge to pay. The top of the trousers was the place for a bullet in that case; that would pay any grudge. His thin lips twisted in a grin of evil pleasure; his long hooked nose seemed to curve down over his mouth.

"Gettin' hostile, Ben?" he drawled pleasantly.

"Hostile is right! Come off'n yore horse you skunk, an' take what you got comin'!"

"Thanks jest the same, but I see you got a forty-five buckled on you that's jest about the same size as mine. Got the guts to use it?"

That was a gunman's trick—make the other man draw first. That was why he had always been able to prove self-defense, when questions were asked. He spat again, turning his head in seeming carelessness, but keeping his eyes fixed covertly on Ben's gun-hand. Ben waited until he again faced him:

"Guts is right, you dirty horse-thief! *Go fer yore gun!*"

LEM'S hand was poised like a hawk, but it did not move until Ben's hand had shot downward. That delay was too much—he found himself staring into the barrel of the other's gun, before his had quite left the holster. For an instant he paled; then seeing in Ben's eye that he would not shoot, he sneered, and drew his plug of tobacco calmly from his shirt pocket.

"Got the drop on me, Ben!" he drawled tauntingly. "I ought to have known enough to take an even break with the top gunman from down Conchitas way. Next time, Ben, I wont give you the break—I'll take an even start, an' you'll see what happens."

Ben jammed his gun back in the holster. "Yes, you will, you skunk, if you don't get a chance to shoot me in the back without gettin' caught!"

"If you say so, we'll try it over right now, an' see who's the quickest!" Lem felt self-assured; he never doubted that he could draw and shoot just a fraction of an instant before Ben.

"Let it go for this time!" It was Sammy who interrupted. "I don't like to see men shoot at each other that way—if they're both mad, an' have reason to shoot, why, that's different."

"But I say that—" Lem began stubbornly, but Doctor Craigie interrupted him:

"That will do, Spink. Hopkins is right. Wait till your next row—you'll have one before long. You have me for witness that Ben drew on you once, so you can easily prove self-defense if you're careful." He spoke deliberately and malignantly. It was obvious that he was quite willing to see Ben put out of the way, but preferred not to be personally mixed up in the killing. He turned to Sammy:

"Hopkins, I'll be at your house day after tomorrow for your next treatment. Good-day."

"Wait a minnit! I aint takin' no more o' your danged treatments. I'd rather be a cripple all my life!"

"Pardon me, but I am determined to show some of those would-be doctors of Arizona what a doctor can do; besides being interested in your case, which presents some unusual features. And you're not going to welch on your bet, are you? And how about your word? You promised to continue the treatment for three months, and I never heard of your failing to keep a promise." There was a sneer in his voice that made Sammy squirm, but there was only one thing to say:

"All right; come up whenever you want to. I'll keep my word." He would have liked to add "damn you," but after all, he felt that he owed some gratitude to Craigie—and since the treatment must be continued, wasn't it better to keep as nearly to terms of civility as possible?

"Two o'clock Wednesday afternoon, then, and continue those exercises I gave you. Let's go, Spink."

Sammy and Ben sat in their saddles, staring after the Triangle Bar men. Somehow they felt that they had been bested, badgered, victimized. Fuming inwardly, they wheeled their horses and silently headed for the Circle T.

CHAPTER V

ALL that evening and all next day Sammy and Ben rode the range. Every time they came to a little knot of cattle, Ben rode ahead and held them up, and he and Sammy inspected them carefully. Nothing seemed to be wrong. Every calf bore the brand of its mother—all but one, that is: one fat yearling bore the Circle T, although it traveled at the heel of a

Triangle Bar cow. Sammy immediately vented the brand, and rebranded it with the iron of its mother. Mistakes in branding are inevitable, but it was well that men of the Circle T, and not Craigie or his foremen, had found the misbranded calf. The Triangle Bar might have been none too tactful in demanding a venting. They never were tactful—that was why they had incurred the enmity of all the cow-men of the country. As Sammy watched the cow trot off with the rebranded calf at her heels, Ben thought he caught a wistful look in his eyes.

"Sammy," he chuckled, "it seems to nearly kill you to see that calf go! Why didn't you just let it go as it was? It wasn't likely that the Triangle Bar men would have found it within a month, an' it'll be weaned before that time."

But Sammy only sighed and shook his head. He was growing more silent and gloomy with every mile they rode. Rarely, indeed, did he speak if he could avoid it. He no more called brands cheerfully as soon as the cattle came in sight. Indeed, he would often sit his horse staring at a brand as if he had never heard of that iron before, and had difficulty in calling it.

On Wednesday morning they started back to town. As the rutty road swung around the hill, putting them out of sight of the ranch, Ben rolled a cigarette and turned to Sammy.

"Well," he interrogated, "what do you think of it? Do you think something's wrong on the outfit?"

Sammy took the tobacco and papers Ben offered him, and very slowly rolled and lit a cigarette. For a hundred yards he rode in silence, holding the cigarette between his fingers until it went out unnoticed. Then he struck another match on the hammer of his six-shooter, relit the cigarette, and turned dully to the other.

"Ben, son," he answered gloomily, "I couldn't see a thing wrong—not a thing."

"I know you didn't *see* anything wrong. But didn't you *feel* that something wasn't jest right?"

Sammy shook his head gloomily, but he did not answer. For some time they rode in silence. Then Sammy's face lit up a trifle, as he sighted a cow a short distance away. It was an old cow, with short, shapeless horns, and thick-set, ungraceful figure. On a man who knew nothing of range stock, she would have made a poor impression indeed, but it was one of the sort that make a cow-man's heart glad; one of those old creatures that manage to keep almost fat during the worst springs, and inevitably bring a lusty calf as sure as the grass begins to sprout, while bigger, better-looking cows remain dry. It was one of those old cows that the wise cow-man keeps on his range until they die of old age, judging one good calf to be of more value than the few paltry dollars its mother would bring as a canner—and it is amazing how many blizzards one of those old cows can stand, how many strong calves she can bring, after having been judged by her owner incapable of standing the rigors of another winter.

"Why," grunted Sammy, "there's ol' Mottly herself! That's the mother of that Circle T yearling we found the day we came out. Fine calf she has—never knew of her having any other kind."

The two men approached her slowly. A puzzled frown came to Sammy's face as she broke into a shuffling trot away from them.

"Now, what!" he murmured to Ben. "Some one must have been ropin' her or something to make her wild that way. She always used to hang around the salt-lot, an' was as gentle as a dog—gentlest cow on the range. Hold her up, Ben, an' let's take a look at her."

BEN loped around her and threw her back toward Sammy, whom she tried to dodge. With some difficulty the men held her a few minutes, then allowed her to run off quickly to disappear in the cedars. For a long time both men sat motionless, staring at the ground.

"Son,"—Sammy shook himself as if awaking from a bad dream, and he spoke dazedly, as if he had been struck in the face,—"son, you go back to the ranch, an' see what you can do. I'm goin' on to town; I see I'm no good no more on the range, after callin' that Broken Box cow a Circle T—mistakin' an ol' cow like that!"

"Sammy," Ben said with a faint hope, "maybe the Broken Box worked the brand over; let's follow her up an' rope her an' look at the brand closer."

"No, I could see that it wasn't any worked-over brand. The Broken Box belongs to Widow Tracy—her husband was a hand of mine when I first started the brand; a locoed horse killed him at the Wagner place. We brand her calves for her ourselves—I forgot to tell you about that; you're to look after her cattle jest

like you do mine—while I have any." His voice trailed away dismally. Obviously he could already see starvation staring him in the face. He shook himself again.

"Son," he continued, "I'm goin' back to town. You ride back to the Circle T an' run it the best way you can; I have nothin' more to do with it no more than if I didn't own it. Keep it goin' if you can, an' if you can't, let it go under. You needn't tell me anything about it—jest run it as if you owned it."

BEN could not meet his eye. He did not want Sammy to see the compassion he felt. After a moment he turned to him.

"Sammy," he asked, "wont you tell me first if you think there's anything wrong on the outfit, or am I jest dreamin' it all?"

"Everything's wrong, son, it looks to me like—everything. There aint half the cattle in the Circle T brand that there should be on this part of the range. But it makes no difference what I think any more—I'm no judge no more." Again his voice trailed away sadly.

"But," Ben insisted, "does it seem to you that some other outfit is gettin' ahead of us, crowdin' us out?"

"Why, mebbe the Triangle Bar—" But Sammy checked himself. "No," he continued, "I can't *say* there's a thing wrong—I aint agoin' to say things that might be wrong. We're both kinda dreamin', Ben, an' that's all."

Suddenly Ben squared his big shoulders, and threw his cigarette away.

"Dreamin', hell!" he grunted. "I'm dreamin' nothing! Something's wrong, an' here's where I start to put it right, or make some one wish it *was* right. Go on back to town, ol'-timer, an' let Craigie fix up your hip. Leave the Circle T to me! I'm agoin' to start something; and when I do—well, I'll finish it, too!" There was an ugly look in his face that boded ill for the enemies of the Circle T.

"I *knowed* you was!" ejaculated old Sammy, apropos of nothing, his eyes again kindling. "I don't get fooled on men, an' I wasn't, on you. I thought for a minnit you was agoin' to jest let things go—an' I'd have had to do the same; I'm too old an' crippled to do much. Yes sir, I *knowed* you was! Son, from now on we're equal partners in the outfit— I'm givin' you a half-interest in the brand for runnin' it for me."

"The heck you are! You aint givin' me nothin' beyond my month's wages, jest because you kinda got blue lately. I don't take anything without earnin' it!"

"*I* say I *am!*" Old Sammy rode close to his big foreman and thrust his chin out in a belligerent manner that looked amusing when one considered the disparity in the sizes of the two men. Sammy might be beaten—but not for long!

"I say I aint!"

"An' *I* say I am!"

It was Ben who apparently gave a point.

"Well," he yielded, "wait till I get the trouble straightened out—whatever it is—an' then we'll talk of that."

"All right, then; I wont give you the half-interest till you straighten things out; but that wont be long."

"And," thought Ben to himself, "I only promised to talk about it then."

"An' now," he continued aloud, "I aint got no time to stand here talkin'. You go back to town, an' I'll go by the Badger Springs camp and take Jack back to the ranch with me—that's the best kid I ever saw, in a tight place. Tomorrow mornin' I'm going to leave the ranch run itself while me and Jack puts in a few days rawhidin' back in the hills near the Rim."

"I may be able to ride out a little that way too, Ben, an' kinda look around for you," promised Sammy.

"Don't you do it! You're in no shape to butt into that kind of business till your hip gets better." Ben would have added that such things might better be left to younger men, but did not wish to hurt his little employer's feelings. "Don't you stir out of town till I get back. I can handle the thing—an' another like it—without any help."

Without another word Ben wheeled his horse and started off in a quick swinging trot. Sammy chuckled to himself:

"I *knowed* he was! If he'd started off in a run or a lope, I'd have knowed he'd fizzle out, but that kind o' trot—a good man an' a good horse can jest stand it all day an' all night without goin' under—an' it shore covers lots o' ground."

CHAPTER VI

DAWN came late next morning, and it came with no preliminary glow in the east. A dirty, diffused gray light crept slowly over the leaden sky, and after a time the outlines of the ridges became visi-

ble. The light increased for an hour or two, but after that grew no brighter. The tired-looking clouds crept slowly along just above the tops of the ridges, dropping an occasional snowflake that melted before it touched the ground.

Far from the Circle T headquarters Ben Jurney and a companion were riding in a steady trot, one leading a pack- the other a bed-horse. The boy who rode by Ben had scarcely passed his twentieth year—might at first seem a strange partner to choose for such a purpose as Ben had in mind. But Ben knew Jack, although it had been but a few weeks since he had seen him for the first time. Short of stature and slender of hips, there was something about Jack's shoulders—a bulge and ripple that the flannel shirt could not conceal—that made him seem a small duplicate of the powerful Ben himself. Ben would have been handsome but that something about his face reminded one of the stern gray of a granite cliff; perhaps it was the strength of the chin, perhaps the thoughtful, almost brooding expression that one generally saw. In Jack's face was nothing but devil-may-care recklessness. It was the usual expression of the happy-go-lucky young son of the open ranges, whose delight it is thoughtlessly to risk his neck, riding untamed and untamable horses at breakneck speed over the polished boulders of the mountains, spurring and quirting all the more as the declivity becomes greater, the boulders thicker and smoother, the overhanging limbs of pine and oak all the more eager to dash one from his saddle.

SUDDENLY a soft blanket of white swirled around them, the snow falling so thickly that they could scarcely see each other. They hastily untied their slickers from behind their cantles, and muffled themselves in them without stopping their horses. For half an hour they rode almost in silence, the wide brims of their hats pulled down to shelter their faces. Then, suddenly as it had begun, the snow ceased for the time. Ben turned to Jack with a grin:

"Just about an inch and a half of snow—just right for tracking. Couldn't be better if I'd ordered it made to measure."

"Huh!" Jack sniffed. "Think anyone would try to do any crooked work with fresh snow on the ground? I think we'd better go back to the Circle T."

Ben had been removing his slicker. Now he threw it carelessly across his saddle before him, and touched his horse with a spur.

"Jack, there's where you're all wrong. If anyone had been roundin' up stock of anyone else's this morning, he wouldn't turn them loose, because he'd figure there'd be no one else ridin' in this weather. The ground is warm, and this snow will either be melted or covered up by more before long, so that a feller would have to be right behind the herd to keep the trail. Let's drift!" He again touched the spurs to his horse, and saddle- and pack-horses broke into a steady lope.

Going up Crooked Ridge, they again slowed to a trot, to save their horses. They were now not over five miles from the Triangle Bar, toward which they had been heading—a short distance, according to cow-country reckoning. At the top of the ridge Ben again struck a lope, but almost immediately threw his horse to its haunches and pointed to the ground.

"What's that?" he asked.

Jack studied the faint broad shadow in the snow for some time before he answered:

"Looks to me like where some one brought a bunch of cattle over in the mud sometime, when they left deep tracks."

"Maybe," admitted Ben. "It looks as though it might be two years old, but then it might be fresh."

"How can you tell?" asked Jack disinterestedly. It was obvious to him that the tracks were very old.

Ben slipped from his horse and sank to his knee. He removed his right glove, and for a moment he felt the tracks, pushing his bare fingers carefully into the snow. Jack, now all interest, slipped from the saddle and sank on one knee beside him, his heavy chaps protecting him from the snow.

"There!" Ben turned to him triumphantly.

JACK was quick-witted. He pushed a bare finger tentatively into the track. Something did not seem to be just as he had expected. He paused an instant, with Ben grinning down on him, and then pushed the finger into the snow just beside the track. Once more he pushed it into the track, and pressed hard; then he rose to his feet.

"Doggone! It's so simple that no one but a smart man would think of it! The snow is packed hard about halfway down in the track!"

"Let's drift!" exclaimed Ben, springing to his saddle and "dallying" the lead-rope of the pack-horse on his saddle-horn, the quicker to start the animal.

"But," demanded Jack, catching up with him, "what makes you think there's anything wrong? Drivin' a bunch of cattle aint suspicious, that I can see."

Ben was spinning the cylinder of his six-shooter, to see that no snow had jammed there, although that was quite impossible, since it had been protected by the slicker. He turned to Jack with another grin—he seemed in the best of spirits, now that action seemed imminent, and the uncertainty of the last few weeks about to end.

"Jack, my son, these are all grown stock, except one yearling, likely for beef." (The trail had become much plainer now.) "No one's selling grown stock now. An' here's a whole crowd hustlin' along a little bunch of cattle that one man could handle easy. An' such a nice mornin', too, to just ride around for exercise, when there's such things as warm bunk-houses where the snow don't get in. An'—"

"An'," interrupted the crestfallen Jack, "some fellers can't tell that two an' two makes four unless you hold up your fingers an' count for 'em! I wish I had the brains of a horned-toad—I'd likely find 'em useful!"

"Aw," chuckled Ben, "you weren't raised down Conchitas way, where a kid learns to trail cattle-thieves before he learns to hand brandin' irons."

The trail now lay on the top of the snow, clear-cut and fresh. The cattle could not be very far ahead. There were about twenty head of grown stock and one yearling, being driven hastily toward the southeast. Simultaneously Ben and Jack saw something which made them swing away from the broad trail—the trail of two more horsemen swinging in at an acute angle, and they wished to study it on the unbroken snow where it showed plainly. They had followed the tracks but a few paces when Ben reined in his horse in amazement.

"By the holy!" he exclaimed. "It's old Sammy's big roan!"

"Yes," corroborated Jack, "an' that chunky little pinto of the cook's! Now, how did they get here, an' what are they doing?"

Ben rubbed his chin. "I can't figure out how they got here, but it's easy to see that they're trailin' the herd, same as we are. A crippled little old man, and a cook that's too fat to walk! I told Sammy to leave things to me, but I was afraid all the time that he wouldn't. Let's be driftin', before they get themselves in trouble!"

He dug the spurs in his horse, but immediately threw it to a stop again. From ahead of them, clear in the still air, came a shrill yell of surprise, followed by a quick rattle of shots, then silence.

"That's the cook's yell!" grunted Ben, "If Lem Spink gets his hands on him again, Jim knowin' all he does about him—"

He did not finish the sentence, for he and Jack had abandoned the led horses, and were tearing across the little flat toward where the trail again entered the cedars on the other side.

"Heck!" muttered Ben anxiously. "It looks like Sammy would leave things to me—it's only a few weeks since he nearly got himself killed by buttin' in on me just that way!"

"That little bobcat," grunted Jack, "pretends to be good-natured and scary, but he'd rather fight than eat any time. But," —his voice was troubled,—"he can't see that he's getting too old and stiff to match up with fellers like the Triangle Bar men; they're a bad lot."

SUDDENLY the sun blazed hotly out. The snow seemed to sag and begin to thaw instantly. Glancing up, the two saw that half the sky was clear blue, and the clouds rapidly vanishing from the rest. They cut their horses with the quirts, and their hoof-beats thundered on across the flat in a rapid, soggy staccato. They dashed into the belt of cedars, but quickly threw their horses back at the sight that greeted them. On the snow lay the beautiful powerful roan of old Sammy, struggling with a broken back, trying pathetically to rise, or to drag himself forward. Near him the snow was beaten down where a smaller figure had struggled; beaten down and dyed a dark red. Around the edges could be seen the raking marks of blindly clutching fingers, and between them and the horse lay Sammy's hat.

"Some one's hard hit," murmured Jack, his voice shaking a trifle.

"Yes." There was a catch in Ben's voice that he did not try to conceal. "Hard hit is right! He can't live till night. See the dark color, an' the foam out of the lungs."

Ben looked at the horse and hesitated, his hand on the butt of his gun. He glanced toward Jack, who nodded—afraid to trust himself to speak. Ben's gun barked, and the big horse heaved once and lay still, a dark stream dribbling slowly from between his eyes.

"That'll warn them," murmured Ben, "but I couldn't leave poor old Charger lying there, suffering that way."

He reloaded his gun, and slowly raised his eyes to meet Jack's face. Their eyes met for a moment, and each could see in those of the other a dull, smoldering glow, grim and relentless as death itself. Picking up their reins they turned down the trail in a long, slow lope.

They swung through the belt of cedars, and into a little circular opening of a few acres. They had scarcely left the shelter before a rifle cracked on the other side of the flat, where the trail they were following entered the brush again. Ben's horse lurched to one side, staggered forward, falling to his knees, and with a single moan collapsed and lay still. The rifle cracked again; and Jack, who had been pulling his horse around, dropped his reins, threw his arms in the air, and sagged limply from the saddle, his head wabbling queerly. Ben had taken shelter behind his dead horse and drawn his carbine from the scabbard, which happened to be on the upper side of the saddle. But it had been broken in the fall, and was useless.

A lynx darted out with the speed of lightning. Her horse sprang into the air and darted off.

The rifle cracked again; and Ben, peering cautiously through the horse's rumpled mane, saw a bullet clip through the snow beside the inert Jack. This was too much—Jack might not be dead. There was a tiny dry wash a short distance away; could he get Jack to it? He threw up his pistol and fired two quick shots toward where he judged the other to be concealed, shoved the gun back into the holster, and rushed to Jack. He picked the limp form up in his arms, and sheltering it with his own body, shuffled as quickly as he could toward the wash.

