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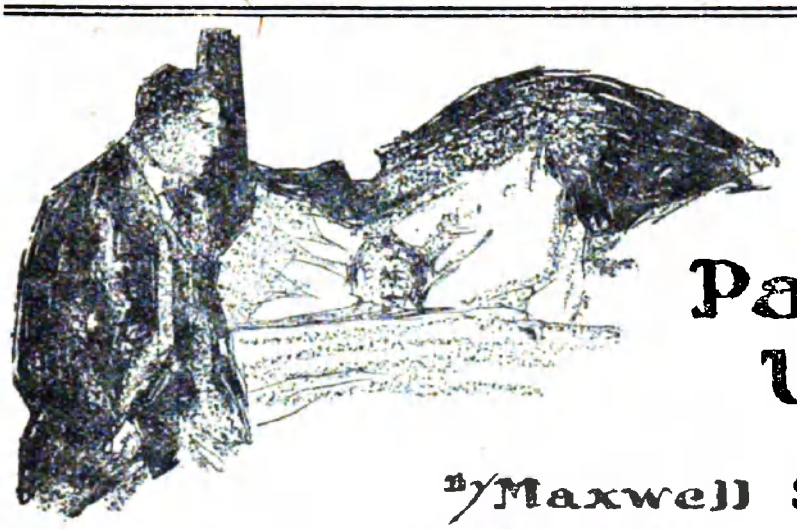


Passed Up

By Maxwell Smith

Author of "Detour," "Unclaimed," etc.

A FAST AND FASCINATING BATTLE OF WITS, WITH SIX MILLION DOLLARS AS THE STAKE. THE SMOOTH AND CLEVER SARVER, ALWAYS A MOVE OR TWO AHEAD OF THE GAME, DANGLES THE PRIZE BEFORE THE MEAN EYES OF QUERCK, THE ROTTER. AND THE QUAINT LITTLE MAN, KNOWN AS THE MOUSE, WATCHES AND NIBBLES. . . . . .

CHAPTER I.

JONES glanced over the top of the evening paper. "Old man Norton's pretty far gone?" he commented interrogatively.

There was a note of disappointment in the speech. For two—for three—years Jones had looked expectantly for something material to result from Sarver's relationship with M. M. Norton. Something in the nature of spoils, of course. He never had doubted that Sarver was nursing the Wall Street plunger along for some distinct and profitable purpose. But nothing ever had happened. With the passing of Norton, therefore, Jones saw a rich prospect vanishing.

On his back on the lounge, Sarver continued to stare vacantly at the ceiling. The neglected cigarette in his hand, trailing to the floor, sent a wavering stream of smoke up his arm to gather in a shifting blue cloud above him. He didn't answer.

With unnecessary rustling Jones changed his position. He made another effort. Sarver might at least tell him what designs he had had on Norton. Why he had waited so long—too long.

"I guess he's counting his chips now," said Jones leadingly.

Sarver grunted absently. Encouraged by the slight response, Jones persisted:

"The paper says he can't last more'n a couple of days."

Sarver chuckled silently. He caught the drift of Jones' thought. A number of times Jones had hinted openly that there must be possibilities in connection with M. M. Norton.

"Must be tough to have to cash in when you've a wad like his," said Jones.

He drew some information.

"A deathwatch isn't generous in figuring a man's remaining days," said Sarver. "It's a soft job, Jones, sitting around waiting for a man to die. The reporters don't hate it exactly. You can't blame them for being a bit enthusiastic—for heightening the suspense, I mean, by shortening his span. That prolongs an easy assignment; there's no deathwatch unless the great man is likely to die promptly. M. M. is a great man," he remarked cynically, "because Wall Street is interested in him. Wall Street expects his death to reveal his holdings and is all primed to knock the stuffing out of them."

Blowing gently into the smoke cloud, Sarver thoughtfully watched it weaving. Jones nodded attentively, waiting for more.

"Wall Street's going to be fooled," added Sarver. "Throw over an ash tray."

"Then"—Jones drew an inference at once right and wrong and hastened to express it as Sarver showed signs of returning to his reverie—"then he isn't in such bad shape as they say?"

"Not quite." Sarver rolled over to locate the ash tray that Jones skated across the floor. "But it's only a question of time, and too little time at that. He may live a week, the doctors told me this afternoon."

"I don't get you," confessed Jones. "You say he's going to fool 'em, and then that he's sure enough going to die. What——"

"Oh, that——" Resting on his elbow as he crunched the cigarette into the tray, Sarver looked at his lieutenant. "I simply meant that the wise ones down in the Street aren't going to find M. M. heavily committed on anything. He's always kept them guessing, and he has them guessing now. They won't find anything to hammer—nothing dependent upon him for support. He stayed on his feet to the last minute quietly closing out. That's all I meant. He hasn't a chance of pulling through. And, as you said, Jones," Sarver nodded somberly, "it's tough—tough."

Flopping onto his back again, Sarver closed his eyes, thinking of the man who was dying—and what his death should bring. Jones also remained silent, his brows wrinkling as he strove to place a deeper construction on Sarver's words. He could not rid himself of the gloomy belief that a bright prospect was, literally, dying on their hands. Yet it was beyond him to see how M. M. Norton now could be used to advantage.

"M. M. should have been operated on long ago," related Sarver after a while. "Now he's got such a snarl of complications that all the doctoring in the world can't save him. I'm sorry, Jones, though I don't suppose many others are. He didn't make friends."

Jones knew that; everybody did. It was a tribute to Sarver's personality that he had come close to Norton. Also, so far as Jones could perceive, it had created a condition that was new in Sarver's life—a ripe, sincere friendship in which there was no ulterior motive. For Jones was satisfied that Sarver had a real liking for the stock plunger.

From personal observation, Jones was aware that Norton's lack of intimates was not due to any disagreeable quality in appearance or manner. Norton had been in the habit of coming to the apartment about once a month to chat

an evening with Sarver. And though Jones had been present only in the guise of a servant, he had found the millionaire jovial and democratic.

M. M. Norton's aloofness was the outgrowth of his intolerance of any one who sought benefit through friendship. Long ago he had come to distrust the advances of others because of the many who had attempted to worm information from him. In the Street it was said, and truly, that none who ever asked him for advice on the trend of the market had been granted it. During his earliest successes, he had learned to know the breed that thrives on the brains of other men.