Jack was not dead. He was muttering something quickly to Ben, in whose arms

he hung limply. A hasty shot from the rifleman clipped through the wings of Ben's chaps; another *whooshed* over his head. He had gained the edge of the little wash when the third shot came. Ben dropped Jack, who fell across the edge of the wash, half his body hanging in. For an instant Jack balanced there; then slowly, inertly, he slid in, his head bobbing queerly as it struck a tuft of bear-grass. Ben had wheeled half around. His hand fumbled for his gun, but could not draw it. His knees sagged, and his head fell forward on his chest. Then he collapsed, his shoulders dropping quickly over the bank, his long legs sliding slowly after. A spur caught on the bear-grass, and hung there, the boot twisting slowly for a moment, the heel pointing toward the sky, the silver-mounted spur glistening in the sunlight. Twice more the boot stirred slightly, as the two soft-nosed bullets ripped through it, then it was still.

COLORADO MARTINEZ smiled complacently and reloaded his rifle, in the shelter of the big cedar. His name referred to neither the State nor the river, but to his dull red hair; with the accent on the last. The color of his hair spoke of blood other than Mexican, blood of northern Europe, and the squinting slant of his eyes told of Asiatic ancestors. A quiet, dandified little fellow whom no one trusted, his employers of the Triangle Bar least of all, was Colorado Martinez. Now he rolled a cigarette with his dainty brown hands, twiddled his sharp little black mustache, and strolled leisurely toward the wash. Still, although he carelessly hummed "La Rosa," he took no chances of either of his victims' having life left. He held the rifle across his body, the hammer cocked, his finger on the trigger. He knew that the first man was dead by now, but the second might have enough life left to shoot, although Colorado did not think it likely. As he approached the wash, he could see the two bullet-holes close together in the boot, and the bechapped leg dangling stiffly upside down from the boot-top. He lowered the hammer of his rifle, and removed his cigarette between two dainty fingers, to smile complacently. It had been good shooting. He did not always shoot so straight with the unfamiliar rifle, although no one but Lem Spink himself could beat him with the accustomed six-shooter.

He was almost at the edge of the wash. Then came the terrible thing, the impossible thing. Two faces suddenly bobbed over the edge, two faces that were white, but only with the white of anger and deadly determination. From before the right eye of each face protruded a grim, deadly blue tube. And still the leg dangled from the bullet-torn boot! It was not bravery but sheer terror that made Colorado Martinez drop his cigarette and jerk his rifle to his shoulder, cocking the hammer as he did so. But that movement was his sentence. With a single roar the guns of Ben and Jack spat, and Colorado Martinez collapsed slowly over his dropped rifle.

With one thought both men bounded from the wash. But it was too late—they had shot too straight. Colorado Martinez could give them no information of old Sammy or the cook, for he would never speak again.

They returned quickly to the wash. Ben untwisted his spur from the bear-grass, and drew the top of the boot from the chap-leg, from which he shook his hat and Jack's, which had been used to give it the appearance of containing a leg. As he drew on the torn boot and strapped the chaps around his waist, he turned to his companion:

"Jack," he murmured, "you can't put two an' two together when you've lots of time to think—because you don't think; but when you get in a tight and *have* to think. . . . . Well, I shore never would have thought of playing possum that way but for you; and if I had, I'd never have thought of pushing the chap-leg over the boot that way, after jerking my foot out, so that anyone coming close to the wash could see it. But for that trick, Colorado could easy have held us in the wash all day, and the other Triangle Bar men would have been here before night to surround us."

"What next?" asked Jack quickly, ignoring the compliments. He realized that the others might arrive at any time, for they must have heard the shooting.

"Wait here," grunted Ben. He broke all the laws of range etiquette by springing on Jack's horse without asking leave, and dashed across the flat. But as foreman, and as the older man, he judged it to be his part to take the risk of meeting the Triangle Bar men. For an instant he disappeared in the cedars near where Martinez had been concealed, and then dashed

back, leading a fine blood-bay horse which wore the Triangle Bar brand on its shoulder.

Jack was indeed quick-witted: angered though he was by Ben's taking his horse,—and the risk,—he had raced toward the dead horse even as Ben sprang to the other. He knew that Colorado's stirrups would be far too short for Ben, and as Ben lurched to a stop beside him, he had just finished dragging the latigo and stirrup from under the dead horse. Even as Ben pulled one saddle from the bay, Jack swung the other to its back and quickly cinched it. Then, without a word, both were dashing back as they had come. They did not relish the thought of being surrounded in the open by all the Triangle Bar men in the concealment of the cedars.

CHAPTER VII

NOW, for the first time, they had leisure to see how rapidly the snow had been melting in the short time since the clouds had disappeared. Already the ground where they rode was mottled with patches of red earth, and the south side of the ridge beside them was almost entirely free of snow. After a moment's consultation as they rode, they dashed at an angle toward a little rivulet formed by the melting snow which ran at the foot of the ridge. They hastily spurred into the shallow water, where it purled over bare rocks that would hold no tracks, and dashed back toward the Circle T. They were clumsy, however. They had gone scarcely fifty yards before Ben allowed his horse to shy to one side, leaving a clear track in the mud beside the water. Ben glanced back at it over his shoulder, and slowly drew his horse up, so as not to disturb the stream-bed. Then he and Jack carefully turned their horses, and riding in a slow walk, so as not to splash too much water on the snow, and keeping carefully to the center of the streamlet, retraced their course. They rode a hundred yards below where they had first entered the water, and then they turned up the ridge, forcing their horses to walk on the top of a jagged ledge of granite that ran almost to the top of the ridge.

The top of the ridge proved to be a solid rock of smooth red sandstone, and beyond that they could see, running down the other side, the continuation of the ledge that they had followed. Somewhat to Jack's surprise, Ben put the spurs to his horse, and together they dashed across the bare rock, leaving white scratches, easily visible, where their horses' shoes had slipped. But having gained the granite again, Ben slowly and carefully turned his horse, and, with Jack following his example, turned back in the slowest possible walk, avoiding any loose stones that might be displaced by their horses' hoofs. They followed the windings of the bare rock as far as they could without leaving tracks, and then, throwing caution to the winds, struck out in a long trot down the ridge, toward the little opening where Martinez lay.

"Now," murmured Ben, "anyone that trails us up, will sure be doing some trailing!"

Having reached the foot of the ridge again, they rode as carefully as time would permit, so as not to leave any trail too easily visible. As they approached the little opening, they struck the tracks of a single horse going in the same direction they were. After a brief consultation they decided to follow this, in the hopes of capturing one of the Triangle Bar men who could give some news of Sammy and Jim. Riding in the damp cedar humus, they made no sound. They were, of course, careful not to speak above a low whisper. Thus it was that they came unexpectedly upon a horse concealed in the bushes. A glance showed them the tracks of high-heeled boots leading toward the trail of the herd.

"Some one else to waylay us!" whispered Ben. "We'd be crazy to try to follow the trail any more."

"Let's try to slip up behind him," suggested Jack, also in a whisper. There was recognition in his eyes as he glanced at the horse.

They slipped from their horses, and very quietly removed their chaps and spurs. Together they stole along the boot-tracks, their cocked guns ready in their hands. The capture was easy. Ben, who was slightly ahead, first saw the crouching figure behind the trunk of a big cedar, back to them, carbine ready for instant action. He cast a glance toward Jack, and was surprised to see the latter's face broadening into a grin.

"What's funny?" he growled under his breath, then continued: "You stay here, an' I'll go ahead. Keep him covered."

But Jack had laid his carbine against a tree, and was stuffing his handkerchief in

his mouth. "I'm—I'm jest thinkin' of a funny story I heard last week, about two Irishmen: Pat met Mike—"

For a moment Ben stared at him in wide-eyed amazement. He didn't know whether he should feel pity or anger. A funny story about two Irishmen! Would Jack ever outgrow his attacks of untimely mirth? Ben quickly jerked off his boots, and stole in his stocking feet toward the unsuspecting figure, his cocked six-shooter never swerving from the center of the back. It was easy stalking, as the other was watching the trail intently, with no suspicion of an enemy in the rear.

"Put 'em up!"

It was a low, menacing growl from Ben, as the muzzle of his six-shooter touched the other's bent back. The prisoner started slightly. He did not obey Ben's order, but quietly rested his carbine against the tree, and slowly rose to his feet, turning to face Ben as he did so. Ben dropped his gun awkwardly. He swooped hastily and picked it up again, jerked off his wide hat, dropped that, and stood red-faced and gasping.

" 'Scuse me, ma'am! I thought—I didn't think—I—I mean I thought you was one o' the Triangle Bar boys!"

SOMETHING like a smothered wolf-howl came from behind them. With a wild gleam in his eyes, and another muttered " 'Scuse me, ma'am!" Ben swooped viciously upon a large clod that lay at his feet, and hurled it with all his might at Jack's head. Ben was furious at Jack, and the hard clod would probably have stunned the latter if it had been thrown more accurately. As it was, the main piece swept Jack's hat from his head, while a small muddy lump which had detached itself caught him fair in the open mouth. He ducked hastily behind a tree, from which could be heard coming a mixture of gaspings, splutterings, and strangling laughs, intermingled with some remarks about a "nobbil hero."

The color had returned to the face of the girl, which had been white and set when she first turned. Now, looking at Ben, who was almost trembling with embarrassment, her lips twitched, and finally twisted in a faint smile. That eased Ben a trifle, and his eyes swept over her in swift appraisal. He was almost unique among tall men in that he was an admirer, almost a worshiper, of tall women. His feelings could almost be described as awe as he realized that, although he was six feet two, the girl's eyes were very few inches below his own. And still there was nothing of the clumsiness so often found in tall women; even her cowboy dress, and the ungainly leather skirt, could not conceal her slender, supple, well-rounded figure. And she had dark golden hair—he could see it curling under her wide sombrero. But—but— He swallowed something in his throat, and tried to speak. It was too much for her; that big, powerful boy standing there gasping like a schoolchild caught in mischief. She broke into a chuckling, mellow laugh.

"Well," she chuckled, "Ben Jurney himself, the bad man from Conchitas who cleaned up Slim Garrett's gang! I always heard you weren't afraid of God, man or devil!"

"Yes ma'am; but women—" he sputtered.

"Chivalry!" she taunted laughingly; but a soft light came into her eyes.

Ben reddened more than before at the taunt; he could not meet her eye, so could not see the qualification.

"They pointed you out to me in town, Ben—you're the big hero there now; but I don't suppose you know me: I'm Jane Talbott, of the Star Bar, over in the Broken Hills."

"Oh!" Ben again swept her with his eyes. He had heard much of her. Since her father's death two years before, she had been running the little Star Bar outfit without any help, doing all her own work, from branding to making contracts with buyers. And the cowboys of the country boasted that she was doing as good a job of it as any man of them could—they were proud of this girl of their ranges. The Star Bar had once known better days; but her father, a fine horseman and a fair cowman, had been too impractical to hold it together. He had been a scholar, though heaven knows how he had acquired his education, as his whole life had been spent on the range. He had contributed to science what was generally acknowledged to be the standard work on Arizona ethnology—but while he had been writing it, poring over books, and pottering around among the bones and implements of long-vanished races, his more practical neighbors had helped themselves to his calves until the outfit had dwindled down to almost nothing.

But before Jane had been running the

outfit a week, things began to change. She had called on several of her neighbors to tell them of the carelessness of their cowboys, who so often put their employer's brands on Star Bar calves—by mistake, of course. There were many apologies—and many bemoanings of the rattle-headedness of cowboys in general. But there were many ventings. From then on, Jane had scoured the range for her calves, although this was scarcely necessary now, for who would steal calves from a girl? Who would not mournfully brand Star Bar on a calf due to go maverick within a week? Ben, although he had never met her, had given his cowboys the unnecessary order to brand all her calves found, and had branded more than one himself. Now that he knew who confronted him, he felt more comfortable—had she not ridden the range all her life, as he had?

"Shore glad to meet you, Miss Talbott." Ben shook her hand respectfully.

"Jane, for short. I earn my biscuits and beans with a rope and branding-iron, same as you do. Let's leave 'Mister' and 'Miss' to town folks."

BEN'S heart warmed to her. So she didn't think town men, with their white collars, were better than the boys of the open range—she was loyal to her own people! He dropped beside her on a log, but shifted uneasily.

"Maybe—if some of the Triangle Bar men were to come back— We'll have to look out."

"They turned that bunch of cattle loose and started back toward home; they scattered, as though they didn't want to leave any tracks one could follow."

"Oh! Then they wont be back till they miss Colorado Martinez—if they come back then. I—I had to shoot him."

"Shoot him! I suppose I shouldn't say it, but I don't think he's much loss. He tried—" She paused, and the red rushed to her face.

Ben understood. The red came to his face too—the red of anger. Martinez, the sneaking little breed, had dared to look at this girl! Unconsciously his hand fondled the butt of his six-shooter as though praising it for a good deed.

"Now," she continued, "let's have some explanations: I was branding a calf over the ridge when I heard some shooting near here. I hurried to get through, and just as I was turning the calf loose, the shooting started up again. I got to the top of the ridge just in time to see the Triangle Bar men turn a bunch of cattle loose and scatter, so I dropped down here, to kind of listen and look around before I rode around to investigate. And then," she continued, her lips twitching a trifle, "you stuck a gun halfway through my back, and scared me out of a year's growth. It's all right, though—I'm too tall now."

Ben reddened again, but could not repress a grin.

"I apologize, ma'am, all over again! It wouldn't have been so bad if that danged Jack—" He glanced around, and saw Jack sitting with his back to a tree near the horses, comfortably smoking a cigarette. He was taking no chances by coming closer; Ben might throw straighter next time!

"And," continued Jane Talbott, "from what you said, it sounded to me like you were out gunning for the Triangle Bar bunch. Having trouble with them?"

"Well—" Ben slowly rolled and lit a cigarette. "I don't know exactly. There's been something wrong—something I can't *sabe*. It looks like our outfit is losing grown stock, but I'm new on the range here, an' I can't find a thing to go by. Somehow, I kinda got the idea that the Triangle Bar was mixed up in it, but I never could find a thing suspicious—until this morning, that is; and I don't know what was going on even then, as I didn't see the brands of the cattle they were driving."

"And you wont; they mixed them with a big bunch that was grazing down below here, so that we can't tell which is which."

"Heck, again! But one thing I *do* know for sure now—there's something crooked going on, whatever it is, and the Triangle Bar is at the back of it." He puffed a moment in silence, and continued: "You haven't noticed anything wrong lately, have you?"

"I—I may have." Jane paused a moment, but continued impulsively: "Ben, we're both out here on the same job this morning, so I'll tell you everything. I never mentioned it to anyone before, because it sounds too unreasonable, and I didn't want to get laughed at. Some one's changing brands. The old mottle-faces and crumphorns that anyone can remember easily are changed to different brands to throw people off the right track, but the well-marked white-faces that everyone can't remember are going to the Triangle Bar. Some old

Star Bar cows that I know as well as I do my horse, there, have gone that way."

"Working over brands! But they couldn't do it and get away with it a month."

"No, that's the queer part of it. I've roped some of those old cows I knew, and couldn't find a scratch of any brand but Triangle Bar on them. It's some new trick that no one ever heard of before."

"So that's it!" Ben was staring at her in amazement. "Old Sammy wasn't wrong, after all! I'd always heard he had the best memory for cattle of anyone in Arizona, but when he rode out with me, he called the wrong brand nearly half the time. We roped one, too, but it was too much for Sammy; when he couldn't find a scratch of his brand, he took it for granted that he'd made a mistake—thought he was getting too old to remember them. Still—" Ben stared meditatively at the ground. "I think he knew all the time, but it looked so unreasonable, like you say, that he wouldn't tell me what he thought, afraid I'd think him crazy. I don't know what he did think, but I could tell from his looks that he thought lots he didn't want to say."

"If old Sammy Hopkins tells you what a cow is, there's no need to look at a brand. I'm good at remembering cattle that I've seen once, but Sammy beats me ten ways."

"But,"—Ben's brows were knitted in perplexity,—"how can you take a brand out after it's been burned in? Why—why it just can't be done, and that's all!"

"I know it can't—but it's being done. I tell you that some Star Bar cows that I know as well as I do that horse there, are now wearing Triangle Bar."

"It—it *must* be! Where else could the cattle be going to!"

"That's just it! And we know the Triangle Bar is building up too fast for natural increase. Of course they make a bluff of buying and selling a good deal, so that one can't be sure of the number of cattle they have—but anyone can see through that. We know what's wrong now. What are we going to do about it?"

BEN sat staring at his boot-toe a long time, pulling his lower lip reflectively. At last he raised his head and answered slowly:

"They must have some safe place where they hide them while they're workin' on them—but where could that be? Every outfit around is restless lately, like we have been, and there are cowboys rawhiding all over the hills. They *couldn't* take chances of holding them anywhere long."

"That's another queer thing. The whole thing sounds queer from start to finish. That's why I never could bring myself to mention it to anyone before."

They sat s ing ahead of them abstractedly for some time. Jane's hand was fumbling listlessly in the big pocket of her leather skirt. Half unconsciously, she drew a crumpled scrap of paper from the pocket and held it a moment in her hand. Then she came to with a jerk, and handed it to Ben.

"Here's something I found out there on the trail of the herd. I don't suppose it amounts to anything—I hadn't thought of it since I stuck it in my pocket."

Ben spread the paper on his knee. It was a blank check—quite blank. He turned it over carelessly, but hastily snatched it up as he recognized Sammy's penciled scrawl:

"Ben hurry to the is—"

That was all, just the five meaningless words. But Ben forgot his purpose in his relief. Old Sammy was alive. He probably was not seriously injured, for the writing was no more shaky than usual—Sammy was no penman.

"What do you make of it?" Jane asked.

"Nothing, only that Sammy's alive; I thought they might have killed him."

"It must mean something."

"No." Ben shook his head as he ran a finger across the scrawl. "He didn't have time to finish it, so it wont do us any good. Now, if I knew what an *'is'* is—" Ben crumpled the paper, and started to throw it away, but Jane suddenly reached her hand for it, and spread it out.

"Say!" She ran a finger over the paper. "Why did he carry the tail of the *s* up that way?"

"Because he was going to write something else, but didn't have time—they probably tied his hands."

"And what was the next letter going to be?"

"Well—looks like it must have been an *l* or a *b*." Suddenly Ben became excited: "Say! That's it! *'Hurry to the island'*—Eagle's Island Mesa! Let's be driftin'!"

He sprang to his feet, then paused:

"Maybe we'd better— Tell you what we can do: Jack an' I can go on, and you ride back to the Circle T and get the rest of the boys to follow us as quick as they

"Don't shoot," he gasped, "and I'll tell you anything you want to know."

can. There's likely to be something doing when we get there."

"I'm going with you. Let Jack go back for the others."

"But,"—Ben stared at her,—"but it's not a woman's place! There's likely to be shootin'! I can't let you go."

"No?" She looked at him coldly. "Since when have you been my boss? I'm representing the Star Bar outfit, and I'm going to the Island. If you want to throw in with me, well and good; if not, I'm going alone."

Ben knew human nature too well to argue with her; he could see that she could not be prevented from going. Besides, he knew she had a right to go, as representative of the Star Bar, from which cattle were being stolen.

"Well," he conceded, "wait here till I get Jack started back, and tell him to pick up our pack-horses on the way. "No,"—as she started to follow him,—"wait here! Jack's going to lose his temper when I tell him he has to go back—he might use language that wont sound nice!"

Jack did. Nothing but a dull rumble of recrimination of which the words were indistinguishable reached Jane, but never before had Ben taken such abuse from any man. A fight might have resulted had not both considered the presence of the girl. At last Ben lost his own temper.

"Jack, I'm running this outfit, an' you're takin' my orders or ridin' down the road huntin' a job an' talkin' to yourself. Are you going back or not?"

"Aw-grr!" It was a bitter and disgusted grunt, but in it Ben read that Jack was weakening. He quickly followed up his advantage, speaking quietly:

"Now, don't kill your horse going back. You can hurry without doing that."

"Hell! You seem to forget that I'm ridin' my private horse today, an' it's none o' your danged business what I do with him!"

He wheeled and cut his horse. Regardless of Ben's caution—perhaps because of it—he tore through the cedars like a cyclone, cutting the horse with the quirt every bound. Ben drew a deep breath and wiped his forehead. That had been the hardest battle of his life, for Ben was a man of action rather than words.

CHAPTER VIII

STILL smarting from Jack's words, Ben mounted his horse, and picked up the reins of Jane's to lead it to her. She understood his mood, which was not one for conversation, so together they swung silently at a brisk trot away from the cattle-trail, around in a semicircle, and then straight toward Eagle's Island.

They had not gone far when something pinkish stirred slightly in a low tuft of scrub oaks just under her horse's nose, and a lynx darted out, bounding into the dense bushes near the trail with the speed of a

streak of lightning. Her horse had dug his toes in the earth and snorted at the first movement of the bushes, dropping instantly until his belly almost touched the ground. Now, with a bound active as the cat's own, he sprang in the air, and reversing ends, darted through the branches of a cedar, only to swerve suddenly sidewise and strike off on a new course. It had happened in an instant. In less time than it takes to tell it, she had the animal again under control, and trotted quickly back to Ben, who was waiting for her.

"Ma'am," murmured Ben, "you sure can ride!"

"Ride!" She glanced at him in amazement. "Did you expect me to fall off?"

"Heck, no!" grinned Ben. "But I can see that you ride some in the round corral as well as on the range."

"Of course! How could I run the Star Bar if I didn't break bronc's?" It seemed to her to be too trivial a matter to be worth mentioning. After a moment, she continued: "But I've two horses I can't ride; they throw me every time I try. I'll have to get some man to ride them for me a few times."

"Throw you!" There was almost horror in Ben's voice. "You should stay off 'em! They must be pretty bad to pile you, and it's not every man could ride them. I'll break them for you if you'll let me." Suddenly he gasped and reddened—didn't that sound egotistic! "I—I mean," he faltered hastily, "I mean, if I can."

"Oh, I reckon you can ride them!" she laughed. "Everyone's talking about your riding."

He rode broodingly for some time, then turned to her impulsively: "Say—it's a shame for you to have to work like that; it's not a woman's work!"

"I know it," she answered slowly. "I like the range, and I like to ride, but this thing of riding day in and day out, breaking horses, branding—no, it's not a woman's work." She sighed. "But the outfit has to be kept up, and there's no one else to do it."

"Your cattle run on the same range as the Circle T's. I'll have the boys brand all yours after this, so you needn't worry about them. It wont make any extra riding to amount to much for us."

"No, thanks. I'm able to look after my own stock." Her voice was a trifle cold.

"Just the same, we'll brand them for you."

"Say, Ben Jurney!" She wheeled on him angrily. "I didn't ask you for any favors! I wont let anyone brand my stock for nothing, and I'm not able to pay. I'm looking after the Star Bar outfit, and I'll thank you to keep to the Circle T."

Ben was taken aback. For a moment he was silent. When he spoke again, his voice was very quiet and determined:

"Just the same, we're going to brand your stock. I'm looking after the Star Bar too. What about it?"

She glanced up at him angrily, then her lips slowly curled in a smile.

"Well," she murmured, "I can't stop you; but you'll get no thanks for it."

"Ma'am, girls an' mules is two things I never could understand a thing—" Ben began with dignity, but he paused, staring at her. She was rocking in her saddle with laughter.

"Let's go, Ben!" She wheeled her horse and loped swiftly through the cedars.

CHAPTER IX

OUT beyond the end of Apache Pocket, of which it had once formed the tip, lies Eagle's Island, a formation made by rifts in the rim of that great plateau, the Mogollon Mesa. Between the Pocket and the Island hangs a high, rounded, cedar-covered "saddle." At the middle of the Saddle, the lowest part, a cow-trail crosses, winding between fantastic rocks and bluffs which in another place would appear huge, but are dwarfed to nothingness by the immensity of the Pocket and the Island. From the trail the Saddle sweeps gently up on each side, like a great suspension bridge ending in huge, unscalable blank walls. It runs a few yards into the Island, where the beetling cliffs sweep around it to form a shallow bay walled with frowning granite, smooth as glass from the winds of ages. These cliffs grow higher as you travel down the ridge to the level of the lower country. And, having reached the foot of the ridge, you may ride completely around the Island until you return to the Saddle, and find no break in the gigantic wall, not one place where the most nimble-footed could scale more than a few negligible yards.

BEN and Jane sat their horses in discouragement near the foot of the Saddle. They had ridden completely around

the Island itself, with the exception of the Saddle before them, without finding the slightest thing to arouse their suspicions. Yet Sammy's note had told Ben to hurry to the Island—in no other way could they construe it—and both felt convinced that somewhere within the shadow of this huge irregular cylinder of rock lay the answer to the questions that were troubling them.

"What do we do now?" asked Jane dispiritedly.

"Nothing, I reckon." Ben shook his head slowly. "We might as well ride back over the Saddle, meet the boys, and go back home."

They watered their horses at the large water-hole at the foot of the trail, and started up the steep climb. Simultaneously they paused, looking at the ground. The trail was thickly sprinkled with burro tracks.

"Prospectors," grunted Ben.

"Must be," Jane nodded, "though I haven't seen any around in a long time but little Crazy Gus."

They continued the climb, riding in silence until they reached the top. Here the burro tracks swerved to the left, toward Eagle's Island.

"They must be camped over there," remarked Ben, "though Lord knows why they'd pick such a place. Let's ride over and see if we can find them and get something to eat—I'm starved, and I know you must be too."

"How about looking them over first?" asked Jane.

"Mightn't hurt anything, though I never heard of prospectors mixin' up in the affairs of a cow-outfit."

TOGETHER they rode cautiously, keeping to the thickest of the cedars. At last, peering through the branches, they could see the camp ahead of them. The ridge ran back into the halfmoon of the bay in the cliff, and at the back of this was a smaller, deeper bay, almost wedge-shaped, cutting into the Island, the cliff towering far out over it to form a sort of very high but shallow cave. Near the end of this finger stood a dense mass of cedars, and just in front of this was the little tepee tent of the prospectors.

"Good place to camp, after all," whispered Ben; "a puff of wind can't get to you, and there's always plenty of dry wood for the fire. Let's ride up and get something to eat."

Jane was intently surveying the three men who were busy preparing for the night, two cooking supper, and one feeding the dozen or more burros. With a puzzled frown, she turned to her companion:

"Let's leave our horses here and try to get a little closer."

Something had been troubling Ben slightly too; together they slipped from their saddles and walked quietly through the cedars. Having got as close as they could without risking detection, they knelt down to peer below the branches of a big cedar. The three men were obviously peacefully ending a peaceful day, quietly preparing their meal and attending to their pack animals.

"I don't know—" Ben rubbed his chin. "I can't see a thing wrong, but— I suppose we're too suspicious after all that has happened today."

"Yes, I suppose we—" Suddenly Jane paused. "Say! Who ever heard of three bowlegged prospectors?"

"*That's* it!" Ben gasped with relief. "I've seen bowlegged prospectors, of course, but three together is about two too many."

Jane could not repress a low chuckle. "We're both so used to bowlegged cowboys —pretty nearly all the shorter ones are that way—that a man hardly looks natural to us with straight legs. That's why we didn't notice it sooner. I always thought— Say! Look at that fellow!"

The man who had been attending to the burros was walking toward the fire—walking with a peculiar stiff, swaying motion of the hips something like the roll of a sailor ashore. Ben nodded silently. It was plain to be seen that the man was far more accustomed to the saddle than to the little pick.

"Huh!" he grunted. "It seems to me that there's something rotten in the state of Denmark!"

Stealthily the two crept back, being much more careful than before, now that they knew that the men camped under the cliffs were no peaceful prospectors. They held a hasty consultation—it was nearly dark, and their plans had to be made hurriedly.

"There's just one thing to do," said Ben. "We'll have to ride back and meet Jack and the boys, before they come butting in here and get those fellows on their guard. We'll have to hurry and get back here; I've an idea that it might pay to watch those fellows here tonight."

"I know what we can do!" exclaimed Jane. "I'll go back and meet the boys—they should be here any time now—and you can stay and see if there's anything wrong here."

"Why," agreed Ben, after a moment's hesitation, "—all right. Just keep to that little draw between the two high ridges and you can't miss them. You shouldn't be in any danger, but keep your eyes open. The Triangle Bar bunch are most likely all in camp by this time."

"But,"—it was Jane's turn to hesitate,—"if I leave you here you're likely to get yourself in trouble, go butting into something."

"No *sir*," declared Ben, virtuously, "I always try all I can to keep out of trouble, and always did."

"Well,"—she could scarcely suppress an unbelieving sniff,—"promise me not to try to take on those three men single-handed."

"I sure will promise not to do that—unless something comes up that I have to."

It was not a very reassuring promise to one who knew Ben's reputation, but Jane had to be satisfied with it. She turned her horse and rode down the west trail, slowly and cautiously. She was filled with uneasiness. No, that big cowboy could not keep still long; he had too much confidence in himself; he was sure to get in trouble before she got back to check him. It never occurred to her that before long she herself was to be exposed to far more dangers than Ben, and so she rode heedlessly, not reckoning what the dense cedars might hold for her.

CHAPTER X

BEN led his horse farther away, and carefully concealed it. Then he crept back as close to the fire as he could get without risking detection. The moon was now shining brightly overhead, so he could not get close enough to hear the conversation. The three men had finished their late supper, and were washing their dishes when he lay down to watch them. Then they gathered around the fire, for the night was chilly, and for almost an hour they lounged on their beds, smoking. The very fact that they had dragged their beds into the open air gave more proof of their being cowboys, not prospectors; the prospector is almost invariably an old miner, unaccustomed to sleeping outdoors.

The time passed slowly for Ben. Several times he crept quietly farther back, to swing his arms and shuffle his feet, for he found his task a cold one. He heartily regretted the promise he had thoughtlessly given to Jane. How simple it would be, he thought, to creep quietly on the three unsuspecting men, cover them, and tie them up with their pack-ropes! Then he would have nothing to do but eat all he wanted to (he tightened his belt another notch), lounge around the fire, and wait for Jane and his men, who should soon be appearing.

At last two of the men rose and stretched themselves. Ben thought they were preparing to go to bed, but instead they turned away from the fire toward where the hobbled burros were browsing. These they rounded up and drove back close to the fire, where their hobbles were removed. With the assistance of the third man, the pack-saddles were lashed on all. This struck Ben as strange—why should they wish to move camp at that hour? Should he let them move? But his question solved itself for him presently. One man returned to the fire, to squat on his bed, a rifle beside him, while the others drove the burros together, and without loading them even with the empty kyaks, turned toward the cliff. Right into the long finger at the back of the bay they went, around the cluster of big cedars.

"Now, what are they going to load the burros with?" grumbled Ben to himself. "What *can* they have cached there behind the cedars?"

Half an hour more passed, Ben growing colder and more restless every second. Then something happened that made him forget the cold in his amazement. From the rim of the great cliff, the top of the Island itself, came a harsh, long-drawn sound, rising and falling. It was the bray of a burro.

LIKE a flash it all came to Ben. He thumped his head with his knuckles in disgust at what he regarded as his stupidity in not having suspected it before. There was a passage from behind the cedars to the top of Eagle's Island! Strange, thought he, that such a passage had not been known before—how was it that stock had not found their way to the excellent grass that must lie on top, and so made a plain trail leading there? But then, it might not have been there long, that passage. Perhaps

miners or prospectors had been hired to blast a tunnel; that would have given the thieves the idea of having the guardians of the tunnel disguise as prospectors, so that a long stay of cowboys there would not excite comment among the restless cowboys who might run across them. Possibly it had not been necessary to do much blasting; there might be a cave or natural tunnel beginning close to the bluff and running to the surface. But was that likely? There were few caves in the lower country, although the whole of the Mogollon Mesa was pitted with what the cowboys called "craters," from their shape; really those were places where the thin roofs of great caves had fallen in, leaving gaping depressions in the earth—the Mesa must be like a gigantic honeycomb. Again Ben thumped his head with his knuckles in disgust. Why had he persisted in thinking of Eagle's Island as belonging to the lower country! Was it not part of the Mogollon Mesa as much as Apache Pocket itself, of which it had once formed the tip?

His thoughts were interrupted by the return of the burros. This time the men who followed them were mounted on powerful horses which they sat with the ease given only by a lifetime spent in the saddle. Each burro was loaded with two large kegs, empty, judging by their free swing, and the ease with which the burros traveled. So that was why there were so many burro-tracks leading to and from the water-hole! Of course there was not likely to be much permanent water on the Island.

How many head of cattle could the Island graze? Ben wondered. Probably over a hundred. No—more! It had never before been grazed, even by deer or antelope—not for countless ages, since the time of prehistoric monsters. For ages the grass had been going to seed undisturbed; it must look like a great meadow. How long were the cattle held there? It took time for the brand to peel and hair over. But then, if a brand could be removed without leaving a trace, perhaps one could be induced to hair over in much less than the usual time. Of course it was the Doctor's doings—he had done wonderful things with the injuries of his cowboys.

THE three men had drawn together to talk a moment. Now the two that were mounted leisurely drove the scattering burros back together, and started along the saddle toward the trail leading to the water-hole, while the other again lounged back on his bed beside his rifle. Suddenly Ben's lips formed a happy grin, although his teeth were chattering with the cold. He had promised not to pit himself against three men—but he hadn't said a thing about two! He started back quickly but quietly toward where he had concealed his horse, but paused. That would be too risky; they would be too likely to hear his horse coming down the rocky trail. He slipped afoot among the cedars, around the camp-fire, and down the hill after the burros, loosening his six-shooter in the holster. The packers should be easy to capture, he thought; the more high-spirited among the cowboys would refuse such a menial task as herding burros.

When he had crept cautiously through the cedars almost to the edge of the water-hole, he found his calculations somewhat upset. One man, the smaller, was laboriously dragging the reluctant burros to the edge of the water, removing the kegs, filling them with water, then gruntingly lifting them back on the burros and lashing them secure. The other had not even deigned to dismount from his horse, but rode slowly up and down, keeping the burros from wandering away, and frequently pausing to give gruff and quite needless commands to the other. Still, a moment's thought showed Ben that it was well as it was; if he could capture both, the smaller one was obviously spineless enough to tell all he knew as soon as he found a gun poked in his stomach.

But there was the rub! How was he to capture them? The one on the horse would have to be handled with caution, otherwise he would either shoot and give the alarm, or dash into the thick cedars—probably both. If much time were spent on him, the other would bolt like a scared jack-rabbit into the darkness of the trees.

Quite unexpectedly the thing solved itself. Ben was crouched in a bush almost at the edge of the water. As the horseman passed slowly back and forth, he could almost have reached out his hand and touched him. He was passing again. As he rode by, he reached down and ran his fingers between the cinch and the horse's chest. Yes, the cinch was a trifle too loose for the climb back up the trail. He swung from the saddle, threw the stirrup back over his shoulder, and started to tighten the cinch, his back to Ben.

Two cautious steps, and Ben was be-

hind him. The other must have heard his approach, for he dropped the stirrup with a twist of the shoulder, and started to wheel, his hand dropping to his gun. But he was too late. The barrel of Ben's forty-five caught him across the head, and he dropped like a log without uttering a sound.

ON the impulse of the moment Ben quickly exchanged his hat for that of the other, which was smaller and of a different shape, and swung into his saddle. A glance had shown him that the man who was loading the burros had not seen, busy as he was with his work. Ben rode casually up to him, rolling a cigarette. The other raised his head and glanced at him.

"Doggone it," he grumbled, "it looks to me like you could help a feller once in a while!"

Ben, of course, did not answer. This seemed to surprise the other, but gave him courage.

"I'm gettin' plumb sick of doin' all the work, while you ride around bossin' the job like you was a millionaire!"

Ben was now swinging from the saddle. With a quick jerk, he drew his gun and poked it in the other's middle, at the same time sweeping back the hat which had been shading his face from the moonlight. No words were necessary. With a gasp of astonishment, the other raised his hands quickly in the air, and stood still while his gun was jerked out by his assailant and thrown to the middle of the water-hole.

"Let's go!" Ben grunted, snatching up a pack-rope.

He hustled the other back to where the first man was lying, and made him help in tying and gagging him securely.

"Now," he commanded, "let's go over to that big log there and sit down. I've a few things I want to ask you."

He seated himself on the log, and seemed lost in thought for some time. Then, as though he had come to some decision, he jerked out his gun again, and thrust it in the pit of the other's stomach.

"I've been figgerin'," he growled, "an' I've come to the conclusion that by pushin' my gun close into you that way,"—he gave a vicious dig,—"they can't hear the shot back there."

The other, a sallow, hatchet-faced youth, turned ashy-gray, and for a moment Ben feared that he was going to faint. He opened his mouth several times before he succeeded in speaking.

"Do-don't!" he gasped, his teeth chattering. "Don't shoot, an' I'll tell you anything you want to know!"

Ben seemed to hesitate, but slowly withdrew his gun a few inches.

"Well," he growled, "let's hear what you have to say."

"An' then will you promise to let me go?"

Ben merely thrust the gun into his stomach again by way of answer.

"Wait! I'll tell you anything!"

"I don't want anything. I want the truth. I know most of it already, an' if I catch you trying to lie to me—" He gave another dig with the gun, and again withdrew it. "Now," he commanded, "tell me first how they get the brands off the cattle—an' watch what you say; this gun's light on the trigger."

"It's—it's easy. Doc showed us how. We just throw a cow, an' one of us shaves the hair off around the brand. Then another cuts the brand out—just skins out a little narrer strip where it runs. The next man sews the edges together carefullike with a crooked needle, jest like a doctor sews up a cut on a feller. A small scar wont hurt—it wont show through the hair."

"Huh!" gasped Ben. "It sure does sound easy. I can't see why no one ever thought of it before. But about the new brand—how do they get it to peel an' hair over again so quick?"

"It don't have to peel—there aint nothin' to peel."

"What!"

"There aint nothin' to peel. While the place is shaved off to take the brand out, you just cut the new brand with a sharp knife—just make one wabbly cut for each side of the triangle, an' one for the bar. Then you draws the edges up against each other flat, so that they sticks up, kinda, an' sews through both of 'em kinda careless. You passes the needle over the edges a few times, an' kinda skips a place here an' there, so that when the hair grows out again it sticks every way, like the broken grain on a regular brand you burns in."

"Well, I'll be damned!" gasped Ben. "The only reason no one ever thought of it before is that it's so danged simple."

"Yes, an' that aint all—" The captive was eager to propitiate his captor. "The Doc gives 'em some stuff he calls *keratin* that makes the hair grow back in no time. It makes 'em look kinda woolly all over for a long time, but no one notices that."

"Keratin—keratin—" Ben struggled to recall something half-forgotten. At last he slapped his knee: "I know! I remember readin' about it in a newspaper a month or two ago. It's the stuff that all hair an' feathers is made out of. They were experimenting on feeding it to sheep to improve the wool. It would make it grow about three times as fast as it usually grows, but it costs so much that it wouldn't pay to use it." He paused a moment, and then asked: "Who found the way to the top of the Island?"

"A little prospector—Crazy Gus, they calls him. He found it. There's only a little wall of rock, and a big, deep crater behind. Doc had him blast the hole bigger—there was only a little one you could crawl through—an' we built a bridge across the crater to drive the cattle over."

"Where's Gus now?"

"They have him on the Island. They're afraid to let him go, afraid he'd tell; he's about half crazy, like lots o' prospectors."

SOMETHING in his voice did not sound just right to Ben. He silently pushed his gun into the other's stomach.

"I'll tell! Wait! Lem Spink pushed him over the north bluff yesterday—at the place where the red bluff hangs over."

Ben shuddered. A sheer drop of a thousand feet before one would strike the first ledge! He had never before realized just how desperate were the men against whom he was pitted. But they were all playing for fortunes—if everything went well, they could soon have all the cattle in the county in their brand.

"Have they got Sammy and the cook up there?"

"Lem threw me over the bluff because I tried to save the girl."

"Yeah, they got 'em."

"What are they figgerin' on doing with them?"

The youth hesitated, but again the gun poked cruelly into him.

"They—they're goin' to take 'em over near Poison Springs tomorrow, keepin' a bandage over their eyes so that they can't know where they are—they do that to anyone they bring to the Island. Then they're goin' to give 'em a drink o' the poison water—they wont know what it is; an' after they die, they're goin' to leave 'em lyin' near the spring."