He had found it a breed so numerous that he had come to believe he was not wanted for himself, but only for his ability to size up the market and conduct a campaign. Particularly had that conclusion been established when his calculations proved wrong—as the calculations of the most knowing sometimes must—and he had been criticized by those to whom he had given the dope on which he had risked—and lost—his own money. Naturally inclined to be a lone wolf, experience had confirmed him in that direction. Throughout the years he had drawn more and more into his solitary shell, seldom forming even a temporary alliance, and then only when it became briefly necessary to further his own interests.

Such was the man whose sole intimate Sarver had become; the man whom Jones had expected from day to day to see sheared by Sarver, or used somehow in the shearing of others; the man who now lay dying without Sarver having turned a trick on him.

That Sarver had won the confidence of Norton did not in itself surprise Jones. There were few who could withstand the rogue's whimsical individuality, his unostentatious but hearty fellowship. Even Wall Street, which knew Sarver as a conservative investment broker and Norton as a spectacular operator, received it as natural enough that Sarver should have penetrated the inner threshold to Norton's regard.

In fact, the Street winked and kept an eye on Sarver whenever Norton was known to be active in the market. Nothing ever was gained by those who aspired to checkmate Norton through this watching of Sarver, but still the delusion remained fixed that Sarver was right-hand man to the plunger and was employed to cover up major operations. That was the only explanation which seemed to fit the sustained friendship with the lone wolf. And Sarver was credited with a magnificent astuteness in having attained intimacy with Norton; for of course it was assumed that he shared in the winnings.

Whereat both Sarver and Norton laughed. Each for his own separate reason was pleased not to disturb the existing impression which named them in partnership. Out of it Norton got an ironical amusement because here again he was misleading the men he so often outmaneuvered in the market. Out of it Sarver got the reflection of Norton's financial strength; a considerable asset in maintaining his pose of legitimate enterprise and probity while he practiced brazen outlawry. Who would suspect the associate of M. M. Norton of being involved in grand and ingenious larceny on the side? Of directing and at times actively conducting burglarious and kindred depredations which, to the despair of the police, remained open on the records?

It never occurred to the Street that Sarver had followed the line of least resistance in setting out to ingratiate himself with the lone wolf. He had asked no favor, and had made it clear that he would ask none. And gradually Norton had warmed to him—had accepted him as that rarity, the man who wants nothing in return.

But, as Jones so long had surmised,

while Sarver *asked* nothing he had planned *to take* something. At the start he had courted Norton's friendship with the deliberate intent of applying it in some way to line his own pocket. Not in the stock market; no. The blood tingle for Sarver did not lie in gambling with money, but in staking his freedom upon his cunning and generalship in outwitting the law.

Thus, merely forward looking, with but a general notion that some day it would afford opportunity to reap the sort of dividend he craved, Sarver had obtained Norton's friendship. Then had entered a circumstance for which he had not bargained: he in turn had warmed to Norton, including him among the scant handful for whom he had genuine feeling. Cherishing the friendship, he had refrained from jeopardizing it by centering any of his criminality upon Norton. To himself he had explained it otherwise by deprecating what he termed his own mawkishness and adding that he was saving Norton as an ace in the hole against dull times.

The collapse and imminent death of Norton had caused Sarver to review the deferred possibility. As he relaxed on the couch his mind was an incongruous mingling of sentiment and business; his own outlawed brand of business. He had come to the conclusion that he might as well rake in on the ace. There was no sense in letting sentiment interfere with business; not now. His attitude would have been different had it been possible to save Norton's life. Since he could not be saved what did it matter that the project Sarver contemplated hinged upon the death of his friend? Sarver did not regard the proposition as cold-blooded. He simply was taking advantage of a natural situation. Norton would not be affected; he would be dead.

Shrewdly eying his reposeful chief, Jones wondered whether sorrow monopolized his attention. Sarver's preoccupation indicated that sorrow did not, as Jones knew his silences. So Jones angled again, touching the point upon which Sarver should be interested.

"His millions don't do him much good now, eh, Dick?"

Sarver's eyes popped open. The remark jibed so neatly with his pondering.

"Not any good," he agreed, "unless you count prolonging the agony as worth while." He paused, surveying Jones. "I was thinking something like that," he added.

"Yeh?" invited Jones. He grinned. Sarver's admission and his reflective tone sounded vaguely promising. But Sarver's lids again were drooping.

Jones coughed suggestively and pursued the conversation:

"You over to see him again to-day?"

"Um." Sarver smiled at this evident fishing excursion. He marked Jones' air of eager expectancy. Jones' nose was lifted high into the wind.

Sarver abandoned his drowsing. Jones would keep pestering him.

"Just what is it you want to know, Jones?"

The reply was pointed: "Who gets his dough?"

"I'm not sure." Sarver sat up, swinging his feet to the floor. "Why?"

"Oh, nothing," said Jones. "Only—— Say, Dick, how'd you let the old bird get away? I always thought you——"

"I did, Jones," acknowledged Sarver. His face puckered and the steel-gray eyes softened. "When I picked up with him I did have an idea that we could——" He broke off with a gesture. "But that isn't what kept me friendly with M. M.," he explained quickly. He would have denied this, but his vanity, which not long ago had come close to bringing about his downfall, had a part in that declaration. He intended to convey to Jones that had he wished he could have made Norton a victim. Proud of his cunning, he could not let Jones think for an instant that

it was growing stale; that in taking up with Norton he had started something he could not finish.

Dimly Jones comprehended Sarver's feeling, although sentiment was an emotion strange to him, aside from his allegiance for Sarver, which he did not recognize as sentimental. He recollected the quiet comradeship of Sarver and Norton when he had seen them together.

"Huh," he said, and graphically, "You got stuck on the old bird and let up on him?"

"You show rare insight—delicacy," remarked Sarver flippantly; he wanted to change the tenor of the talk.

"Aw——" Jones passed the sarcasm. He was intent upon M. M. Norton's millions. "Has he got any folks?"

"Yes." Sarver's lips pulled thin, his eye held a flickering contempt. "A nephew."

"Does he get the roll?"

Lighting a cigarette. Sarver hesitated, puffing.

"Not as things stand at present," he replied ambiguously.

It was like pulling teeth, thought Jones, but he stayed.

"You going to beat him out?"

"I am not," returned Sarver. "I'd like to beat him up!"

"Eh?" Jones wagged his head lugubriously. "How come?"

"Because I think about as much of him as M. M. does. He's a rotter."

Sarver's expression told that he meant that absolutely. Jones looked blank. He was all mixed up; he couldn't follow.

"You know him?" he asked inanely.

"I've met him." Sarver glanced at his watch. "Mr. Alonzo Querck will phone in a few minutes. Tell me how you like his voice. It gives a complete specification of him."

Alonzo Querck? Jones never had heard of him. But he was prepared to dislike him because, regardless of everything, Mr. Querck was a contender with a flying chance at the Norton fortune. If Norton didn't include him in his will, Querck, as the only relative, could doubtless make an interesting contest that would tie up the estate and perhaps force a compromise.

"What's he calling you for?" scowled Jones.

Sarver shrugged. "About M. M.'s money."

"You just said he won't get it."

"But he hasn't given up hope," laughed Sarver thinly. "There he is"—as the phone rang. "You answer."

As he listened at the phone, Jones' scowl blackened. If Alonzo Querck's general make-up matched his voice, Sarver had not gone amiss in categorying him as a rotter. The grating monotone, unctuous and self-satisfied, aroused Jones to revulsion. He handed the receiver to Sarver and stood by, anticipating that the conversation would tell him something definite about what was afoot.

It didn't. Sarver said only that nothing had happened—to call on him in the morning. Querck's greasy voice, which Jones was near enough the instrument to hear, objected that time was getting short and that Sarver would have to hurry. He was saying more along that line guardedly when Sarver curtly wished him good evening and hung up.

"He sounds like a bum, all right," declared Jones, whose language at times became more apt than elegant. "You're sure he won't get the dough?"

The reply was clearly disingenuous, perplexing: "Not if M. M. has his way. M. M. aims to help out some colleges and cat-and-dog homes. His will is made—has been made for a long time."

"Hell!" The expletive was the acme of disgust and went well with Jones' dour countenance. For the moment he missed the significance of Sarver's "if." "What a waste of coin!" sputtered

Jones. "Hell, Dick, can't we grab off a hunk? What's the use letting——"

"How, Jones?" interrupted Sarver. He laughed softly at the vehement outburst from the usually placid Jones. "Tell me how?"

"Well——" Jones slowed up. "We-ll——"

"Well?" urged Sarver.

Jones grinned sheepishly. He had no suggestion.

"Oh, I dunno." he said. "You ought to think up something, Dick. He's been your pal. You got the head. Maybe" —he brightened—"maybe he'll leave you——"

"He won't," said Sarver crisply. "He thinks I've got enough. I've told him so whenever he's hinted that I might use his dope on the market. I wouldn't take his tips," he explained as Jones stared, "because if I had he'd have crawled back into his shell. And, Jones"—Sarver's smile was almost defiant, as if he were caught in some shameful act—"I didn't want to lose M. M. No more do I want him to leave me money," he ended with a snap.

To Jones such an attitude was crazy, but what could he do about it? If Sarver chose to be queer, the question was settled; he was the doctor. So far as Jones could see, money was money, whether it was given to you or you took it. He'd rather have it come as a gift; that carried no risk. Jones never faltered in the face of danger, but he went into it only to fatten the roll on which he planned to retire—some day. He supposed Sarver was prompted by a like consideration. But therein he showed that despite their long association he did not completely understand his directing genius. Sarver himself would have had difficulty in convincing Jones that the spice of money was in the getting of it by his wits.

Therefore Jones nodded dejectedly. He sighed. What'd Sarver want to go get stuck on old Norton for?

"I get you," he said, which wasn't quite the truth. "It's tough, though."

Sarver's moodiness passed. The smile returned, and the hard gleam of hazard shone in his eyes. He gave Jones' spirits another fillip.

"We'll see how tough it is after M. M. has gone," he said. He made an odd distinction: "We can't tap M. M. then. With the others," he laughed, "that's something different."

Jones stared blankly. Sarver to-night was a series of contradictions.

"What you going to do?" Jones was near to pleading, for he was more at sea than when he had begun to pump.

Switching on the lights, Sarver stepped to the middle of the room. Intently he looked over it, visualizing.

"I'm going to get a million—or two —if I can," he said. "Now let's do some scene shifting. We're going to entertain the Mouse," he chuckled. "I asked him to drop in to-night."

CHAPTER II.

THE attitude of Jones toward the Mouse was immediately recorded. He swore—with repression, but heartfelt vehemence. He preferred to have plenty of space between himself and the little man whom Sarver had musingly but ineptly dubbed the Mouse. The less he saw of the Mouse—or, more correctly, the less the Mouse saw of him, the better he liked it. For to Jones the Mouse had become an ever-present and consuming menace. Allowed his own way, to follow the ruthless law of self-preservation that had been his in the cruder days before Sarver adopted him, Jones would have arranged for something heavy to land on the Mouse. Under the circumstances, he mourned that Sarver so hampered his style by barring violence.

Sarver, however, was wholly sensible to the danger. Otherwise he would have paid no heed to the Mouse. But

he regarded it as no more than potential. In jousting with the Mouse, as he well knew that henceforward he must, he had none of Jones' pessimism. His self-assurance was superb, but not braggart. Having distanced the hunt so often, he was confident of ability to do so again. He welcomed the intrusion of the Mouse for the further savor of conflict it afforded.

Since the crime in which Sarver, yielding to vanity born of consistent victory, had pulled a trick so amazingly brazen as to be brutally raw, he and the Mouse had come to understand one another. That affair had concerned the disappearance of a hundred thousand dollars' worth of unset diamonds as Sarver—apparently—was about to buy them. As a remembrance, besides the loot, he had the Mouse.

The Mouse had appeared as investigator for the insurance company in that case, and had developed a moral certainty that Sarver did get the gems. But Sarver had so fortified himself in a position to cast doubt upon the diamond merchant that it seemed as though the latter had attempted to victimize Sarver, whose check he already held. Alone in his suspicion, the Mouse had kept it to himself. Moral certainties are valueless in court. He had sat in to play a waiting game.