It was told in such a matter-of-fact way that Ben had to fight off an inclination to press the trigger.

"Are they hurt?" he asked.

"No, they aint hurt. The boys was hidin' in the cedars this mornin' an' roped 'em as they came along follerin' a bunch o' cattle we was gettin'. Sammy managed to get his gun out an' shoot one of our boys —he died this evenin'. Some one shot Sammy's horse in the scrimmage."

Ben breathed a sigh of relief. After having read Sammy's note, he had been afraid

that it was Jim, the cook, who had been shot.

"Well, that'll do for this time. Walk over there to where the pack-ropes are."

He soon had him trussed safely, and tied to a cedar for additional security. The other man he also tied with his back to a tree. He gathered the scattered burros and tied them up, so that none would wander back without a load to arouse suspicion. Then he tied the two horses, and hastened back up the hill. He knew that a long absence of the packers might cause the guard to become suspicious, and decided that the safest plan would be to capture him if possible.

CHAPTER XI

UNUSED to walking as Ben was, he panted heavily as he neared the top of the Saddle. He dropped on a boulder to rest a moment, and to catch his breath, but a sound that he heard made him spring to his feet again and strike upward in a heavy dog-trot. It was the clicking hoofs of trotting horses coming up the other side of the Saddle. Surely Jane would not bring the men up so noisily! But he soon realized that it could not be over three horsemen that were approaching. Jane! Could she be captured? He broke into a run, trying to see the horsemen before they turned toward the Island, but was too late. He followed as fast as his burning lungs would permit, and was just in time to see them disappear around the clump of cedars behind the camp. But his fears had been well founded. It was Jane Talbott, her eyes bandaged, and her hands tied to her saddlehorn. On one side of her rode Lem Spink, on the other a half-breed Mexican known as Chihuahua Pete. Ben heard the guard calling after them:

"An' there sure must be something wrong, or they'd be back before this time."

The guard was standing up, his rifle across his arm, looking in the direction of the water-hole, and listening intently. Ben took advantage of his preoccupation to slip recklessly around him on the other side, on the very edge of the cedars. Luck favored him, so that he dropped unseen behind a boulder scarcely fifty feet from the campfire. He could go no farther, for between him and the camp was not a scrap of cover.

He lay still until he had recovered his breath, wondering what to do next. But again fortune favored him. The guardian of the tunnel was growing more suspicious every instant. Now he walked forward, slightly past Ben, although some distance away, and mounted a huge boulder that had once fallen from the overhanging rim of the Island. Just a moment he balanced there, peering intently into the cedars, but that moment was all Ben required, for, running on his toes, he had gained the cover of the cedars behind the camp. It had been a foolhardy thing to do, but by a miracle it had succeeded.

He would have tried to capture the guard, but had a suspicion that there might be others at the mouth of the tunnel who would have heard him. His guess proved to be correct. He crept on his hands and knees to the other side of the cedars, and peered cautiously out. A man stood facing him, a rifle held ready in both hands. That was Buck Dreer—Ben had seen him in town. As Buck advanced a step toward him, he drew back, fearing that he had been discovered. But Buck paused again.

"Hey, Dink," he called, "what was that?"

"Nothing—jest me lookin' around."

"Better stay where you are; Lem'll raise sand if you don't—you know what his orders was."

"I know, but I'm wonderin' what's keepin' the packers; they should have been back before this."

"That's jest what I'd been thinkin'. Don't you reckon we'd better call the boys an' have 'em go see?"

"I think we had. Gimme a match before you go."

BUCK walked to the middle of the clump of cedars to meet the other, passing so close to Ben that he could almost have touched him. As the men paused for a moment's low conversation, Ben slipped quickly through the mouth of the tunnel. He ran as far as he dared, and dropped behind a boulder near the bridge just as Buck returned to his post. A shrill yell from Buck! Ben jerked out his gun, preparing to fight it out. Then he noticed that Buck was not looking toward him, but past him, up the slope that ran back from the bridged crater. An answer came back, and almost immediately three horsemen dashed down the incline and across the bridge. For a moment they paused to speak to Buck, then raced through the tunnel. Ben had hoped that Buck would follow them for a

distance, so that he could slip from his hiding-place. But Lem had his men too well trained for that.

Now, for the first time, Ben had time to look around. The tunnel, if such it could be called, was larger than a large gateway, and of very little greater depth; it had been necessary to pierce less than six feet of rock. From its mouth opened a great cave in which Ben was concealed. The floor of this cave tilted upward for a short distance, then suddenly dropped to form the "crater," the bottom of which was strewn with huge jagged boulders. Across this depression ran a rude but strong bridge, built mostly of rough cedar trunks, and covered thinly with earth, partly to afford firm footing, but mostly so that the wild cattle would cross it more readily than they would the bare wood itself. A short distance beyond the bridge, the roof of the cave ended in a cliff that ran straight up to the surface, but the trail wound up a fairly easy ascent between two walls which formed a miniature canyon that gradually grew shallower until it reached the level ground above.

Ben was now between the horns of a dilemma: If he stirred from where he was, the guard would see him. He could not risk tackling this guard, for the man outside would be sure to hear him and spread the alarm. On the other hand, if he remained where he was, the first man to pass would be likely to see him; nothing but the haste of the others had prevented their doing so. The moon was shining full into the cave, which opened toward the southwest. Ben glanced up and gave a sigh of relief. The clouds were creeping slowly up the sky; in just a few moments more they would hide the moon, and then he would be safe.

Then a woman's scream came to him, distant but unmistakable. Jane! That was more than he could stand. Should he run for it across the bridge, or open fire on the guard first? A moment of indecision; then he drew his six-shooter and turned toward the unsuspecting Buck, who was facing him. He took careful aim—the moon shone full on his sights—at Buck's chest. He could not afford to miss, and so begin a battle likely to last until reinforcements arrived for the guard. But in spite of himself—he cursed himself for his weakness—his sights pressed to the left, to Buck's right arm. He could not kill a man in cold blood. Could he even break his arm? He clenched his teeth, and started to press the trigger slowly and carefully. Had he a good bead? The sights seemed dim. He peered more closely at them. Then, suddenly, he found himself in darkness. The clouds had reached over the moon.

With a heartfelt sigh of relief he lowered the hammer and thrust the gun back into the holster. Then, crouched down so that his fingers touched the earth, he ran lightly across the bridge. At the other end he straightened up and ran as rapidly as he could. Up the slope he went, only to pause near the top. He could hear voices—they might be in the little cañon. Just an instant he paused, then scrambled quickly up the cliff at his left, where the climb was comparatively easy.

CHAPTER XII

PEERING into the darkness, Ben stood listening intently. A shift of the light breeze brought the voices to him again. Lem Spink and Doctor Craigie! They seemed to be quarreling—their voices grew louder and louder. Lem was speaking:

"An' we're tired o' havin' a damn Englishman orderin' us around like we was dogs."

"Do you think you're any better? Why, a reputable dog would be ashamed to—"

A stray puff of wind again made the voices indistinguishable. For a moment the quarrel continued. The men seemed to be above Ben, and some distance away. Then a patch of lighter clouds drifted behind them, and Ben could see them, outlined against the gray of the clouds. On the top of a high bluff they were, and Ben gasped with horror as he saw that they were locked in a death-struggle. But struggle it could scarcely be called, for the two were too unequally matched. Even as Ben watched, Lem twisted the other's smaller body around, pinned his elbows behind him, and forced him slowly toward the edge of the bluff. Ben drew his gun, although the range was too great for a six-shooter. But again heavy black clouds swept behind them, and Ben stood staring blankly into the night, his gun balanced in his hand. Through the darkness came a cry of surprise—it was not fear—from Craigie. Then —a heavy, soggy thud at the foot of the bluff, and the quick steps of Lem hastening away as though terrified with his own deed.

Ben stared aghast into the darkness. He himself had killed—he had a reputation as a killer; but he had killed only those whose lives were forfeit to the law of the land or the custom of the range. Even then he had killed only when a quick shot had been necessary to save his own life or the lives of others. Now he stared aghast as would any other law-abiding man who for the first time had witnessed a brutal, cold-blooded murder.

He ran as quickly as he could in the darkness toward the bluff, stumbling over loose stones. For fifteen minutes he stumbled back and forth, expecting every moment that his feet would touch the body of Craigie. He paused a moment and thought. There was just one place where he had not searched; a long heap of boulders that had fallen from the rim had at one place formed a sort of low wall. Craigie must be behind this wall; he must have struck its top and rebounded back against the cliff. Ben crept slowly along next to the solid wall of rock until his foot touched something soft. Then, suddenly, the moon blazed out again, and he found himself looking across the body of Craigie into the barrel of a six-shooter.

HIS hand twitched once, as though to drop to his gun, but he saw that he was too late—it could mean but instant death for him. He started to raise his hands, but the little leather-faced man opposite him suddenly gave a squeaky chuckle, and thrust his gun back in the holster.

" 'Scuse me! Ye're Ben Jurney o' the Circle T, aint ye? I thought ye was one of 'em. Hee-hee! Wouldn't it be funny if I'd shot ye, an' ye up here to clean up the gang! Hee-hee!"

Ben knew it must be Crazy Gus, the prospector; he vaguely remembered having seen him in town.

"Why—why," he murmured in surprise, "I heard they'd killed you!"

"No. Oh, no! I'm still alive. Lem pushed me over a bluff onto a ledge that he didn't know was there, an' I crawled back up. He was scared to look over—scared o' high places like lots o' folks. I been hidin' in the ruins ever since, an' stole some grub from their camp last night. He didn't kill me, but he'll wish he had before I get through. Yes, he will! Hee-hee!—he thinks I'm crazy, an' don't know he's crazy himself."

Ben looked with pity on the little, bowed, gray-haired man before him. There was a wild look on his face that Ben had not seen when he met him in town: that was why he had not remembered him more clearly when he first confronted him.

"Yes—yes," the little prospector was mumbling to himself, apparently having forgotten Ben, "he'll find out who's crazy! Stole my old burros, did he, an' workin' 'em to death! Well, he'll wish he hadn't. Ol' Gus is a bad man to fool with! Ol' Gus'll l'arn 'em—ol' Gus'll l'arn 'em!"

But Ben was not listening. He had seen Craigie's eyes fixed on him with a look of recognition, and had quickly stooped over him. He swept his arm around him, and raised his shoulders to a more comfortable position against a boulder, shuddering as he saw how his legs were twisted and distorted. Every bone in his body from the waist down seemed to be shattered, and he had felt the grind of broken ribs under his hand.

"Ben," Craigie was whispering, "get some paper and pencil from my pocket—quick—I can't last long! You'll find a list of the cattle we stole on the books at the ranch—without the brands. . . . . Here's the brands. . . . . Circle T's are A; C X's are B; Broken Box is C; Star Bar, E—" He quickly gave a list of the signs used, while Ben hastily jotted them down by the moonlight.

"That's all," he finished. "I've been selling a good many cattle lately, but there's enough left to pay everyone back for all I stole." He stopped and closed his eyes, trying bravely to smother a groan of agony.

"Ben," he continued, his voice growing weaker, "will you see that I'm not buried on Eagle's Island? I—I want to get away from all that. . . . . Put no name on my grave—don't mark it. Craigie isn't my name—I've disgraced a good name—always did. I might—" Again his face twisted with agony, but not a trace of a groan escaped his lips.

"Ben, raise my shoulders up. Get that little black case in my inside pocket. . . . . That's it. . . . . Put it in my hand. No—open it for me."

With feeble hands he drew out a hypodermic. The sight of it seemed to revive him a trifle. With much difficulty he loaded it, and pushed the needle in his left arm.

"Ben, until that got me, I was a man, like you are. I've taken a big shot now. I'll soon go to sleep, and never wake up

again. Don't think hard of me, Ben—you're a clean sportsman—I want you to think as well of me as you can. That you may, I'll tell you: Lem threw me over the bluff because I tried to save the girl from him. They have been masters lately—I lost control of them—they go too far. Jane. . . . . No, no—he hasn't hurt her—yet. Go to her, Ben; take care of her. Jane's a fine girl—aristocrat— Don't let them. . . . ." He sank back in Ben's arms.

"Take care of him!" Ben whispered to old Gus, as he bounded over the low wall of boulders.

CHAPTER XIII

THE bluff formed one side of a small high hill which appeared to have been torn in two in the middle. On all other sides, a steep incline led to the top. Ben's first thought was to mount this eminence to look around. The bluff grew lower and lower as he sped along at its foot, until finally it was no higher than his shoulder. He placed both hands on the edge and vaulted up. He started to run toward the top, but common sense made him crouch so that the stunted cedars and scrub oaks would partly hide him, silhouetted as he was against the moonlit sky. But this seemed too slow to him. Again he straightened up, and ran as fast as he could, heedless of the target he was presenting to anyone who might be around.

At the summit he stopped, panting, and looked around, too reckless to even seek the shadow of a cedar near him. He found himself looking down on the walls of a town abandoned long ages before. On every side stretched rows of ruined ancient houses, some mere outlines, others ten feet high. This was but what he had expected, for the crags of the whole country of the rim of the Mogollon Mesa is plentifully sprinkled with those old ruins, scarcely touched by archeologists, most of them known only to the wandering cowboy or trapper, if to him. Those of Eagle's Island were better preserved than any Ben had seen before, because the little wind-swept plateau had not favored the growth of many of the huge cedars that had grown through the walls of most others, riving them apart century by century. But Ben had no eyes for the ruins. Half-consciously, his cowboy instincts made him note the great number of cattle scattered around, some lying down, some standing half-asleep, a few grazing or browsing lazily. But no sign of another human being.

Then darkness fell again. A short distance from the foot of the hill he could see a patch of flickering reddish light. He recognized it for the reflection of a camp-fire against a wall—it was in a house, the high walls of which prevented him from seeing the fire itself.

Toward the light he raced in the darkness. As he went lower, it disappeared, hidden by the nearer wall of the house, but he had got his bearings, and rushed down, heedless of the clatter he was making among the loose stones. His foot hung on a twig and sent him sprawling; his hands, which he had instinctively cast out to break the fall, were torn on the sharp stones. He felt the sting of cactus-thorns in one forearm, but heeded it not, as he quickly scrambled to his feet, feeling to find if his gun had fallen from the holster.

Then, suddenly, his head cleared. Was he mad? What could he, a lone man armed only with a six-shooter, do against a crowd such as that which must be on the mesa, if once they were alarmed! He must keep his head, and not let them suspect his presence! Otherwise he could be of no help to Jane. Jane—why did he keep thinking of her, and not of Sammy and Jim! But that, he told himself, was only natural; didn't a man have to protect a woman before going to the assistance of other men?

He crouched low for a moment as two horsemen swung quickly past him—his prisoners, he guessed. Why had he not dragged them back into the cedars and hidden them! He went more cautiously now, plucking the stinging barbed cactus thorns from his arm as he went. Soon he could hear the low, hoarse hum of voices in the house. He stumbled over something on the ground. His hand reached out and felt it; it was a saddle lying on its side. Probably the other dim shapes around were saddles, too. There were no watchers; no one had considered the possibility of anyone's being able to pass the guards without creating a disturbance.

HE slipped close to the house and sought a hole to peer through, but could not find one. The wall was about eight feet high on the average, and built of two thin walls of flat stones, laid without mortar, about three feet apart, the space between filled with rubble. Knowing what the con-

ditions were, he slipped quietly around the walls, peering carefully through every chink, but not one was large enough to give him a view of the interior.

Then he saw the way: he crept softly to a cedar growing near the walls, and quietly climbed up the big limbs on the side away from the house. After some maneuvering, he eased into a position that allowed him to look over on the group beyond the wall of the roofless ruin. The house was much larger than any of the sort he had ever seen before. Probably it had been used for ceremonial purposes, and dated from a time before the sacred room of the Indians had become invariably an underground chamber. Indeed, it was by no means certain that the builders of the oldest of these ruined towns of the Rim were Indians at all. The swastika design sometimes found in them spoke of contact, at least, with the heliolithic culture which had originated in the neighborhood of the Mediterranean—some paleontologists say in the bed of the then-dry Mediterranean itself.

But Ben's thoughts were far from these questions as he studied the faces of the men who lay stretched on tarp-wrapped beds below him. A hard group of faces it was—it would have been difficult to find harder. Some were lean and hook-nosed; some broad and high-cheeked, telling of Indian blood; some were the mixture of Spanish and Indian that forms the modern Mexican type. One had the kinky hair of the negro, although his face was little darker than the others. But the expression of all was so much alike that they might have been a large family of brothers—wolfish.

Although the men feared no eavesdropper, their voices were low and cautious, as though from long habit. It is said that the penitentiary breeds such voices, and it would be safe to guess that the cell had more than once been the home of many of the lounging figures. Ben recognized his recent captives among the rest, and again cursed his carelessness in not having hidden them where they could not have been so readily found. He was wondering where Lem Spink was—wondering and dreading—when he saw him step slowly through the door. Immediately all turned to him questioningly.

"Yes," he grunted, "Doc fell over a bluff and killed himself."

The others nodded understandingly, but the faces of some showed uneasiness.

"Hell," he grinned, placatingly, "there's nothing to worry about! He signed the last of the papers yesterday, when he was full of whisky and dope. We can take over the outfit without any trouble."

"Mebbe we can, an' mebbe we can't," muttered some one. "You should have left well enough alone—he didn't hurt much, though he took more o' the money than he had a right to, seein' as he wasn't doin' no work to amount to nothin'."

"An' tried to treat all of us like we was dogs! I tell you there aint nothin' to worry about: the papers prove clear that we all put money in the outfit—all it's worth, an' more. He aint got no folks that anyone ever heerd of, so who's goin' to say anything when we take it over?"

"Aw," growled the big captive of the water-hole, "there'll be no outfit to take over if that dam' Ben Jurney aint put out of the way, an' *pronto*, too! The kid, here, says he didn't tell him anything, but I don't know—"

"Hell!" blazed the youth vehemently. "Think I'm a squealer? I didn't tell him nothin', but he sure made some close guesses. Some one else might have squealed." He looked evilly at his recent companion. "Or else he sure made some close guesses. I say that the sooner he's put out o' the way, the better."

"We'll get him tomorrow," grunted Lem, "an' early, too. It's our only chance. It was so late that he'll likely lie out all night, an' some of us can waylay him near the Circle T as he goes home. If that don't work, get him with a rifle as he leaves the house—don't take no chances. I've been down talkin' to the guards, an' told them to keep their eyes open. You fellers fix it up any way you want to to see which ones goes after him; I got something else to attend to." He leered at them.

This was not greeted with the general grin Lem seemed to expect. Less than half the men could see the humor of it. A few there were who glowered at him. One rolled over on his bed and sat up, growling:

"Damn it, Lem, that's goin' too far for me! Do what you want to with the men, but gals is gals."

"Aw, let him alone!" interfered a third. "She aint no better than any other gal, is she?"

"The hell she aint!" spoke a third. "Where did you ever see another like her before?"

"I got Lem," he called, knowing the effect it would have on Lem's men.

"Easy, boys," grinned Lem ingratiatingly. "I aint meanin' no harm. I wont be rough with her unless I have to, an' I'll marry her any time she says the word—what more could she want?"

"Mebbe she could an' mebbe she couldn't," grunted some one doubtfully.

"How you figger? In a year more I'm agoin' to be the richest man in this here country. What more could she want?"

He swung through the door. A growl followed him, but no one saw fit to try to stop him, although for a few minutes an argument waged, the general consensus seeming to be that a marriage with Lem would be highly desirable for a girl like Jane.

But Ben did not hear more than the beginning of this argument. He slipped quietly from his perch, and crouched in the shadow of the cedar.

CHAPTER XIV

THE clouds were growing thinner now, the light increasing. Ben followed quickly after Lem as soon as he dared, slipping from one crumbling wall to another with the stealth of a panther. Lem entered a house, a much smaller one than that in which the others were. In a moment Ben was crouched against the wall, listening carefully.

"How you fellers makin' it?" he heard Lem ask with evil cheerfulness.

"Jest fine, thankee. How're you?" It was Sammy's voice. Poor little Sammy! His voice showed that despite the show of cheerfulness he was suffering greatly. Probably thirsty, Ben guessed—likely he had not been given anything to eat, either. He was being prepared for Poison Springs.

"None o' yore dam' business how we are!" The cook's voice was weak and thick, too, but showed that he had not for a moment lost his nerve.

"Why, you fat—" Ben heard the thud of a boot against flesh. "An' here's one fer you, too!" he muttered, and again came a thud. Ben could scarcely overcome the inclination to spring over the low wall at the side away from the door, where he was crouched.

"Say," grumbled Sammy, "couldn't you bring us a drink o' water? We aint had none all day."

"Shore sorry, ol'-timer, but that smart foreman o' yours, Ben Jurney, butted into our packers, so we only got enough water for ourselves an' the stock, an' can't waste

any on you fellers. Jest wait till mornin'; we're takin' you both where there's lots o' water, an' we'll jest love to see you drink yourselves to death." Lem chuckled, and Ben gritted his teeth.

"Ben!" exclaimed Sammy. "Is he around? But o' course I might 'a' knowed he'd be! Well, Lem, your goose is cooked now, an' I'll get water before long." Sammy actually essayed a feeble chuckle. "Doggone it—that Ben's jest nachelly the most useful cuss 't ever lived! I'm agoin' to give him a half-interest in the outfit, Lem, mostly because I like him, an' partly to keep him from driftin' off on me—I don't see how I could get along without Ben Jurney. Well, so Ben's here! I *knowed* he would be!"

"No, he aint here, nor nowhere near here. An' he aint goin' to be nowhere but in a hole in the ground by tomorrow night. I'll see to that."

"Ben can clean up on yore whole danged outfit single-handed, an' he'll do it if he has to—jest wait an' see!" Again Sammy chuckled throatily. "An' he's around already! Doggoned if he *aint* the most useful cuss you ever saw!"

A sizzling oath from Lem, and the thud of his boot again. He strode angrily toward the door, with Sammy's voice calling after him: "Your goose is cooked now, Lem! Ben'll have me loose in no time!"

HIS implicit faith was justified, and his prediction came true sooner than he had dreamed. The words were hardly out of his mouth when some one dropped from the wall beside him. He felt a sharp knife cut the ropes binding his wrists, and heard his foreman's hurried voice:

"You do the rest. I'm in a hurry. Likely find carbines on the saddles near the big house."

"I *knowed* you would, Ben!"

But Ben had not heard, for he had slipped through the door in pursuit of Lem. He glanced around, expecting to see his retreating back. Not a movement in sight —the slight delay had been too much. He listened carefully a moment, but could not hear a sound, except the scuffling of the prisoners freeing themselves. A moment's thought showed him that this house must lie between the main camp and where Jane was; Lem would not have bothered to go out of his way to taunt his prisoners.

Ben slipped along among the crumbling walls, zigzagging and doubling. He peered into several of the ruins hastily, but could find no trace of Lem. Then he heard a slight sound some distance off; it sounded to him like a heavy cough. He ran hastily toward where he judged the noise to have come from, then paused and listened. Not a sound. He went on again, more cautiously now, for the last of the clouds had passed, and it was almost as bright at day. He was running a great risk, but he cared nothing for that—he had to reach Jane, and quickly.

Again he heard a sound, one stone gently striking against another, as though disturbed by a careless foot. This time he located it in a high-walled house a short distance away. Another ruin, with still higher walls, stood just beside it, and between the houses he slipped noiselessly. He could hear some sound in the house, very faint.

For a few minutes he stood listening, but the suspense was too great. He stepped quickly to the doorway, his gun poised. There was nothing in the house but a cow, whose heavy breathing he had heard. He was now in a panic at his delay. He thrust his gun back in the holster, and started to run. Just one step he made, and stopped dead in his tracks. The sound of his footfall had been drowned by a piercing scream a few feet from him, in the other house. Then Lem's voice came, with an oily ingratiating ring:

"Don't be skeered, little gal. I didn't mean to wake you up so sudden."

"What do you want? Oh, my God!"

BEN crouched to bound to the door, but something swept him from his feet, and he went down with an exclamation he could not smother. It had been nothing but the terrified cow rushing from the other ruin. As he picked himself up, he heard Lem drop to the ground from the far wall of the house that Jane was in, and run hastily away. Ben sprang to the corner, but too late to get a shot at the back he glimpsed disappearing around the corner. Then he sprang back to Jane.

He found her on a greasy bed thrown on the ground in a corner, with a piece of tarp stretched above it as a shelter. Her hands were tied behind her to a long rope which ran through a small hole in the wall, and was probably fastened solidly to something on the outside. She lay with her face buried in the pillow, her bound hands sticking up behind her pathetically, her shoul-

ders shivering as though from cold, or mortal terror. In an instant Ben was over her, whipping out his knife. As he cut the rope and picked her up in his arms, she screamed again. Feeling her hands free, she turned upon him like a tiger, but he ducked and imprisoned her wrists.

"Good Lord!" he muttered, "I should have spoke to her so she'd know who it was!"

But she had recognized him even before he spoke, and now her arms swept around his neck, and she buried her face in his chest, trembling like a leaf in the storm. Gone was the self-reliant ranch-owner of a few hours before, and in her place was a terrified girl. She tried in vain to recover her self-control, tried to release him, but could not.

"There, now! It's all right now—I'll take care o' you. I told you I was goin' to look after your outfit; now I'm goin' to look after you too, so there's nothing to worry about. There, there!" he soothed.

"Listen," he continued. "The trouble aint over yet, though it soon will be. We have to get out of here before the whole gang comes. Try an' brace up, now!"

With an effort she withdrew her arms, and backed a step away from him.

"All right, Ben; wha-whatever you say." Her voice trembled, and her face was white as death, but by an immense effort she had almost controlled the trembling of her body.

"Lord! You got sand!" Ben looked down on her admiringly. "Now," he continued, "let's get away from here first thing. I turned Sammy and Jim loose; let's get back to them."

He took her hand, and together they hurried away among the ruined walls. They came to where Sammy and the cook had lain, but were not surprised to find them gone.

"They'll go to the water-trough first thing," guessed Ben, "and then they'll look for carbines on the saddles over near that big house—that's where the whole gang is. Let's drift over that way—we have to find them—that's all there is to it! Scattered this way, we can do nothing."

CHAPTER XV

THEY crept along quietly, seeking as much as possible the shadows of the higher walls, and of the occasional cedars. They had almost reached their destination when they paused as an apologetic voice reached them from the house:

"Shore sorry to disturb you, boys—but would you mind much to stick yore hands up kinda?" It was little Sammy!

"An' be danged quick about it!" There was nothing at all apologetic in the ferocious growl of the little fat cook. Ben wondered how he had managed to get his usually somewhat high-pitched voice down to such a bearlike growl. He was evidently highly pleased with the position he now held.

The sound of a moment's shuffling came to Ben and Jane. An instant of silence, and then, again, the gentle tones of Sammy Hopkins:

"Thankee, boys. Shore do hate to disturb you this-a-way!"

"Higher!" Ben could scarcely repress a chuckle at the conscious ferocity of the cook's roar.

With Jane beside him, Ben stepped quickly toward the back wall of the house, intending to cover the prisoners from that side too. But then came the unexpected. Simultaneously with him, another figure had stepped from the opposite corner of the house that had sheltered him. It was Lem going to the rescue of his men. To shoot Sammy and Jim in the back as they stood in the doorway would have been easy for him. Both men stopped dead still, the meeting was so unexpected. Neither had his gun out, but the right hands of both twitched as though poising for the swoop to the hip.

"Back, Jane!" grunted Ben, trying to sweep her away with his left arm. "Wait a minute!"—to Lem. "Let the girl get out of the way!"

"Damn the gal!"

Ben's right hand dropped on Jane's shoulder; she was standing firmly beside him—she had to be pushed away. An evil grin started to Lem's lips as he saw the advantage he had been given—his hand was but inches from the butt of his gun, and shooting down upon it like a striking snake. His gun left the holster and spat. But the bullet struck the ground halfway between him and Ben. Lem straightened up and stiffened, as though he had felt a powerful electric shock. For a moment he stood stiffly there, a look of blank, dazed amazement on his face; then he toppled backward stiffly as a board, his head striking the corner of a rock.

Ben bounded to the wall and scrambled up, the smoking gun still in his hand. With his toes dug in a crevice, and his left arm stretched over the top to support him, he covered the men below, and nodded to his allies in the door.

"I got Lem," he called, knowing the psychological effect it would have on Lem's men. Leaderless, they would be easier to handle.

He heard a scuffling sound beside him, and turned his head. Jane also was looking over the wall, her right hand holding Lem's gun steady as a rock, although her face was still white from her terror. Ben gasped. Such a girl!

The Circle T men glanced uneasily at each other as a hurricane of hoofs bore down on them. But they were soon reassured.

"Got 'em, Ben?"

IT was Jack, back at last, and followed by all the cowboys of the Circle T, and some Flying O men who had chanced to be staying with them that night. The horsemen quickly surrounded the walls. From their saddles they could easily cover the men below, who were soon tied and thrown on their beds. Then Jack explained:

"Danged funny, I call it! We met a crazy prospector drivin' a lot o' burros about a mile from the Island, an' he told us you were up here, an' how to get up. Jest outside the tunnel we found a man lyin' on a bed—he'd been knifed in the back. An' there was another just inside the same way. Who did it?"

"I suppose he did it himself," guessed Ben. "That was Crazy Gus. Why were you so long getting here?"

"Why—why,"—and Jack reddened,—"my horse stepped in a dog-hole an' broke his leg, so that I had to walk most o' the way home, an' my ankle got kinda bunged up in the fall."

Ben could hardly restrain an angry "I told you so!" but his eye fell on Jack's right foot, which was bootless, and swathed in bandages. Jack had paid for his wild riding, paid like the man he was—had limped miles on a badly injured foot, and then led the men back!

Ben thought that three of the men had escaped, the three who had passed him in the cave, but a little questioning of the prisoners showed that they had not. They had brought the burros back to the guard's camp below, and hobbled them. Then two of them had remained as night guards, to fall victims to Crazy Gus' knife, while the other, with the day guards, had been captured with the rest in the house, to which they had returned while Ben had been at the other side of the Island seeking Jane.

The night was now far gone, so preparations were made to leave the Island with the first signs of daylight—it would be easier to handle the prisoners then, without risking the escape of any of them. Their horses were led from the corral, and saddled. So were those of Jane and the cook, and one for Sammy. Ben decided to ride an extra horse down to where the one captured from Martinez was hidden, and ride him home. He had not eaten for twenty-four hours, so did not feel like going down after the horse while the light breeze was bringing such savory odors from the little house that was used as a cook-shack. Jim had gruffly told them all to keep out of the way of a man while he was busy.

"Aint that jest the heck!" whispered Sammy to Ben, mournfully. "There'll be jest no gettin' along with Jim now, he's so blowed up over helpin' ketch them fellers!"

At last the cook told them all was ready —after having filled his own tin plate— and they descended on the blackened pots with a total disregard for etiquette.

When they had finished the cook quietly gathered up the plates, and dropped them in the dish-pan.

"Now," he stated firmly as he walked from the house and turned toward where the prisoners and their many guards were, "you can wash 'em whenever you get ready. There's no hurry about it. The hot water is in that bucket near the fire, an' the soap an' dish-rag is on that rock yonder."

"What did I *tell* you?" wailed Sammy. "An' I can't *never* fire him now!"

CHAPTER XVI

"NOW, son,"—Sammy turned to Ben,—"before we start on the dishes, there's somethin' we might as well settle: Are we goin' to town this mornin' to fix up them partnership papers, or do you want to wait till evenin'?"

"But—but," mumbled Ben, taken aback, "I never said I'd take a half-interest in the outfit."

"Oh, that's all right! We can fix the papers up in the mornin' an' have it over."

"Shore sorry, but I jest nachelly aint goin' to take no half-interest I haven't earned, and that's all is to it. There is no use in talkin' any more."

Ben spoke confidently, but he was quaking inwardly, for he really dreaded his little employer.

"But lookee here, Ben: I aint never been married nor nothin', nor had no boys o' my own. Somehow, before I'd knowed you five minutes, I felt like you was a boy o' mine, an' that you'd be jest the feller to leave the outfit to when I die—which wont be for a long time. An' look at yoreself! You say yore dad died when you was a little feller, an' you aint got no relatives, like myself. You've been takin' keer of me jest like I was yore dad. Why—why, but for you I'd 'a' been dead *twice* already—over at the old Wagner place, an' here ag'in! Why, son, you *got* to take it!" Sammy's voice was almost tearful. He turned to Jane, with a sudden inspiration:

"Jane, you reason with him—make him see sense."

Jane paused a moment, then replied:

"I think Ben is right. He's not entitled to anything but his wages."

"And," wailed Sammy, "I knowed her since she was knee-high to a horned-toad! Ben, son, I *want* you to take it. I tell you—"

FOR half an hour the battle raged. Poor Ben, drowned in Sammy's flow of words, stood red-faced and puffing, his back against the rough wall. But he was resolute; Sammy had for once met his match for stubbornness. And at last Sammy seemed to realize that he was beaten, and returned to his seat on his kyak.

Ben sighed in relief and slowly rolled a cigarette as he walked back to the fire from which Sammy's threatening finger had backed him away. He drew a match from his pocket and started to strike it, when Sammy, as if seized with a sudden inspiration, sprang at him:

"Wait a minnit!"

He snatched the match from Ben, and again seated himself on the kyak. "Now, son, you said you'd talk the thing over, an' you didn't—wouldn't talk sense—jest kinda snorted an' raved. You said you'd talk it over; are you goin' back on yore word?" He leveled an accusing finger at Ben. Poor Ben!

Sammy dug a prodigious quantity of matches from various pockets, and laid them on one end of the kyak. On the other he laid that which he had snatched from Ben.

"See them there matches o' mine, Ben, an' that one o' yours? See any difference in 'em?"

"Why—why, yes." Ben was puzzled. "Mine has a blue head, an' all yours has red heads."

"That's jest it!" Sammy cocked his head to one side, and looked approvingly at Ben, as though praising him for his cleverness. "Now, I'm agoin' to mix 'em all up, like this." He stirred them with his fingers. "An' throw them in a heap in the kyak, like this." He scooped them up in his hands, pried the lid of the kyak up with his knee, and threw them in. With his eye fixed on Ben, he slammed the lid shut, and continued:

"Now, Ben, seein' as you wont talk sense, there's jest one thing to do: One of us draws a match out of that there kyak. If it's the blue-headed one, you signs the papers this mornin'; if it's red-headed, I never says another word about it. I aint got a chance in a million, but I don't want to be so danged cranky as you are, so I'll let it go at that. That fair enough?"

Ben gasped with relief. Of course the one blue-headed match would not be drawn. He could be rid of any further argument.

"All right; let it go at that."

"That fair, Jane?"

"Why—I suppose so."

"All right. Stick yore hand in, Ben, an' draw one out—or do you want me to?"

"Go ahead."

SAMMY rolled up his right sleeve, showed both sides of his hand like a conjurer, with the fingers spread wide, and thrust his arm in the kyak. He drew it almost out, but paused.

"Doggone it, Ben," he wailed, "it aint fair, it aint, an' that's all is to it! Why, I aint got no chance! Let me take half the red matches out!"

"Say!" Ben stood up angrily. "I've had about enough o' this! Draw or don't draw, an' let's have no more talk!"

"But what *chance* have I?"

Sammy slowly withdrew his hand, holding one match. For a moment he stared at it as if stupefied. His mouth opened silently once or twice. Then an expression

of amazed joy leaped to his face. He sprang across to Ben and thrust the match under his nose.

"Danged if I didn't! Danged if I didn't! Who'd 'a' thunk it! You'll sign this mornin' now."

"Yes, I'll sign." The impossible had come, but Ben could not go back on his word.

For a moment he stood tight-lipped and silent. Then a sound near him attracted his attention. Jane was covering her dark golden curls with her wide-brimmed hat as she walked toward the door. She turned toward them, a queer, set expression on her face:

"Sorry to leave you, but you'll likely have business matters to talk over. I'm going back to the Star Bar now, instead of waiting for the rest of you."

"But—but," mumbled Ben, taken aback, "we'll be going in half an hour now, and you can ride with us nearly all the way!"

"Thanks; I know the way home."

"But—but—" Ben floundered. Then a brilliant idea occurred to him: "When did you want me to go over to start breakin' them horses for you?"

"Why, I've decided to sell them—I've had an offer. You wont have any trouble about them. Thanks, just the same. Good-by."

Ben turned blankly to Sammy: "What did I do? She's mad at me again!"

Sammy clutched him by the arm.

"Why, you locoed—Why, you— Don't you see?" He shook Ben's arm impatiently.

"Listen here," he continued, with another impatient shake, "Jane's jest like you —only that she's a girl an' you aint. Now, lookee here: Supposin' you was a girl, an' took a likin' to some cowboy. Would you let him see it or not?"

"Shore I'd let him see it!" Ben was puzzled.

"An' supposin' that all at once he got to be rich. What would you do—would you still keep showin' him that you liked him?"

Ben stood open-mouthed an instant, while a great light dawned upon him.

Then, aided by an impatient push from Sammy, he shot through the door and toward the tied horses. Sammy heard the clattering of hoofs over stones, and shook his head wearily.

"Aint young folks fools!" he muttered. "They always don't want to do the thing they want to do most. Them two will be the death o' me!"

Then, with a start, he whirled back toward his kyak, but this time he did not sit on it. Instead, he dragged it hastily toward the fire, peering over his shoulder with frightened glances. He threw back the lid, and withdrew a box of matches—blue-headed matches. In panic he scattered the contents on the fire, and threw the box on top. Then came a half-empty box. And then four more full ones. And every match of the lot had a blue head! He frantically stirred the last charred fragment of the last box, and quickly threw a great armful of wood on the fire. Then he paused, mopping his face with a red handkerchief, and trying to blink the acrid match-smoke out of his eyes.

"Whew!" he muttered. "If Ben had ever ketched me at that, he'd 'a' cracked my neck, shore!

"Cheatin' is cheatin'," he brooded, "when you cheats some one out o' somethin'; when you cheats 'em into somethin', it's not. Anyway, I *had* to do it, that's all!"

He returned the kyak to its former place, and seated himself on it—just in time. He heard the slow walk of two approaching horses. Then a moment of silence, as the horses stopped. Then came Ben's booming laugh, and the full, chuckling laugh of Jane. Sammy slapped his knee with the palm of his hand.

"*Now* I got him!" he chuckled. "A half-interest in an outfit an' a wife—he can't get away from me now! Sammy, you good-fer-nothin' ol' cuss, yo're shore lucky—even if you do have to help luck out a little once in a while. He can't get away now, so I can jest set down an' take life easy, an' nothin' to worry about no more. I aint even lame enough to bother about now."

He started to pick up the dish-rag to wash the dishes, but a wild—a wicked—thought came to him, and showed in the recklessness that crept into his face. He just *had* to do something desperate to celebrate his newly found freedom. He replaced the dish-rag, walked to the bed, and deliberately threw himself flat on his back. He blew a puff of smoke from his brown cigarette in the air, and spoke recklessly to the cedar-branch hanging over the wall:

"No sir! Danged if I do! I'm a-takin' life easy now, an' danged if I don't let 'em wash the dishes. I aint even goin' to help!"

By

Stuart Marlowe

This story of a casual exploit that turned to grim Adventure is one of the most remarkable we have ever printed.

Three Men Without the Boat

HIS Majesty's ship *Thisbe*—detailed to carry the Royal Geodetic Survey expedition to study the life and bottom structure of the sea in and about the Malay archipelago—after leaving Apia had swung her pudgy old nose northward and gradually to the west in a wide leisurely arc, the end of which would be Hongkong.

The greater part of the work was done, and with the exception of four hours each day during which we took our turns at the lead line and the microscope, "Bones" Mareno, surgeon and biologist extraordinary; "Pinky" Radford, cartographer extraordinary, and I, journalist and recorder (very ordinary) who constituted the twelve to four watch on the profile board, loafed about the quarter-deck. It was the tag end of a two-year cruise. We of the expedition were regarded aboard ship as passengers and so long as we kept off the sacred precincts of the bridge we were allowed to do pretty much as we pleased, which accounts for the fact that we were allowed to loaf on the Navy's second most holy of holies, the quarter-deck.