Sarver had welcomed him good-humoredly as the Mouse's hand was revealed. He was just a little tired of so completely outclassing the police. Not that he craved danger; of course not. But—well, wouldn't the triumph be greater if some of the pursuit got a glimpse of him, but failed to carry on to the kill?

After the diamond theft he kept in friendly touch with the Mouse for two reasons—because at close range he could observe more accurately just how great was the little man's wisdom, and because, perversely, he liked him. He relished the Mouse's quiet conversational barbs, innocent-sounding speeches with a hidden sting. To the consternation of Jones the Mouse became a casual guest at the apartment. He read Sarver's purpose in maintaining friendly contact and it suited him also to have things that way. Some time when he least expected he might pick up from Sarver the missing thread.

Then the contest was broken wide open and all pretense laid aside when the Mouse bobbed up to snatch a prize from Sarver—seventy-four thousand dollars in currency that had been irretrievably lost by the bank clerk who stole it, but which seemed to be within Sarver's grasp. Once more, however, the Mouse had found Sarver securely intrenched. There was no proof that he had been criminally implicated. So again the Mouse had pigeonholed his observations and let Sarver go his way. Their relations remained unchanged except that Sarver's respect for his opponent was manifestly enlarged when the Mouse let it be tacitly understood that he was making this a personal matter, playing out the hand alone.

It was illustrative of Sarver's bold processes that he should invite the Mouse to call while embarking on another venture, the first since the disaster attending the bank clerk's plunder. But Sarver really was taking precautions. The Mouse was working on the back trail, he knew; on events prior to the diamond theft. While without fear that a case could be made out on any of his endeavors, Sarver wanted now to learn just how well the Mouse had things hooked up in his own mind.

With his efforts centering upon the Norton fortune, Sarver conceded that the Mouse might prove troublesome. He might, for instance, come forward with a recital, libelous without proof, but circumstantial enough to attack Sarver's credibility seriously. Sarver desired to appear with clean skirts. The Mouse could spatter mud.

Wherefore Sarver was confronted by a double problem, interlocking. There was the execution of his plan to collect a million—or two, and the handling of the Mouse. All in all, he felt it advisable to put a damper on the Mouse.

CHAPTER III.

THE scene shifting incidental to the reception of the Mouse was not extensive.

Sarver shoved a chair over with its back to the flat oak desk which served also as reading table.

"I'll sit here," he announced to the wondering Jones.

At an angle to that chair and about eight feet distant to the right he placed another in front of the grate.

"The Mouse here," he said.

Unless the chairs were moved their occupants would face one another over the arms. The Mouse might be expected to haul round so as to have a more direct view of his host and quarry, but even then Sarver would remain bulwarked behind the high side of the Turkish chair. If he sat that way he could lean naturally in a position which would keep his right hand practically out of sight.

"Switch these other chairs around so he won't drop into any of them," said Sarver. He lent a hand and gave the room a haphazard look that was not out of keeping and appeared accidental.

"I don't want him to notice he's being maneuvered," said Sarver, "but I want him to sit right there."

Jones ceased muttering to ask, "Why?"

"To keep him out of the light." Sarver smiled critically at the indirect fixture which furnished the illumination. "We've got to study the light effect, Jones. Get up there and put out a couple of bulbs."

Mounting on a chair, Jones unscrewed the bulbs from their sockets. Sarver shook his head.

"Another one."

That left a single bulb burning. The room was dim as he wished it, but with a quick motion Sarver disapproved the arrangement.

"Too noticeable," he declared. "Too stagy. Put them all back, Jones. We'll try the floor lamp."

Jones obeyed and climbed down. He saved his questions, now Sarver was in action, waiting for the results to explain themselves.

The floor lamp stood behind the desk. Sarver disconnected it and carried it across the room to the wall farthest from the chairs he had placed for himself and the Mouse. There was another socket there in the wainscoting, and he plugged in the lamp.

"That's it," he said as Jones extinguished the other lights.

The burned-orange shade gave the room a pleasant, subdued duskiness, to which the delft-blue walls contributed a harmonious tinge. The effect was restful, and, being so, the faintness of the illumination was not conspicuous.

Opening a drawer in the desk, Sarver glanced at Jones.

"Can you stand ether?" he asked.

"Ether! What—who——" Jones gaped.

A two-ounce bottle in his hand, Sarver shut the drawer.

"Don't get excited." He laughed. "I don't want you to take it. Does a whiff of it make you sick is what I mean?"

"Uh-uh," said Jones with visible relief. "But what the——"

Sarver uncorked the bottle. The pungent reek of ether arose. He grinned at Jones.

"In case you don't know," he said, "you're now in the act of putting an unfortunate puppy out of misery. It —er—had fits. Ate too much red beef, probably."

With a flourish he poured half an ounce of the colorless liquid on to a magazine. The atmosphere was instantly permeated.

Jones, leaning forward in open-mouthed bewilderment, got a heavy inhalation and coughed.

"What the hell, Dick!" he spluttered, backing away and pressing a handkerchief over his mouth. "What's the big idea? You going"—his eyes widened above the kerchief—"you going to feed it to the Mouse?"

"Jones—Jones!" chided Sarver, corking the bottle. "Why not ask if I'm going to cut his throat? The place smells, I told you, because you just got through anæsthetizing a pup that had fits. We require an explanation for the Mouse. When he rings the bell, we'll open the windows to make it seem we're trying to clear the air. Meanwhile——"

Turning again to the desk, he took up a flat mahogany box, about the size of a two-pound candy package. Velvet-lined, it contained two automatic pistols. Smiling thoughtfully, Sarver polished the guns with a silk kerchief and returned them to their velvet bed.

"If you'd use one of 'em on the damn' Mouse," began Jones feelingly.

"You'd like to do it, wouldn't you?" said Sarver lightly.

"I sure would," affirmed Jones. "Say the word and——"

"And have the dear public entertained with the news that after the third shock you were pronounced dead, three minutes and forty-seven seconds after the first contact," finished Sarver. "Strategy, Jones, has got downright violence backed off the boards. Besides," he laughed softly again, "who ever heard of any one using a gun on a mouse! Run off into another room, Jones, if the ether's too strong for you. I've got to fix myself up to welcome the little man."

When the Mouse entered the shaded room fifteen minutes later, Sarver was lolling in his chair. Without rising, he waved greeting to his visitor; they were on free-and-easy terms despite their status as hunted and hunter, for they were alike in one particular as disbelievers in rushing strong-arm methods.

"I'm lazy, Hutton," smiled Sarver. "Drop yourself anywhere."

The chair that had been placed for him being the only one in any way facing Sarver, the Mouse settled into it. The odor of the ether brought mild inquiry to his face.

"Had an operation in the flat?" A bland smile accompanied the words, with just a trace of doubt in it. Had he come upon Sarver in the midst of—something?

"It is sickish, isn't it?" Sarver wrinkled his nose and related the fiction about the dog. "It'll blow out soon, though; the windows are open. You don't mind it?"

"No." The Mouse's tone was dry. It might be true about the dog, and it might not. His quiet gaze roved over the room while Sarver branched into small talk.

They might have been cronies, with never a cloud between them; Sarver slouching on the small of his back, chatting over his right shoulder; the Mouse placid, with hands drooping idly between his knees. But beneath their indolence each felt in the other a watchful keenness, and himself stood ready to parry or thrust.

Before long the Mouse observed that there was a specific reason for this meeting. From the start Sarver saw that his visitor was on guard, perplexed by the ether which hung so persistently in the air. That was as he desired. The Mouse was guessing, and would be skeptical of all that was said.

Abruptly Sarver grew serious. Sitting up, he turned sidewise in his chair, leaning on his right arm as he spoke.

"I want a straight-from-the-shoulder

talk with you, old man," he said slowly. "You have an idea that I—well—— What say?"

The Mouse nodded. He felt the presence of Jones near by—and he thought of that in conjunction with the partly filled, red-labeled bottle on the table.

"I'm in your hands," he jested. "Fire away."

"Pour yourself something first," said Sarver. "That's the same Scotch. I want you to feel—at peace."

Following the inclination of Sarver's head, the Mouse turned to find Jones, now cast as servant, at his elbow. The ice tinkled in the glasses as Jones lowered the tray for the Mouse to help himself.

"Mix mine, Jones," said Sarver, and the Mouse noted the catlike silence of the man as he moved to the table and performed the service.

Still resting on his right arm, Sarver took in his left hand the glass Jones proffered. He raised it sociably.

"How!"

"How!" returned the Mouse, and drank with him.

As Jones noiselessly retired, the Mouse moved his chair. He faced his host more directly and at the same time brought the door within range of the tail of his eye. He could avoid having Jones steal up on him again.

"Let's be frank with one another, Hutton," said Sarver. "There's nothing to be gained by circling."

"There isn't," agreed the Mouse. "Where do you want to start?"

Sarver's tone crisped. "Right up to date. I'll put it bluntly: What would you do if I should be drawn into a court contest? Wait a minute! It would be a civil action."

"That's a hard question to answer offhand," said the Mouse. He crossed his ankles deliberately. "It depends on the nature of the suit—and what side you happened to be on. Will you tell me that?"

"Not any more than that it would be the right side. I wouldn't be an interested party; only a witness."

"Then"—the Mouse's hands flopped deprecatingly—"what difference could be made by any interference of mine?"

Sarver's lips pursed disappointedly: "I thought we agreed on frankness?"

"I'm asking you for that," said the Mouse. "What sort of suit would it be? Friendly? Or would there be some intimation of—er—of crime—say fraud, perhaps?"

Staring into his glass, Sarver seemed to ponder.

"No. Not in the technical sense, although an effort might be made to set up a suggestion of something—unethical. You see, Hutton," he went on seriously, "I'm putting this up to you because I've been asked to do a certain thing. To undertake a matter of trust, in fact. Well, smile if you will! I wouldn't hesitate except that you"—he hesitated with a wry smile—"that you have your ideas."

"I apologize for smiling," said Hutton gravely. "You struck me rather suddenly with that. Go on. You hesitate because——" he prompted.

"Because you might choose an unfortunate time to let go what somebody recently referred to as loose talk."

The Mouse digested that, his wide eyes placid, unchanging. He was looking for the motive in this confidence. He doubted that Sarver was stating the truth. Not the whole truth, at any rate. It was possible that Sarver was in earnest in asking for a truce—his effrontery was great enough—but the Mouse had yet to be convinced.

"You mean that such loose talk might upset the trust—you said trust—reposed in you?"

"In a way—yes. Of course"—the shadow of a threat was in the suave tone—"I'd protect myself against any

attack. You understand that. But we won't bother about that till we come to it. I'm not thinking of myself now. What I want you to know is that if you were to start anything you would cause confusion which in turn probably would result in a great injustice."

Frowning, Sarver stopped. The Mouse, however, thought he saw his tongue go into his cheek. He waited while Sarver emptied his glass and set it on the desk.

"Injustice to whom?"

"To those on whose side I'd be a witness." A flaunting twinkle in the eyes contradicted the otherwise sober expression: "I'm leaving it to you, old man, to decide whether it would be fair to these people if I do as I'm asked. You see what I mean? If I'm going to jeopardize their interests, I'll stay out."

"You would do that," murmured the Mouse. What the devil was Sarver getting at? "I'm sorry, Sarver, that I can't make up your mind for you. I don't know enough about the situation. Why should your presence—as a witness—endanger the rights of any one?"

"It wouldn't but for you," came the ready reply. "I'll go further with you, Hutton, by telling you there would be considerable ill feeling in the case. Capital of a kind could be made out of the charges you might be induced to bring against me, although you never could make them stand up. In fact, there might be persons involved"—he picked his words, regarding the Mouse meaningfully—"who would be willing to pay you sufficient to meet any verdict for libel recovered by me against you, and still leave you comfortably well off."

The Mouse's fair brows went up. The circle seemed to be narrowing. He stared tranquilly.

"You wouldn't do that, Sarver?"

"What?"

"Make me comfortably well off?"