In her day the *Thisbe* had been one of England's "terriers of the sea," but her day had long since passed. She was a steam auxiliary barkentine of about twelve hundred tons, clipper-bowed and selected because of her well-known slowness. At best under steam and sail she could not make more than eleven or twelve knots. Deep-sea charting is slow and exacting work and she exactly fitted our purpose, jogging along at about five knots, engines just turning over and enough canvas spread to steady her.

The cartographers are by no means the only ones on such an expedition who have to be slow and exacting, however. The ship's officers must keep as nearly as possible an absolute record of her track. This

necessitated "swinging ship" or traveling in a half-mile circle once each day in order to correct compass error. This was usually done at about four-thirty in the afternoon, just as we were being relieved for the day.

When the sea was not running too high and the presence of schools of porpoise indicated that there were no sharks about, it was our custom—as soon as we were sure that she was started upon her circular track—to slip off our sneaks and trousers (which with a cotton pajama jacket, comprised our usual costumes) and dive over the stern. The "swinging" process usually took from thirty to forty minutes, during which we would enjoy a good swim. It was a simple matter to catch hold of her martingale chains as she wallowed along and pull ourselves aboard by clambering in over the bowsprit.

ONE hot, steamy day the sea was flat as a floor; our four hours on duty seemed interminable and we were bathed in perspiration. Several times that afternoon I had glanced up from my table to observe with a great deal of satisfaction that the sea seemed alive with porpoises.

When we were relieved we sat on the stern hawser butts under the shade of the quarter-deck awning, too hot to bother about even talking. The water had never appeared so inviting, so caressingly cool, as it did on that breathlessly sultry day.

Radford, without speaking, pointed to our wake. Sure enough, it was beginning to curve toward the west! In less than two minutes we were over the stern on the inboard quarter, clear of the screw, and playing about as happily as any of the porpoises around us. We started a race, working westward in order to be in the track of the ship as she came about in her wide circle.

The sprint over, we were slowly catching up to Mareno, who had far outdistanced Radford and me, and was lying on his back floating. Suddenly Mareno's head went up and I saw his face frozen in a look of horror more intense than any I had ever seen. Thinking that he might have a cramp or was in some unknown danger, I put on a burst of speed to catch up with him and did not hear his shout. Not until I had reached his side and, treading water, lifted my head, did I see the cause.

The *Thisbe* had changed her course several points west and was *not* swinging! Rolls of black smoke were coming from her pudgy funnel and she was increasing her speed.

We were about two hundred miles out at sea; nothing but the presence of porpoises to protect us from sharks, and not so much as a piece of driftwood to cling to!

No one had seen us as we went over the stern. Of that we were quite sure, for the awning and the belly of the sail cut off the view from the bridge and we had seen the master-at-arms slumbering peacefully. It was about four-thirty and not until our absence at six o'clock mess was there the slightest chance that we would be missed. She would then have steamed for an hour and a half. Would she return? It would take three hours—would we be able to keep afloat three hours? At about twenty minutes past six would come the brief tropic sunset. Would she be able to find us, even if she did return?

Those first three minutes of panic! Three minutes? Three eternities!

Radford had come up to us by this time and I noted the deathly pallor of his face. I hoped that I was not showing it as he was—then cursed myself for the meanness of the thought.

"I'm perfectly sure that there is nothing in the K. R." (King's Rules) "which tells one exactly how to proceed in a pickle like this."

It was Mareno's voice which first broke the silence. It was as cool and nonchalant as though he were talking in the wardroom, and his face was as serene as it had formerly been horror-struck.

I tried to answer him, but my voice broke and I made a miserable failure of it. Radford too, was mute.

"Come, fellows, you know we mustn't funk it! They'll miss us at mess and they'll never give up without making a mighty effort to find us. We have a job of work cut out for us and it's up to us to make good on it." Again it was Mareno who spoke.

THEN followed the hours of waiting—sometimes swimming slowly, conserving our strength, sometimes floating. Mareno was in command. He was several years my junior, but years my senior in level-headed ability.

Hours passed; they seemed years to us. Radford was obviously weakening and Mareno directed that he float between us, a hand upon each of our shoulders that

he might rest. The great red ball of the sun sank swiftly to the horizon, hung poised a moment and sank into the leaden sea. Our limbs were tortured, arms stiff and aching, backs tiring.

Radford by this time had given up hope, and begged us to abandon him. I would perhaps have done it, but Mareno's reassuring voice chided him gently, telling him that all he need do was lie still and straight, and breathe deeply.

It is not the recollection of the danger, not the fear of death, which comes uppermost to my mind when I look back upon that narrow escape, but the splendid manhood of Bones Mareno. I too had given up hope but was grimly fighting on just because of the example he set.

As we lay upon our backs, hands together under Radford's body, Mareno started to talk of the work which he hoped to accomplish. He intended to become a specialist; he didn't know in just exactly what line, and this interlude of the expedition had been just to give him a chance to "find" himself. I was becoming drowsy by this time and I remembered that I chuckled "lose yourself, you mean"—and surely he was lost.

WELL, I mused, what did it matter? There were plenty of surgeons and journalists, plenty of young Naval officers —one more or less did not count. Sleep! That was it—now *sleep* really counted. Sleep really was something worth while—and all I had to do was to close my eyes and the ache would stop in my back and arms. . . . .

"You know you really *can't* funk it, old man, until the last chance is gone!" Again it was Mareno. He had seen the exhaustion stealing over me, and he gently but none the less firmly told me that to leave Radford without his chance would be rather a cowardly trick. "You know that both of us are infinitely more fit than he is and if we can only hold his head above water a little while longer, the relief will come."

With a sense of shame I realized that in my desire to sleep I had almost forgotten poor Radford, and that Mareno was really doing all of the work of supporting him—had been doing it, in fact, for the past half hour.

Again I fought back to the work in hand, certain that there was nothing but death ahead, but still unwilling to debase myself utterly in Mareno's eyes. Then followed phantasmagoria: home; roses; faces I had known; floating bodies of dead men; sharks; porpoises with sharks' jaws; gigantic squids; dinner-tables; sea-serpents; immense microscopes. . . . . Then faintly came Mareno's voice: "Easier, old man, easy—easy!"

Utter blackness enveloped me—dimly I heard a puffing noise—far in the distance, it seemed, I could hear Mareno shout; then absolute void.

AN hour later I regained consciousness to find Mareno sitting beside me on a stinking Japanese pearler's fo'c'sle, holding my wrists and trying to keep me from attempting to swim. Radford was lying unconscious beside me and there was an infernal chattering of many Japanese voices all about us. Through the jabber of noise came the long-drawn wail of a ship's siren. The *Thisbe* was returning.

Shortly after came the *putt-putt* of the ship's speed-boat, which had been patrolling in advance of her during the return. We had been missed at mess and one of the junior officers who was acquainted with our habit of taking a swim had guessed the cause.

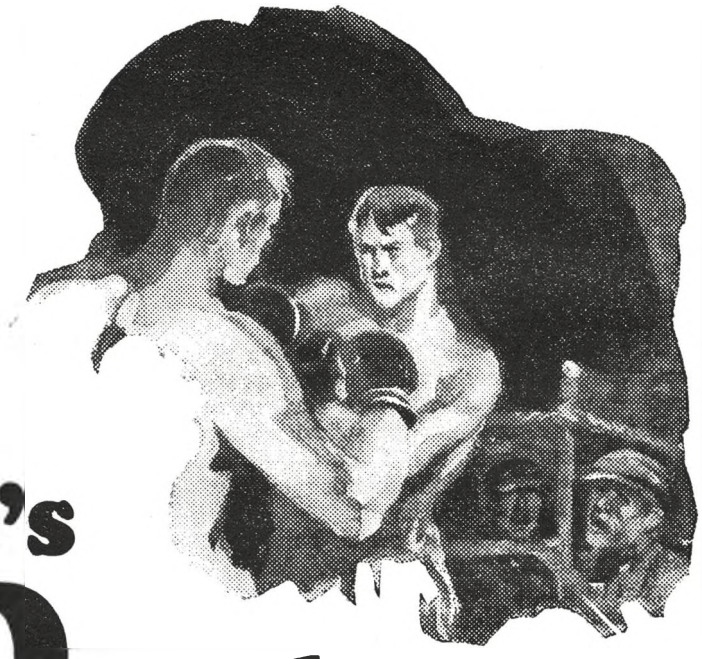
Of course we were severely reprimanded and there was some talk of a court-martial, but good Captain Graham seemed to think that our experience had sufficiently disciplined us, and nothing further ever came of it.

Sidney "Pinky" Radford, Lieutenant Royal Navy, died at Zeebrugge where he was awarded the Victoria Cross for his exceptional bravery.

Major Charles "Bones" Mareno, R. A. M. C., will be remembered with undying gratitude by the hundreds of men whose faces he saved with bits of finger and strips of skin from here and there. Hundreds upon hundreds of men owe their hold upon life and their ability to face the world to his skill as a plastic surgeon.

But it is not only in the surgical field that his influence has been felt. Sometimes when I look myself in the eye in the course of my morning shave I think: "You couldn't look at yourself like that, old chap, if you had been left to your own impulses; if there had been no Bones Mareno to help you preserve your self-respect and teach you that it isn't living which is important —but how we live; nor is it dying which is to be dreaded—but how we die!"

A specially exciting episode in that notably exciting Sport—box-fighting. And Mr. Freitag tells it well.



Joe's Dewdrop

By **C. E. Freitag**

"LAY off that, you sap! This is my dance!"

Just as I heard these words a firm hand clutched my shoulder and turned me about. I looked into the eyes of "Bulldog" Brant, local bully and prize-fighter.

"This is no place for a remark like that, Brant. You at least owe Miss Collins an apology for being rude. According to Miss Collins' program, your dance is the next one, not this."

"The dance after this one was to be yours, but you can go without now," Miss Collins snapped back at him. I could see that she was both hurt and embarrassed.

"Beg your pardon, Miss Collins, I must have been mistaken," Brant apologized. Then he turned to me.

"But you," he threatened, "I'll see you outside." I disliked to make a scene in public, or I'd have smashed him. His taunt thrown at me when he turned to go meant fight. Bulldog Brant was rightly named; he was tough—boasted that he'd had seventy professional fights and never had been knocked out.

I thought things over during the evening, then decided I wouldn't have a chance with him outside of the ring. He was much heavier and stronger than I, and his boast held a lot of weight with me. I'd fought a few fights—eleven in all, most of them preliminary fights. I'd had the luck to win five of them by the knock-out route, but I'd never fought a man out of my class. Yes, I was afraid of him, but I would never let him know it. During intermission I stepped outside, and found him waiting for me. I walked up to him.

"Brant," I said, "you have no reason to fight me, but if there is no alternative, suppose we make it a grudge fight. We'll fight the semi-wind-up on the Thanksgiving boxing card."

"Begging off, are you! I oughta bust you right now, but seein' as how I can get paid for the pleasure of knockin' your block off, I'll take your suggestion. The Lord spare you till I can get my mitts on you!"

WITH a scowl he turned and left me.

Next day I talked to Joe Henderson, a one-time pugilist and runner-up for the welterweight championship of the Pacific Coast. He was one of Ketchel's trainers.

Joe was "tough," but he was one of the

best-hearted men I ever knew. And could you believe it, Joe was very religious! When I told him about the incident the night before, he got excited.

"Now, you see," he said, pointing a finger at me, "Brant will get what he is lookin' for some o' dese days. Mark my woid. As de Bible says, 'What ye sow, so shall ye reap.' An' he's gonna reap, too. Now, listen. I'm goin' to train you for dis fight. I know Brant is a lot heavier dan you, but dat don't make no difference. You have de speed, an' dat's all I want. Be up to de gym tonight."

That night I arrived at the gymnasium at seven o'clock. Joe was there in his boxing tights. I slipped into my trunks and was ready for instructions.

"Listen," he said as he kept feinting at me with his left hand, (he always did that when giving instructions), "I'm goin' to show you my dewdrop punch. When you woik dat blow poifectly, you can knock 'em all crooked. You're de foist one I've ever shown dis pet blow of mine to, an' I want you to feel honored. Put up your dukes an' be careful. I'm a-goin' to slam you—not hard but just a couple o' real live ones."

HE danced lightly about me. Suddenly he stepped in toward me, then out, and in again with amazing speed. He struck suddenly with his left hand for the pit of my stomach. I instinctively dropped my guard to my stomach. His left never reached there, but slipped back, and whipped in a hook to my jaw. Believe me, it landed, too! This blow was followed quickly by a right hook, then a peculiar left upper-cut to my solar plexus. All three blows landed cleanly and with whiplike speed. I saw pretty little stars blinking in the blackness; then my head cleared.

"You see how she's done?" he said, twisting his face into a sardonic grin. "If you learn to do dat punch wid speed, wid de proper body movement, an' do it at de proper time, you can knock 'em all flat."

Joe showed me many punches, ducks, head-slips and so on, that I, being only an amateur, had never seen before. He worked with me every day, and worked hard, too. It was not long until I was handling myself as I had never done before under any other trainer. I was much faster on my feet, could punch harder and with greater speed. I could take advantage of openings left by an opponent much better than I could before. During all this training I had been told by at least a dozen persons that I wouldn't have a chance with Brant. But nevertheless I was determined to fight him, though I was nearly certain I couldn't last over two rounds.

Joe would say: "Mind over matter, son—mind over matter! If you really t'ink you can win, you will win. *An'—you're goin' to win!* Get dat in your head an' keep it dere!"

Then came Thanksgiving Day. I felt fine except that I was terribly nervous. Something kept whispering to me that I was a fool to fight Brant. Then I would think of what Joe said about "Mind over matter," and cheer up slightly. When the special event started, I was called below to my room, received a rubdown, and had my hands taped.

"Now, listen, do you hear me—listen!" said Joe, tapping me on the shoulder. "When you go in dat ring, be careful. Brant will rush you, but keep out o' his way. Don't mix wid him—he's too strong for you. Take your time, an' I'll tell you when to mix it hard. All I want you to do is feint 'im all de time. Don't hit till you're ready, but when you're ready let her rip. If you ever hit 'im wid dat dewdrop, he's gone—dat's all. You know. *Bom!* An' all dey have to do is sweep 'im up wid a broom. Now when you go in dat ring, grin all de time and tell 'im you're goin' to knock his can off."

AS we crawled through the ropes, I heard many of my followers cheer me, but I also saw some of them shake their heads. I vaguely heard the referee announce: "Buff Wilson in this corner, one hundred and thirty-five pounds—Bulldog Brant in this corner, one hundred and forty-five."

After instructions from the referee, we went to our corners. Brant surely looked dangerous to me. Then I happened to think that I had sparred with much heavier men; had been hit hard, but never hurt very badly by any of them. Surely I could stand all he had, so long as he didn't land on me squarely.

I heard Joe say to some one, and loud enough for Brant to hear: "When Buff hits dis doity sock, dey're goin' to sweep 'im up wid a broom. Jus' like dis!" And he swung his fist: *"Bong!* Right on de point."

The bell clanged for the first round.

Brant rushed across the ring. I sidestepped and ducked under his swinging arms. He missed and rammed his head into a corner post. Everyone roared with laughter. He turned on me with a savage scowl on his face. Then I heard Joe's voice: "Grin, you—grin!" And I grinned.

"Little mamma's angel!" Brant slung at me. "I'll get you good for that!"

He rushed again. I was not so successful this time. There was a fast exchange of blows. I remember once landing a hard left jab on Brant's nose. When I connected, I heard Joe say: *"Bam!* Oooh!"

I could hardly block or parry Brant's blows—he was so strong. But as we clinched, I could see the claret running from his nose.

"First blood!" I yelled in his ear.

"Damn you—how long do you think you can stand up and fight?" he flung back.

Just before the referee parted us, I caught a cuff on the side of the head that made me see stars. I managed to hang on until the end of the round. When I went to my corner, Joe was waiting for me.

"Fine, fine!" he admonished. "Keep it up—he can't hoit you. You've got too much speed for him. But don't hit until you're ready."

WHEN the bell for the second round came, I bounded to the middle of the ring and waited for Brant's rush. He came; I landed a left swing to the stomach. I heard Joe say: *"Bum!* Jus' like hittin' a bass drum."

We exchanged punches. I landed two or three clean ones to Brant's head, and received several to my ribs. We clinched, and Brant mumbled something between gritted teeth. I slammed him in the eye for it. As soon as we broke, he charged again. I took a hard one to the side of the head, and went down for the count of five, but I was not badly hurt. When I got to my feet, I rushed but soon found out my mistake. I couldn't infight with him—that was his long suit. The bell rang.

"You're doin' fine," said Joe, "but don't ever rush 'im again. Use dat shift on 'im dis time."

The third round came up. I shifted as Joe told me, and landed clean on Brant's chin. He staggered but recovered. Then he opened up, and I took a bad beating for the rest of the round. When we clinched, I would say: "Hit—hit hard! Haven't you any punch?"

Then he would turn loose and smash me so hard my teeth rattled. He was one of these fellows that struck with his wrist, arm or back of his hand—no difference as long as the referee didn't catch on!

At the beginning of the fourth round he was beginning to tire. I could see he was out of condition. He had stopped his rushing in order to rest part of the round. That was just what I wanted. I feinted him several times, and found that I could keep him guessing.

"Now, *now!*" I heard Joe sing out.

I feinted him again, then struck for the stomach and landed a left hook to his jaw. Then a right cross that popped like a bursting sack. He staggered, and I followed. One more, and he went down. I couldn't believe my eyes. While I was sort of dreaming, he got to his feet again. He surely started in to make up for lost time. He slammed me unmercifully. Lord, how those punches hurt! They jarred me from my head to my feet. Once I nearly fell. I commenced to think the end had come. We clinched and the referee broke us. My head cleared immediately.

"Now," yelled Joe, *"now!"*

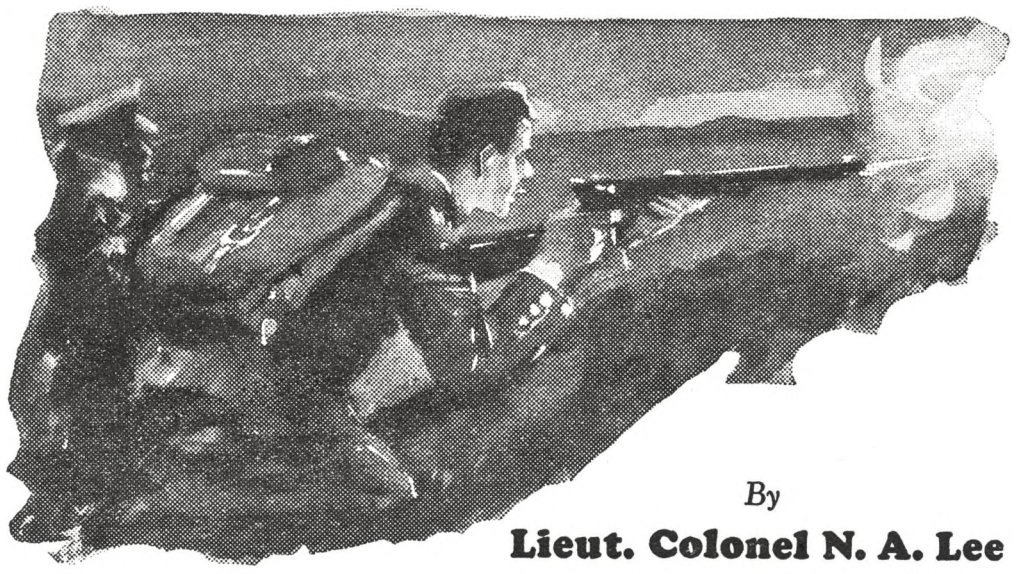
Brant was coming in wide open. I instinctively started Joe's dewdrop. I struck harder that time than I had before in any of the earlier rounds. Both my hooks landed—*"smack—smack!"* I could feel the bones in my hand give. Just as I landed the finishing punch to the body, I felt a terrific jar on my chin. I went down, down, with the yelling of the fans gradually fading out. I heard faintly: "One-two-three." Then darkness slipped back, and I could dimly see the referee counting.

"Get up, fo' de Lord's sake, get up!" came from somewhere. I was lying near the ropes. I remember pulling myself up. I reached my feet waveringly just as the referee counted—"Seven—eight—nine—ten! You're out!"

Brant was stretched upon the canvas sleeping peacefully. It had nearly been a double knock-out! Brant had landed that last punch a fraction of a second after I had slammed him. The house was in an uproar. Joe jumped into the ring and slapped me on the back. "I knew it, I knew it, *I knew it!*" he yelled.