Sarver laughed. "You've more sense than to think that. I'm not trying to bribe you. Good Lord, no! I'm simply trying to convince you how easy it would be for you to make a regrettable mistake by again jumping at conclusions. Don't get me wrong—please!"

"I hope to get you right," smiled Hutton, "later. I'm doing my best to follow you. I confess I'm still a jump or two behind." He referred not only to the immediate interview, but to the bigger pursuit, and his quarry grinned understanding.

"Just now," demurred Hutton, "you ask for guarantees, but yourself make reservations. Let me ask you something: How much do you think I could tell that would affect your position—of trust?"

Sarver pulled a face.

"That diamond deal sticks in your craw," he said matter-of-factly. "And also that I—ah—found a baggage check for a grip that had contained seventy-four thousand dollars stolen by a bank clerk. Out of these items you've constructed all sorts of uncharitable thoughts," he deplored ironically; "unkind suspicions."

"Is that all?" The Mouse was equally frivolous.

"All!"—reproachfully. "It's too much, Hutton; far too much. What more would you want?"

"More than I've got." The Mouse made his feeble gesture, flopping his hands upward and letting them sag back into a slack fold. He chuckled audibly. "Some day, Sarver, if I can fix it so, we won't hold any secrets one from the other. Some day one queer event too many is going to happen in your vicinity. Your foot's going to slip—and somebody'll be there to catch you as you fall."

"You're a funny mouse," mused Sarver. It was the first time he had used the nickname before Hutton, and he laughed at the answering gleam it pro-

voked. "D'you mind telling how far you've gone?"

The pure impudence of the inquiry brought compliance.

"I'm making up a list," admitted the Mouse passively. "Pecking at odds and ends, you know, to see if they fit. I've looked over your season on Long Island last summer. That was good. And clever, Sarver. Nobody ever got within a mile of you despite the three number-one jobs you turned off. A hundred and fifty thousand in Liberties, wasn't it, from the old skinflint? Oh, of course you weren't anywhere near his house at the time! Thirty-odd thousand in jewels at the country-club fête. That was a smart job, but small for you. The bank was good! Over a hundred thousand in bonds and thirty thousand cash. But nobody ever suspected our jovial friend Sarver!" He grimaced. "Not at all."

"Wonderful!" taunted Sarver. These jobs never could be pinned on him. "I wish you'd been on deck then. There were more sleuths to the square inch——"

"I'd have been as dumb as the others," interrupted the Mouse with a sigh. "I didn't know you at that time. There's another little thing on the list—not that it helps any, but I think it belongs. Another unsolved jewel robbery—remember it?—in Washington a year ago. You were there."

Sarver's eyes danced, and there was pleasure in his laughter.

"I like the way you tell it, Mouse. But you frighten me!" He shrank in mock terror. "I'll have to carry a perfect alibi with me everywhere."

Hutton shrugged. "One of the best things you do is carry an alibi. I'm waiting for you to leave a hole."

"Thanks." Sarver ceased bantering. His voice sharpened. "You're welcome to your list, Hutton. May it grow rapidly. You know you can't get anywhere with such a line of chatter. You've nothing back of it. You're only wasting time. And I tell you now, if you ever start a move you can't make good on I'll put you in jail for criminal libel."

He didn't expect the little investigator to wilt. He was merely talking out his part.

Hutton received it equably. He was vastly puzzled. Sarver was throwing out a smoke screen, of course. But why?

"A suggestion of bribery, eh, Sarver," he summed up, "and then a threat of jail? Well, well! Was that all you brought me here for to-night?"

"The jail proposition isn't so far off the mark. It's one of those things that might come true." Sarver stretched his long legs, then snapped round again to his visitor. His gaze was cold, but friendly. "You can tell fairly well when advice is sound, Hutton," he said softly. "Listen to this: If you're tempted very much to cut in on me with your battery of loose talk, come see me first. That is, if you haven't heard from me in the meantime."

Respecting the man for his resourcefulness and craft, for his boldness and daring, Hutton did not utterly reject the advice.

"I might do worse. Now let me say a word in this so frank conference." He grinned. "If you're shaping up to turn a trick, Sarver, I'll do my damnedest to be right behind you all the way. I haven't made much out of your circumlocution—your stuff about a prospective lawsuit in which you'll be upholding justice. I don't put any particular stock in that. But if it's true, I can give you some advice. Come clean on it, and——"

"We won't say any more about it," interjected Sarver sharply. "I've explained my position. If you don't believe me, all right. We won't quarrel over it ahead of time. Use your judgment, Hutton when the occasion arises. No!" He waved the other to silence.

"Not another word. Let's forget it. Have another high ball and I'll show you a present I just got. Help yourself to the medicine. Jones! Ice!"

Emphasizing the finality of his dismissal of the subject, Sarver swung out of his chair and round it to the desk.

Hutton also got to his feet as Jones entered with the ice. While his glass was being replenished he watched Sarver take from the drawer the mahogany box containing the two automatics.

"There!" said Sarver, raising the lid. "What do you think of these?"

For a moment the Mouse didn't think. The exhibition was too sudden, too far removed from what they had been talking about.

Calmly he manipulated the siphon. Were the guns so very remote from the tail end of his and Sarver's conversation? Or very near? Was this a display intended to go with the repeated warning to go slow?

Lifting his glance, the Mouse caught a baleful eagerness in the eyes of Jones as they lighted on the guns.

"That's all, Jones," said Sarver curtly.

Looking at him, the Mouse saw the angry sparkle shot from Sarver's eyes upon Jones. He turned his head to watch Jones leave the room.

Placid as ever, but twice wary, the little detective brought his glance back to his antagonist. The guns were not irrelevant, but portentous. Jones' expression, and Sarver's condemnation of it told that. But it was ridiculous to imagine that Sarver, the master of finesse, would commit murder in his own apartment. He had a feeling that Sarver would not commit murder at all. Unless done in sudden passion, killing was always a confession of weakness. Sarver was not weak. What, then, was the meaning of the guns?

Sarver was smiling, balancing an automatic in his right hand. Its muzzle ranged over the Mouse.

"An odd gift, isn't it, Hutton? Why do you suppose any one would give a man a brace of pistols in these days?"

"Perhaps"—Hutton looked over his glass unconcernedly—"perhaps the giver thought you might be engaging in a duel."

"Dueling pistols! That's funny." Sarver struck an attitude, laughing. "But wait! The weapons must be satisfactory to both men. Here——" He twirled the gun so that he held it by the barrel. "What d'you think of the weight of that? About right, isn't it?"

Unblinking, the Mouse took the gun in his left hand. The only way he could fathom Sarver's game was to play it out with him. He joggled the weapon judicially.

"They work smooth as silk," said Sarver. "Try it. Pull back the slide. It's empty."

Setting down the glass, the Mouse transferred the gun to his right hand. He flipped out the cartridge clip which, as Sarver had said, was empty. Throwing back the jacket, he made sure there was no shell in the chamber.

"They're all right," he said, "but they jam more easily than a revolver." He pulled the trigger harmlessly, replaced the clip, and handed the gun to Sarver.

Sarver laid it in the case beside its companion.

"I'd hate to shoot anybody," he commented sententiously. "Did you ever do it?"

"Once."

"Aha!" cried Sarver. "The Mouse is a killer!"

"No. He didn't die. But—he's in jail, Sarver."

"Where all second-rate crooks ought to be," said Sarver carelessly.

Closing the pistol case, Sarver returned to his chair. Hands in trouser pockets, he lolled again, his legs stretched out. His eyes, half shut, were mirthful, but his voice was sober.

"I'm sorry we can't come together.

That you can't see the light." Obliquely he contemplated the Mouse, who remained standing. "If you'd only forget—— But it doesn't matter. I'm glad anyhow that we've talked things over. It's been an evening well spent, Hutton; it's helped me a lot."

The mocking accent on that last did not fail to reach Hutton. He could not see wherein Sarver had gained anything from the meeting. Apparently Sarver had scored in some way, however. Racking his brain for some item upon which to fasten, Hutton reverted to the ether, the reek of which was still discernible in the room. What did the ether mean? That and Sarver's alleged confidence concerning an impending legal contest? And the guns? And—Hutton became acutely conscious of it for the first time—the scant illumination; had that, too, a bearing on his riddle? He allowed the probability, for Sarver worked in strange ways, yet it all continued unintelligible.

"In everything there's something for somebody," said the Mouse tritely to cover his puzzled thoughts. "Myself, I wrestle along on the presumption that things'll make out all right in the end. It doesn't worry me that we don't come together at once, Sarver. We're both healthy, likely to live a while."

Their eyes met steadily. Sarver found a question in Hutton's speech and answered it:

"Yes; I think we will. I'm not looking forward to your funeral. I'd miss you—in my business. Tush," he shook his head, "we're getting morbid. Sit down, old man, and——"

"Not any more to-night. It's getting late." Hutton's lips twitched humorously. "I don't mind confiding that I've a little problem to mull over," he said.

"Profitable employment—thinking," came the gentle sarcasm. "I wish you could stay, but if you can't——"

Sarver escorted his visitor to the door, and, going through the hall, put his right arm across Hutton's shoulders. It remained there while they stood a minute at the door. When they parted, therefore, there was no lack of cordiality, and his failure to shake hands seemed only a friendly absence of formality.

Returning to the living room, Sarver hummed contentedly and switched on more light. Jones trod in on his heels.

"You're poking that bird too much," charged Jones darkly. "What was that line of bunk you were handing him, anyhow? You've got him figuring——"

"Figuring—what?" asked Sarver. "You hit the idea there, Jones. His head's going round like a mouse in a cage—but he hasn't a glimmering of what he's spinning after. You don't get the fine joints, Jones. What I told the Mouse is likely to turn out to be the truth. But he doesn't believe more than half of it, if any."

"I'm dumb, I guess," admitted Jones. "But I'll bet he's asking the janitor right now if we had a dog. He'll know you're a liar on that——"

"Consequently he'll conclude that I lied about other things. I thought of that, too. When you don't want to be believed, Jones, tell the truth under conditions that make you appear a liar. Friend Mouse is sure there's something doing. He thinks I tried to give him a wrong steer; even that I wanted to buy him off. Hence, since he hasn't the least notion where we're heading, he's going to stick close. He'll come as near as he can to being a regular bedfellow."

Jones snorted. "Who wants him close——"

"I do," said Sarver composedly. "Have a drink, Jones, and quit grumbling. And Jones—don't look so viciously at the little man next time. You make him suspicious!"

Jones didn't answer, but picked up the ether bottle. He was peeved; this fooling with the Mouse had no point

to it for him. Sarver might be amusing himself, but he was only making things tougher. Why did he have to stir up the Mouse?

"Want this smell any more?" growled Jones.

"No. You can throw it out." Grinning, Sarver opened the pistol case.

"Say"—Jones glowered at the ether—"what the hell was this junk for? You've got dizzy ways of kidding, Dick."

"Eh?" In the act of inserting a pencil into the muzzle of one of the guns, Sarver paused. "Oh, that? It kept the Mouse from getting too inquisitive. Listen, old man, and I'll give you a complete map. Collodion consists of gun cotton and ether. I had to use collodion to-night—here"—he turned over his right hand, the palm and the inside of the fingers glistening with a filmy substance. "If I hadn't sprayed the place he'd have smelled the collodion on my hand—and not being a dumbbell, he'd have got the flash. He'd have kept his hands in his pockets and wouldn't have touched a thing in here. As it was, the ether was so strong he didn't think of collodion. Otherwise"—bending again to the gun and lifting it by the pencil stuck in the muzzle—"we wouldn't have this deadly weapon with none but friend Mouse's finger prints on it."

Tenderly he placed the gun in a silk handkerchief. Jones' gloom departed. He laughed.

"I told you, Jones," murmured Sarver, "that it isn't customary to hunt a mouse with a gun. That wasn't quite true. It's a matter of how you use the gun."

CHAPTER IV.

THE trouble with Alonzo Querck was his, oh, so splendid opinion of himself. From childhood it had grown on him until he was within an inch of being the smuggest thing on earth. The moment he opened his mouth to speak, before sound actually issued, a stranger could place him.