Then above the noise I heard this come from somewhere near the back of the house:

"Joe Henderson's dewdrop! When you hit 'em dey—do—drop!"



By

Lieut. Colonel N. A. Lee

Secret Service

The Mystery so well described in this vivid and authentic chronicle of the deadly game of war has a very real fascination.

I WAS still dazed, for I had slept but a few minutes, I thought; and so the words, "He's a tough beggar—must be made of iron, or some such thing," never registered with me at all until I heard another voice I knew quite well.

It was Major-General W. O. F. Hutchison, ("Willie Hutch") commander of the general staff of the Nth army, in France, who was the second speaker: "Come on there, show a leg, lazy-bones! There's a special conference with the Chief in ten minutes."

I jumped out of my canvas bed-valise as though I had been shot. "In ten minutes!" I exclaimed. "Why, look at me! How can I be ready in that time?"

If ever there was a disreputable scarecrow, I was that one. I remembered getting back to Headquarters, writing out my reports, attaching the identifications, and crawling into my valise after pulling my boots off. I looked at my watch—I had been asleep seventeen hours! I was in a filthy condition, with a five-days' growth of beard on my face. For four days and four nights I had been penetrating through the enemy's lines with Walton, my sparring partner. Much more versatile than I, he was everything from life-guard to chauffeur. He could speak seven major languages and four dialects. In addition, he was also the light-heavyweight champion of England, and the son of a very wealthy Yorkshire woolen manufacturer; quite a respectable friend to have.

"All right, Willie, but I don't see how I can be ready in ten minutes. You might have given more time. I don't want to wake Walton if he's still sleeping, but I would like some of that coffee he makes!"

"It's here. I brought some in myself. I didn't wake you up till the last moment. The Chief wont mind."

I hurried through a hasty shave and polish-up, drinking two good strong cups of coffee meanwhile. Coffee sure bucks one up after going through the mill!

IN exactly ten minutes, seven of us were seated round a little table in a very office-like room, littered with maps and a huge coffin-like box filled with plastic sand in various colors. Here in miniature was the actual front line, No-Man's land, and the enemy's first and second trenches, all as accurately drawn to scale as the intelligence branch, of which I was in charge, could make it. We seven included the major-general in charge of all the staff officers (who was incidentally responsible for the carrying out of the operations) then the brigadier-generals in charge of administration and equipment, ordnance and quartermaster stores, with their staff officers.

My own job was a peculiar one, being called simply "special duties." Those *special duties* called for anything and everything that would help our side, and stop the activities of the other. Under me were all the intelligence officers in the entire Army corps of over eighty-four thousand troops, commanded by Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Dickinson, G. B. E., K. C. B., K. C. M. G., D. S. O., etc., a grizzled veteran with thirty-seven years in all the ranks ranging from second lieutenant to lieutenant-general. He is now a field marshal, by the way.

Sir Henry came in right on the dot, with his "lackey," as we jokingly called Lord Hampfordstead, the senior *aide-de-camp*. "Afternoon, gentlemen. Sit down, please!" We reseated ourselves and waited.

"Lee has brought in some valuable information. How he managed to kill one officer and four other ranks, if he did kill them, and get their identifications, is beyond me. But it is a serious thing to know, gentlemen, that the eleventh, seventeenth and nineteenth divisions have recently been transferred to our front. That can only mean one thing—an attack against us very soon."

The divisions mentioned by the Chief were the famous *Sturm-Truppen* or shock troops. "Iron divisions," they were sometimes called by the French. Very seldom were these three divisions together in a fight—one or two were usually enough for shock tactics. It certainly was a tribute to the Chief and his men!

"It looks as though they want to take back the salient that we captured ten days ago. Now we *must* keep the salient, as a jumping-off place for the drive; on the other hand we cannot afford to lose a hundred and seventy men every twenty-four hours when there's no battling. We must not only keep the salient, but we must straighten it out to stop these daily losses."

There were a series of suggestions from the staff officers around the table. Willie Hutch suggested using two divisions to straighten out the line, after the usual bombardment. That was negatived—for there were three "iron divisions" opposing us, besides the other troops, and the bombardment would advertise everything three or four days in advance. Another proposed a night attack, but that was much too dangerous on a full divisional frontage. I had an idea, but even if it were approved by the Chief, I didn't want anyone else to know about it, for its success depended upon absolute secrecy.

A famous Scottish division had just come into the Chief's command, fresh from three weeks' rest out of the line. They had won battle after battle, and in their last engagement had taken more prisoners than they themselves had suffered in killed, wounded and missing. My idea hinged on them. So after the conference, nothing having been definitely agreed upon, I sought Sir Henry and told him my idea. He thought for a minute, then said, "I believe your plan a sound one. Of course it would be absurd for you to attempt it. I'll sleep on it and give you my decision tomorrow."

THE next day's conference was very decided, as was usual with the Chief when his mind was made up. I was not there, for I was busy taking care of my end, but I can imagine the polite acquiescence—and inward amazement—on the part of Willie and the others, as they heard plans for a big attack on a point nearly *eight miles* from the salient—to take place fifteen days hence! "Use the Scottish division in final reserve," he said. That meant that the general staff must not put this magnificent body of shock troops into the fight until every other unit had been used!

Two days later I returned from England; I had flown there and back. All the staff could say as they busied themselves with the preparations, concentrating men, ammunition and supplies in that sector, was: "What's the Old Man got on his mind? Is he going cuckoo?" But Sir Henry was acknowledged to be one of the best strategists on the side of the Allies, so

they merely "carried on"—and wondered.

Arrangements were made for one of the weakest divisions to hold the salient while the big attack was going on, and so the relief started almost immediately.

One of the first regiments to take over its allotment of the front line was the Blankshire regiment, which had just received a draft of three officers and fifty-eight men. Two of the officers had come straight out from a reserve camp and had been attached to the Blankshires for duty on arrival in France. One was Lieutenant W. H. Kingdon, the other Second-Lieutenant F. L. Woods. Though no one else but myself knew, they had papers which showed they had been in France five months. Well, the Blankshires had been in the front line only a little over twenty-four hours when both these officers were reported absent. They had deserted to the enemy—an unheard-of thing! There could be no doubt about it, for they had volunteered for a double officers' patrol, had entered No-Man's land, and never returned. There had been no firing, and what was worst of all, one of the sentries had heard them say that they were "fed-up with the damned war!" I really felt sorry for the Blankshires, for the news soon spread through the army. The General, red-faced and fiery, denounced the "white-livered curs" in no small measure, and told the general of the administrative section to publish the desertion in Orders.

Later the Chief said, "Well, Lee, did that suit you?" To this I replied, "The other Sir Henry (Irving) was never better, sir!" "All right," said the General, "but if this isn't a success, I'm going to hang you from the nearest tree!"

The "deserters" evidently did their worst, for the first day of the five days' intensive bombardment had hardly started when five raids took place by the enemy, three in the sector under bombardment and two in the salient. In each raid orders and identifications were collected by the enemy which clearly proved to them that what the deserters had told them was correct: namely, that the strongest and best divisions were concentrating for an attack some miles away, with one division only in the salient. In the various regimental headquarters, too, was the special order referring to the deserters, as well as in other places that the enemy's intelligence service might reach.

EVERYTHING seemed to be going all right. All now depended on the secrecy which could be maintained around the Scottish division's movements. Although it was not quite the ordinary thing, no one wondered when the Chief ordered the "final reserve" unit to be brought rather close to the front line and placed midway between the point of attack and the salient.

The steady rumbling of the guns, firing hour after hour, grew more intensely bitter at the approach of the zero hour. I could not help feeling slightly apprehensive as, under cover of darkness, some of the units moved up to take place in the attack, *just at the same time the Scottish division was moving right into the salient.*

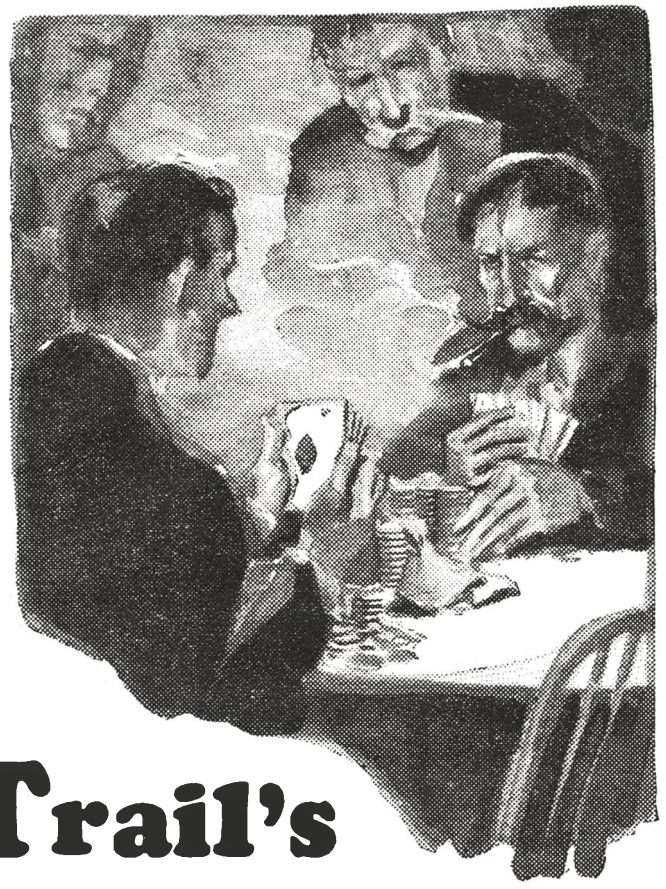
Two hours after zero hour, the salient was straightened out, and the Scotsmen had taken over three thousand prisoners; their own casualties were sixteen hundred. Assured of the splendid success, the Chief stopped the other attack almost as soon as it started. Oh, but the enemy were sore! It took them three days to launch a full counter-attack, they had been so completely fooled—but they carried it on for nearly a week. I got about one hour's sleep during that time, or so it seemed to me. The straightened line remained where it was, nevertheless.

The "deserters," do you ask? They were two of the "special duties" department, volunteers for the job! We tried all we could to get them back to us after the show was over, spending a mint of money in the effort; but to this day I do not know how they died. One thing, however, I do know: they died bravely, an honor to themselves and to their country.

By

Oscar B. Olsen

A wild night on a steamer homeward bound from Alaska comes to an end in a huge joke that is the essence of Humor.



Hot Trail's Hunch

IT was all of thirty years ago. I wasn't more than eighteen then, and how I had got away from my parents and reached Alaska is only a dim memory to me now. But there I was, or rather there I had been, for I was starting home this day on the old *Tewillan*.

She was a leaky little tub with cranky boilers, and I looked with disillusioned eyes at her scarred and battered smokestacks, her paintless railings and her not overly clean deck. After I had paid for my ticket the week before, I was broke, but the seven days before sailing I had put in washing dishes at the Last Chance saloon, so now I had nine dollars to jingle in my pocket.

I was going home and mighty glad of it. I leaned over the rail to take a last look at the slushy streets of Dawson.

"What are they waiting for? It's past sailing time!" I said to a great black-bearded man at my elbow.

"Don't you know?" he answered boomingly. "They're holding the boat up for old Hot Trail Riley.

"Yeah? Who's he?" I asked.

"An old rat of a prospect," answered the black-bearded one. "Got his name because when anyone talked to him he was always 'hot on the trail' of a strike. Well, by gee, this time the old fellow made it! Cleaned up thirty thousand in dust, and now he's going back to the States. He was going on this boat, but he ran across a sick Indian on the way and stopped to nurse him. He's a good-hearted old cuss. He sent word on ahead though, that he'd do his best to make the boat. By gee, there he is now!"

A little old man with a fringe of white

whiskers blowing back from his withered cheeks scuttled up the gangplank, followed by an Indian with a roll of baggage. Hot Trail had the most outrageously bowed legs I have ever seen and as he walked a heavy canvas sack that he held hit against them at each step, threatening to upset him. The Captain met him and together they went below, evidently to put the contents of the bag in the safe.

We craned our necks to look after Hot Trail and the black-bearded man nudged me.

"Look at Dawson Jack," he whispered hoarsely. "By gee, I bet his mouth is watering already for the old man's pile!"

I looked at Dawson Jack. He was a big smooth fellow, with oily black hair worn long and brushed into an upstanding pompadour. I used to see him come into the Last Chance saloon and I knew him for a gambler—a crooked one at that.

As the boat pulled away from the wooden pier, the crowd took stock of one another. There was a mob of returning prospectors, bearded like Roman senators, and a sprinkling of sleek, sly-looking gamblers; but not another fellow on board as young and "green" in appearance as myself.

Before we had been out an hour, a dozen poker games were in full swing. I wandered about from one group to another till I came to one that held my attention: it was Hot Trail Riley and Dawson Jack. There were three other ordinary-looking men in the game, but they dropped out later on.

Dawson Jack was blandly effusive to Hot Trail and kept up a running comment on the other's luck. Hot Trail was winning, his pile of chips growing higher and higher; and he was drinking, though I do not think that the liquor was affecting him as much as was the grinning envy and admiration of the men standing about, and the flattery of Jack.

His frost-seared old eyes were bright as new dollars. He laughed and swore in a high, cackling falsetto as he raked in his piles of chips. It wasn't till after supper that the tide began to turn for him; now, instead of winning almost every pot, he would win a few light ones and lose the heavy ones.

These inroads bit into his pile of chips till soon there were only a half dozen left and Hot Trail took a trip to the Captain's cabin.

I could hear the Captain expostulating with the old fellow, but when Hot Trail came back his arms were full of small sacks of gold dust.

Dawson Jack's lips drooled at sight of the dust but he never lost his caution. Now Hot Trail began to win again. He repeated aloud the warning of the Captain, and crowed over his returning luck. Soon, however, he began to lose consistently.

At midnight there was nothing left of the first stack of gold sacks and there was another raid on the Captain's safe. Two more incursions in as many hours and the old man was cleaned out. With eyes like dried sea-weed, he stood up, looked dully at Dawson Jack a moment, then slouched away.

THE next morning I was standing at the rail watching a school of blackfish playing about in the water, when a thin chirp of a voice quavered, "Say, son!"

I turned. It was Hot Trail Riley, his little fringe of white whiskers whipping in the breeze, his bandy legs swaying to the ship's motion. I mumbled a bashful greeting.

"Son," he quavered, "you saw what he did to me last night?"

I nodded. The old man put his hand in his pocket and drew out a five-dollar goldpiece.

"That's all I have left, son! That's my lucky piece, but it aint lucky for me—I dunno why. But you take this and get in a game with that durned card shark! I got a hunch you can trim him. I dunno why I got that hunch, but I have—so strong I can smell it!"

I could feel my face turning red.

"But I'm only a kid and I don't play poker even!" I stammered.

The old man persisted, however. Like a parasite he hung on me and all day he dinned his monotonous chirp into my ear: "I dunno, son, why I got it, but I got an awful strong hunch that you kin clean him!"

At last in desperation I seized the goldpiece, crying: "And if I lose it?"

He shook his white head slowly. "Well, it aint no good to me—only five dollars—and anyway, son, I got a hunch."

I took the money and getting into the game where the oily-haired Dawson Jack was playing, I threw down my goldpiece.

The crowd grinned; they kidded me, calling me "angel child," because of my yellow curls, my blue eyes and soft skin.

They wondered loudly if my mother knew I was out; they hoped she would never find out I had played poker. They didn't hope it half as hard as I did!

"Hurry up and take it away from him, Jack," advised a bystander, "and then we'll have a regular game! I craves action in *my* looking on!"

Well, he got it—plenty of it! It was eight o'clock when we started playing. The steward was beating the breakfast gong when we finished. And I had won—won back every sack of the old man's thirty thousand!

Dawson Jack sat across from me, his eyes sunken, his thin lips twisted with anger. My hands shook, but I wasn't afraid of him; there were too many men pleased at the outcome to allow him to start anything with me. And Seattle was just around the corner, so to speak.

Hot Trail pulled me up from the table where I had sat so long that the movement of my cramped legs brought tears to my eyes. Together we carried the dust back to the Captain's safe.

"Half of it's yours," cackled Hot Trail. "I had a hunch; I dunno why, but I had it. Now half of the stuff goes to you."

"None of it's mine," I told him curtly. "You made me play against my will, but blamed if I'll take any of the money!"

He argued, he pleaded, he had the Captain and a dozen others talk to me, but I stood pat. When I slipped away from them in Seattle, the only jingle in my pocket was from the nine dollars that I had made washing dishes in the Last Chance saloon.

I couldn't tell them why I couldn't take the money nor how I had won it, for I couldn't tell them that my old grandfather had been court magician to the King in Norway and that his specialty had been cards. When I was five years old he had started training me.

There was nothing I could not do with a pack of cards; there was nothing anyone else could do that I could not anticipate—I knew where every card was all the time.

But my honest, God-fearing mother had made me solemnly swear a promise which bound me at least till I came of age, that I would neither play cards for money nor take money gained by my knowledge of cards. Hot Trail Riley had made me break the letter of my promise—but he could not make me break the spirit of it!

Adventures on Rum Row

By **Elford Leedham**

THE business of rum-running, especially along the Jersey coast and on Long Island, is, to say the least, a very unhealthy and rather unprofitable occupation, as anyone who is on the "inside" knows.

The majority of people in this country have been led to believe that rum-running is the surest get-rich-quick game of the present day, and that the dangers are comparatively few. This, however, is far from the case, as I discovered this summer.

I am a student at one of the leading universities in New York but during the summer months I usually spend my vacation with my parents at their summer home on Long Island. I do not give the exact location, for obvious reasons, but it is near the northern end of the island on the ocean side.

Early in July I made the acquaintance of a young chap about my own age who was the owner of a high-powered motorboat equipped with two twelve-cylinder Liberty engines. He was a young man from a good family—but none too scrupulous morally, and very fond of action and adventure.

One afternoon he asked me if I would like to have a bit of a thrill that night, telling me of his intention of paying a visit to "Rum Row." I jumped at the chance to get a little inside information, so just before midnight we started off.

The young man, whom I shall hereafter call Jim, kept his boat in a little inlet about two hundred yards from the nearest

This extraordinary chronicle of a present-day activity that has become almost a Business is amazing indeed.

house, which was that occupied by his people. We got well out to sea without misadventure, but about ten miles from shore I was startled to find the boat suddenly revealed by the beams from a powerful searchlight. A moment later we were again in darkness. I asked Jim what it was.

"Oh, that was from one of those four-stackers," he answered, adding with a laugh, "but they don't bother us on the way out."

I asked him what he meant by a four-stacker, and he explained that they were the destroyers, who made life miserable for the "runners."

A FEW miles farther on we came upon a disreputable-looking old schooner. There were very few lights visible and no signs of life on board, but as we came within a hundred yards we were hailed from the deck. Jim answered, giving his name, and we were then told to come aboard. He ran the boat around to the eastern side of the old tub and we clambered up a rope ladder to the deck where we were met by a ferocious-looking individual, whom I took to be the Captain because of a battered old cap, trimmed with faded gold braid, which adorned his massive head. Jim spoke with him for a few moments and then told him to load the motorboat with a hundred and twenty cases, at the same time asking him to bring us a "sample."

He left us standing near the ladder and disappeared in a dilapidated-looking cabin. Jim turned to me and told me to "watch my step." A minute later the Captain returned with a bottle. Jim smashed the top against the railing and took a swallow; then with a grimace he handed it to me, telling me to try it. I did—and nearly choked.

"What do you think of it?" he asked.

"Terrible!" I answered, and started to express my opinion in detail when I was interrupted by a sharp command to "shut up." Turning my head, I found myself gazing into the business end of a murderous-looking .45.

"Looky here, you blankety-blank dude!" roared the Captain; "if you don't like that stuff don't drink it—but keep your blinkety-blink trap shut, or you'll go out like a light!"

"Easy there, Cap," Jim said, stepping between us. "He's new at the game and didn't mean any harm."

"Aw right—gimme my cash and get to hell out of here!" the Captain growled, with another bloodthirsty glare at me.

Jim handed him twenty-four hundred dollars and bade him good-by. The Captain did not take the trouble to reply.

When we had got out of hearing dis-

tance I turned to my companion and asked him why our friend had been so touchy about his terrible-tasting booze.

"That's really not such bad stuff," he replied. "You see most of it is made right here on the 'Row'—and it's made extra strong. When the bootleggers get it they tap the bottle and dilute it. Our friend the Captain and the rest of his kind are a little sensitive about the fruits of their labor."

When we were about ten miles from shore, and I was beginning to think that our adventures for the day were about over, I was again startled to see the rays from a searchlight swinging toward us over the water. The rays reached us and stopped, revealing us with the motorboat piled high with cases. An instant later I heard a splash a few yards ahead of us —and then a loud report.

Jim threw both the engines into reverse and yelled to me to throw the cases overboard as fast as I could.

"For the love of Mike, why don't you try and make a run for it?" I asked.

"Nothing doing, old top," he replied. "That baby is only about a mile away and she's got at least ten knots on us and those boys are real mean shots, too—so forget that idea and for the Lord's sake hurry up with those cases!"

One after another the big wooden boxes went over the side—the beams from the big searchlight playing upon us all the time. Hardly had the last case left our hands when a formidable-looking destroyer plowed through the gloom toward us. She came to a stop about fifty yards from our starboard side.

"Stand by for inspection!" a voice roared from the bridge.

A minute later an officer and three seamen, all with drawn revolvers, came alongside in a small motorboat. Three of the men, including the officer, came aboard and while the two seamen "covered" us the officer searched the boat from stem to stern. Finding nothing, he returned, told us in detail and with a strong flow of unrepeatable phrases, what he thought of rum-runners in general and us in particular, warned us not to "pull that line" again and then departed with his men.

"Well, there's another $5,000 gone to the bottom!" said Jim with a wry smile, as we got under way again. "That's the third load I've lost this year, out of five tries."

"How do you figure $5,000?" I asked.

"Well, those cases were worth about forty-five dollars each, so figure it out for yourself," he answered, and added: "I guess I'll lay low for a while. Those boys are after me hot and heavy now and they are apt to make a mistake in their aim next time, and save us the trouble of unloading by sending the whole works to Davy's locker!"

IT was not until late in August that Jim decided to try his hand at the game once more, and invited me to join him again. Together we overhauled the boat thoroughly and put the engine in first-class condition.

Jim told me that he was tired of dumping valuable cargo overboard and said that if he thought we had half a chance he would make a run for it if anyone tried to stop us this time, trusting to luck that we would be able to dodge the shots by steering a zigzag course.

Instead of starting at midnight we waited until almost two o'clock before casting off. The sea was blanketed by a heavy fog and we reached the schooner without mishap. This time we were given a more cordial reception by our friend the Captain who immediately invited us into his cabin, offered us drinks and then proceeded to bemoan the condition of "business." He said that the watchfulness of the four-stackers and sub-chasers had nearly driven them out.

Jim decided to make the trip with a lighter load and ordered the boat loaded with a hundred cases. With the weather in our favor we started the return trip full of confidence. But again as we neared the ten-mile mark we were discovered; this time it must have been from the sound of our engines. A shot was fired but it did not come within three hundred yards of us. We could not see the destroyer through the fog nor, I am sure, could they see us, even with the aid of their powerful searchlight, so Jim decided to make a run for it, saying that they were probably a mile or more in our rear and that he thought, thanks to the fog, that we would reach shallow water before they could get near enough to see us.

He pushed the engines to the limit. As we rushed through the choppy sea at nearly thirty-five knots an hour I heard several shells strike the water close behind us, but the Naval men were apparently

afraid of hitting some other ship and soon gave up their attempts to stop us in that way although they followed us to a point about a mile from shore.

Hardly had we shaken the pursuing destroyer than the fog lifted, and there about two miles to the port side we saw another boat apparently headed in our direction.

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Jim, "here comes more trouble—I'll bet that's one of those fool sub-chasers. If it is, I'm going to pull the same stunt on those fellows."

No sooner had he uttered these words than we again experienced that unpleasant sensation of being exposed, under the glare of a powerful light, to the view of anyone who might care to take a pot-shot at us. Apparently the crew on our newest enemy were of just that turn of mind, for no sooner had the big light swept over us than a shot was fired across our bow. Instead of stopping, however, Jim fed her all the gas and made a sharp turn to starboard.

"They'll never catch us!" he shouted above the roar of the engines, "but they may score a bull's-eye—and then it's curtains!"

"Shall I start chucking the stuff overboard?" I asked.

"Hell, no! What's the use? If they hit us, they'll do it before we get it all over, but if they don't, why we'll be about four thousand dollars to the good," he answered in a determined tone.

The men in the chaser, seeing that we did not intend to stop, opened fire with several rifles and a larger gun but they were unable to train the searchlight on us, due to the choppy condition of the water, and as a result none of their shots took effect, although some of them came so close that they seemingly sent my heart into my mouth.

A HALF-MILE farther on, with our pursuers apparently gaining very little, Jim swung the boat at a sharp angle toward the shore, at the same time shutting down the engines until they made very little noise.

"Now we'll have to trust to luck that those birds don't send that infernal light over this way," Jim said as we headed toward land at a slightly diminished speed.

We were, as always on our nocturnal visits, running without lights, and I could not see how we were going to land without crashing into a rock or something. Jim, however, was familiar with almost every inch along the coast for miles and two minutes later we ran into a little inlet which I recognized as one about a mile from our usual stop.

As soon as we had made fast to a crude old pier he gave a low whistle and a minute later four men emerged from the surrounding gloom.

"Hurry up, boys, and get this load out of the way before it begins to get light," Jim ordered.

With our assistance the men fell to unloading and carting the cases of whisky into a near-by woods, where they were put into a big cave-like hole in the ground, surrounded by heavy underbrush—to be taken away in trucks the next night.

When the last case had been moved, one of the men handed my friend a large roll of bills, which I afterward learned contained forty-five hundred dollars.

We cast off and started for home, but instead of going right back Jim turned and continued on the course we had held until we made the turn. After a few minutes' run at an easy speed, he turned on the lights and headed back for the inlet. We saw no signs of the sub-chaser nor of the destroyer. It seemed we had succeeded in losing them both.

Jim was full of confidence and expressed his intention of making another trip within a few days, but the next day he told me that he had changed his mind and would not make another trip until sometime in September. That morning he had heard of another runner who had tried to slip past the guard and when ordered to stop, he too had made a run for it, but a shell from one of the destroyer's heavy guns had sunk the boat together with its cargo and crew of three. Two other runners, however, had made successful runs that same night—all within a radius of ten miles. This, Jim said, would put the Navy men more on the alert than ever and they would be apt to shoot on sight anything that looked like a rum-runner's boat.

A number of times during the following weeks we heard several reports from among the rum-runners which, from Jim's viewpoint, were not so cheerful. One or two had slipped by the guard unnoticed. Others had escaped by "unloading" but still a greater number, they said, had been caught red-handed or sent to the bottom.

Late in September Jim decided to make another trip. He said our party would

be three in number this time, and later introduced me to a tough-looking thug whom he called only by the nickname of "Pete." The new addition to our crew, who had accompanied Jim on a number of expeditions during the past year, was given a pair of powerful binoculars as we set out, and was instructed to keep a sharp lookout for anything that resembled a Government boat.

When we arrived on the Row I found, much to my surprise, that our old schooner had departed for parts unknown. However, we soon found another, and after a brief parley we started back with a capacity load of a hundred and thirty cases.

There was a bright moon overhead but at times it was obscured by heavy storm-clouds. We had gone hardly more than three or four miles when Pete cried out that a destroyer was heading our way. At the time it was almost two miles to the south of us. Jim decided to keep right on going.

Slowly the gap was closed up until at the halfway mark the destroyer was only about a mile away.

The moon, which had been hidden by a huge cloud, suddenly came out. No sooner were we under its light than a shot was fired across our bow. A minute later we were again in darkness. The Naval men tried to train the searchlight on us but were unable to do so, due to the choppy water and the zigzag course which Jim was pursuing.

This time, however, there was no fog and the men on our trail were not afraid of hitting any boat on lawful business, for none but rum-runners would be out at that time without lights.

The greater part of the time they could only guess at our location; but once in a while the moon would come from behind a fleeting cloud and expose us clearly to their view. Several shots from the big three-inch guns and from rifles struck the water dangerously near us.

SUDDENLY, when we were less than three miles from shore, the moon again exposed us—only for a moment, but that was enough. I heard a terrible crashing of wood, then Jim, who had been sitting in the stern of the boat, was half-lifted and half-thrown a foot or more in the air, hung there for an instant and then pitched headlong into the foamy water. At the place where he had been sitting was a hole almost a foot in diameter, about six inches above the water line.

"Good Lord!" cried Pete, "they sure got him that time! Hurry up and chuck that damn' stuff overboard before they hit us again!"

"But what about Jim?" I asked frantically. "Can't we see if we can pick him up?"

"What the hell's the use?" replied Pete. "You'll never find all of him—that damn' shell must have blown him to bits!"

True, the side of the craft over which Jim's body had gone was now a gruesome sight and from appearances I had no doubt that there was little left of my friend.

In less than two minutes we had dumped our cargo into the sea. The firing in the meantime had died down to an occasional rifle-shot, but none of these came within ten or fifteen yards.

Pete took the tiller as soon as we had dumped the cargo, and changed our course. Ten miles farther on he ran the boat into a harbor and tied it up to a large pier.

A few days later the boat that had cost over $7,000 was on sale for $1,000 with, so far as I know, no takers. However, this was undoubtedly a matter of no interest whatever to Jim!

As the Salesman—

would you accept defeat? . . . or ◆

The prospect's emphatic tone and curt manner are unmistakable "I'm NOT Interested!" As the salesman facing this situation, what would you do? Accept defeat? Or?

SUPPOSE a man you called on greeted you in this fashion. Would you know how to remain completely the master of the situation? Would you still feel reasonably sure of an opportunity to tell your story?

It is no disgrace to answer "No" to these questions—to admit that this and similar problems have blocked your progress.

But, it *is* an injustice to yourself, a rank injustice, to continue indefinitely on the same path, when the means are at your command to handle such situations easily and surely—to use *deliberately* the successful methods which others use only once in a while, by chance or accident.

For—*mark this well*—there is a fundamental rule of action that teaches exactly what to do to win the confidence of the man who has just said, "I'm not interested."

Why "trust to luck" when—

"Back of every successful action in business there are guiding principles, unchangeable laws."

Naturally you ask, "If this is true, how can I quickly acquire these principles?" The answer is, simply thru training that deals in *basic* principles—training that brings within your grasp not merely cold facts, not merely a fund of information, but the live, vital forces that mark the difference between success and mediocrity.

The LaSalle Problem Method of training for salesmen (and for men in every other branch of modern business) deals in such essentials, and *only* in essentials. Intensely practical, it combines the best that has been learned by thousands of salesmen in the "school of experience."

How Are Big Incomes Earned?

Isn't it true that the difference between, say, the $50-a-week salesman and the $200-a-week man lies chiefly in greater ability to meet just such situations as we pictured at the top of this page? Think that over a moment. Then consider that many of the men who take LaSalle training are successful before they enroll. Yet within a few months after starting they report their earning capacity doubled, tripled and often quadrupled, while those without previous sales experience become pace-setters for the "old timers."

The secret, if it may be called a secret, is the fact that they learn to recognize the *causes* underlying success instead of blindly following the methods by which others have achieved success.

Learn the principle and method that turns "I'm NOT interested!" into a receptive attitude.

Ask yourself this simple question: "Have I the necessary knowledge of the science and strategy of selling to make of myself the fullest success of which I am capable?"

For example, can you put down on paper the basic laws underlying every successful sale, the violation of any one of which unfailingly reduces or destroys your chances to make the sale?

These four principles—together with *the plan* which has enabled thousands of men and women to double their incomes—are fully explained in the interesting booklet which will be sent *free* to any earnest man or woman interested in the science of selling.

Compressed into this booklet, which may be slipped into the pocket and read during odd moments, you will find the most inspiring and helpful matter you ever read on this great subject of salesmanship. An application of the fundamental laws which this booklet discloses will result in an immediate increase in your selling power.

This booklet is our contribution to the general cause of better salesmanship. Fill out and mail the coupon.

— — — — — *CLIP AND MAIL* — — — — —

LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY

The World's Largest Business Training Institution

Dept. 9369-SR **Chicago**

I should be glad to receive an outline of your *salary-doubling plan*, together with a copy of "Salesmanship in a Nutshell," also copy of "Ten Years' Promotion in One," all without obligation.

☐ **Modern Salesmanship—**
Salesmanship in a Nutshell

Other LaSalle Opportunities

The LaSalle plan opens the way to success in every important field of business. Check below the opportunity that appeals to you.

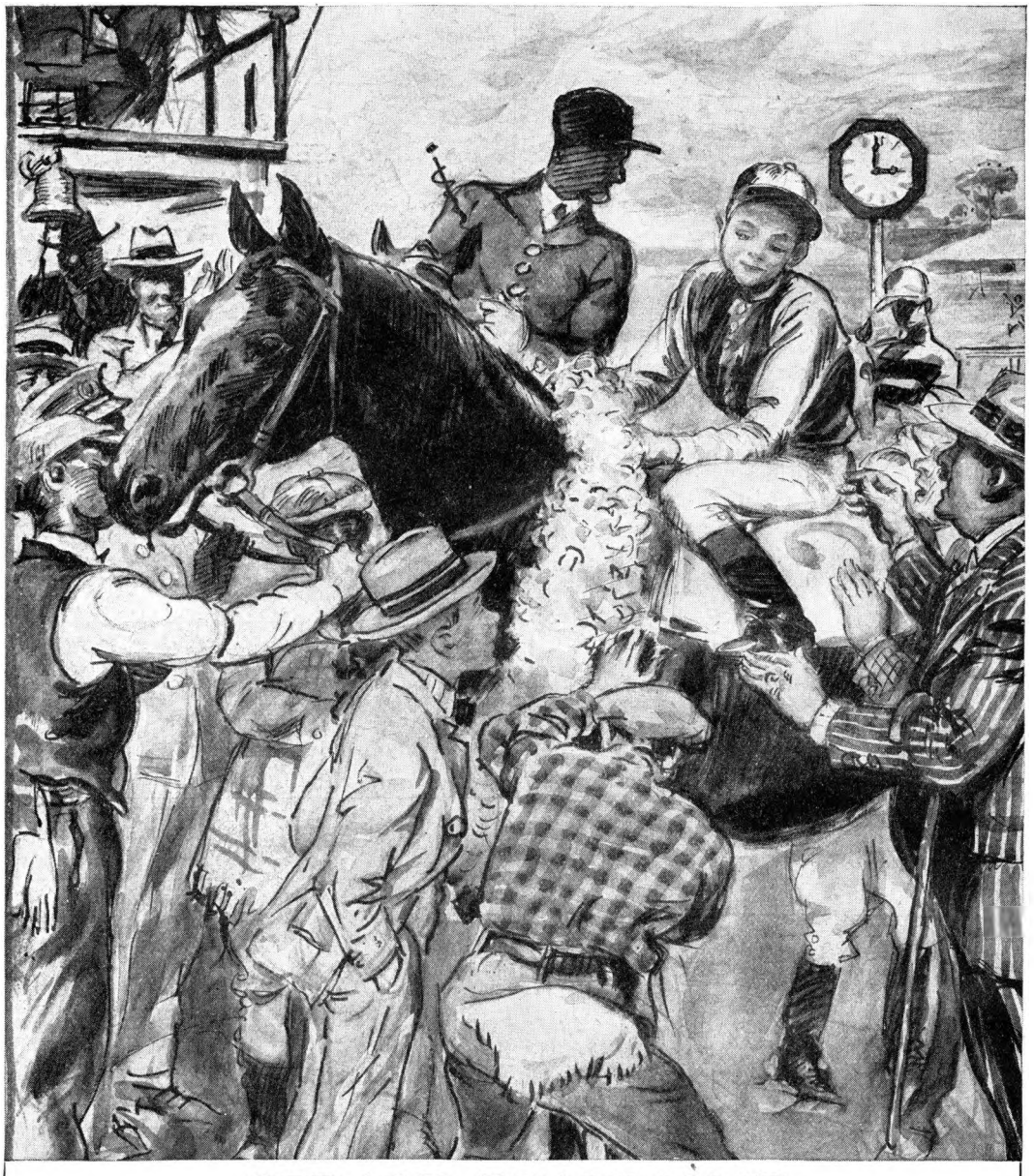
- ☐ Business Management
- ☐ Traffic Management
- ☐ Higher Accountancy
- ☐ Railway Station Management
- ☐ Law—Degree of LL.B.
- ☐ Commercial Law
- ☐ Industrial Management
- ☐ Modern Business Correspondence and Practice
- ☐ Banking and Finance
- ☐ Modern Foremanship and Production Methods
- ☐ Personnel and Employment Management
- ☐ Expert Bookkeeping
- ☐ C. P. A. Coaching
- ☐ Business English
- ☐ Commercial Spanish
- ☐ Effective Speaking

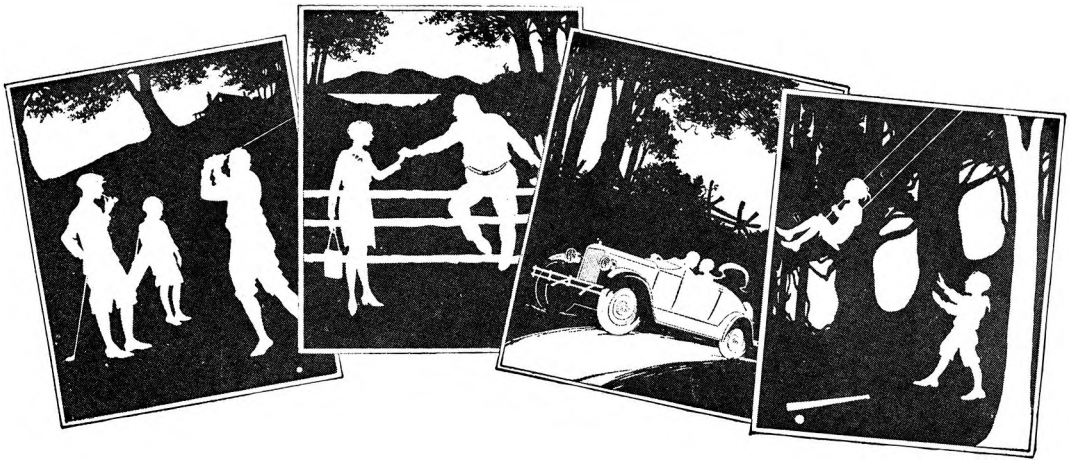
Name.....

Present Position.....

Address.....

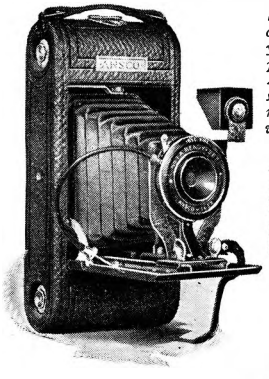
CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING DEPARTMENT



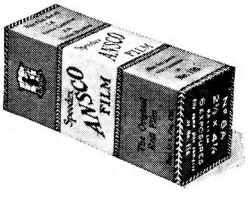


Get pleasures with pennies that dollars can't buy —*take pictures!*

IF you let a camera look every time you see something amusing or interesting, then you have made time stand still. For you can live over again every pleasing thing you've seen, every time you look at what you've taken.



What "Ready-Set" means in cameras, the red box with the yellow band means in film: good pictures without fuss or bother! Ansco Speedex Film comes in sizes to fit every roll-film camera made. Ask for it; you'll be pleased with the results.



The Ready-Set Camera costs only from seven-fifty to thirteen-fifty, according to size. In no other way can you make such a lifetime investment in happiness. And the up-keep—just pennies! A roll of good, reliable Ansco Speedex Film costs about the same as a gallon of gas—but the results live forever.

The Ready-Set camera has no thorns to its joys. It's made for easy, instant action without the bother of adjusting for light or distance. Just open—aim—shoot. As easy as that. And good pictures are yours.

ANSCO

CAMERAS & SPEEDEX FILM

Pioneer Camera Makers of America

Ansco—Binghamton, N. Y.

Because it's toasted, the hidden flavors of the world's finest tobaccos are developed

LUCKY STRIKE

"IT'S TOASTED"