Ordinary folks don't open their mouths much when they talk. Alonzo Querck did open his, in an irritating, pauseful manner, and held the pose before releasing words. He implied that the hearer must be honored by Alonzo Querck's merest utterance and gave the impression that he was of two minds whether to bestow that honor. He never was known to be guilty of hasty speech, for haste was unseemly. When finally he let words fall, the supercilious monotone, greasily superior, was just what you expected would belong to him.

Alonzo Querck was a snob and a prig—and, when it came to the pinch, worse.

Perhaps he wasn't entirely to blame. He was the development of a pampered child. But, at that, had he not been a sponge for this sort of thing, he could have outgrown the fostered belief that he was very near perfection and become something like a livable citizen. He did not.

Alonzo got off to a bad start when his crib was encircled by adoring parents, two indulgent and admiring uncles—including M. M. Norton—and divers other worshipers. His was the accident of being the first grandchild and the first nephew. Naturally he was looked upon as an extraordinary human; and even as an infant he didn't dislike it. Of course he learned to expect every attention and to get what he wanted when he wanted it. Which was fair enough and "so cute" while he was in rompers; yes, up to the time he merged into his teens.

About then the uncles, including M. M. Norton, began to observe that Alonzo was becoming an insufferable young prig. Had the womankind of the family observed similarly, he might still have been saved. But Alonzo had remained as the only juvenile in the family; practically, that is, for his only

cousins were three thousand miles away on the coast and virtually strangers. He had no competition, therefore, in the eyes of his grandmothers and a couple of spinster aunts. His egoism thrived and never gave him a chance to see where he was going wrong. As the years went by he became more and more and most abominably self-sufficient. When time removed the brigade of related admirers, others remained. Alonzo could count his men friends on no fingers, but there always were women who thought him perfectly lovely in his lofty superiority.

There was one great big mistake in Alonzo's life, though, which he ultimately realized. M. M. Norton's indulgence and enthusiasm for the shaver had degenerated into an expressed disgust. When Alonzo got through college, M. M. outspokenly declared that Alonzo should be put to work and recommended a job on the docks until a heavy-fisted foreman and others—M. M. openly hoped there would be many others—knocked the priggishness out of him and some humanity into him. Alonzo had sneered in his own peculiarly insulting fashion and thereafter evidenced an aloof distaste for M. M. Norton. At that time he did not dream that some day he would have use for a section of the millions M. M. was accumulating. That need did not appear until fifteen years later when his bankers managed to penetrate Alonzo's disdain and communicated that the moderate fortune left by his parents was almost gone. Alonzo never had been stingy with himself and he assuredly never had swapped nods with anything that could be classed as work.

The news shocked him; but only for a minute. His egoism came to the rescue. True, he hadn't seen a great deal of M. M. Norton since that crass and impertinent remark about the docks. But he was generous enough to concede that his millionaire uncle probably had attained some delicacy with ripening years. Alonzo was willing to forgive him and be friends.

What could be more natural than that his uncle, having reached a proper degree of appreciation, should take Alonzo to his bosom and make him his heir? What else could he do with his money? The far-off cousins, whom M. M. had seen only on a few occasions and could scarcely remember, had money enough. Besides being the stellar light, Alonzo was the only needy member of the family; needy through no fault of his own, but because his parents inconsiderately and shamefully had left an inadequate fortune. M. M. Norton undoubtedly should be overcome by the opportunity of bequeathing his money to Alonzo. Thus Alonzo in a quite normal lucubration.

The second shock, which brought realization of the fifteen-year-old mistake in connection with Uncle M. M., astounded Alonzo. Approached with really very decent condescension and a flabby, forgiving handshake, M. M. Norton proved just as receptive as a frozen tadpole. He was glad to see his nephew again—he said so politely—and wouldn't Alonzo stop in again when passing?

For nearly a year Alonzo did stop in, with increasing frequency as his funds diminished alarmingly, but he hadn't made noteworthy progress when his uncle was stricken and went to his deathbed.

Then Alonzo met Sarver. Or Sarver, who knew of Alonzo from Norton, met him, and, taking him into a quiet corner, talked with him. It was Alonzo who inspired Sarver to make use of the ace that had lain so long dormant.

That's why Alonzo Querck phoned Sarver the evening on which the mouse trap was partly set; why Sarver started to carry the fight to the Mouse. That's why Querck called at Sarver's office down on Broad Street the following day.

Under other conditions, Querck would have cut this Sarver person dead; for Sarver was no whit impressed by his company. He appeared to Querck as common clay which was unable to recognize fine china. However, considering that Sarver was making himself useful, Alonzo had decided to endure the temporary association.

"Sit down, Querck," said Sarver brusquely. He did not wish his visitor good morning.

Querck sidled his sleek bulk gracefully into a chair. He had closed the door on entering, but looked over his shoulder to assure himself that it remained closed. He was just a trifle nervous as he bent to Sarver, his jaw opening preparatory to speech.

"You have something to tell me?" he asked stiffly.

"Yes. Your uncle told me about his will yesterday."

"Ah!" Querck's blue eyes widened uncontrollably. His weight rested on his cane. "Ah?"—inquiringly.

"You were right," said Sarver baldly. "You don't get a cent."

"Ah!" said Querck again. His smooth jowl bagged and his mask cracked further under a momentary gleam of fright. His only chance of getting money lay with M. M. Norton. And, good heavens! he wasn't forty years old!

"But you can do something? You agreed——"

"To think it over," interrupted Sarver coldly.

Querck almost forgot the preliminary mouth-open pause: "I would pay you well. My uncle, of course, does not quite understand. He is—ah—unappreciative, lacking in the finer sensibilities."

"Doubtless," said Sarver dryly. The man was nauseating with his posing and utter absence of feeling for the uncle whose money he coveted.

Sarver became quietly businesslike, his gaze hard and boring.

"I expect to be well paid for anything I do, Querck. How much money do you suppose your uncle has?"

"I don't know. A great amount, I believe. Enough"—the unpleasant voice and manner were injuredly indignant—"to provide handsomely for me, as it is his duty to do."

"A duty he can't see for a minute," emphasized Sarver. "He has in the neighborhood of six million dollars. How much would satisfy you?" He smiled sarcastically.

The blue eyes were greedy. "I should have it all——"

"But you won't. How about half?"

"Three million dollars!" Alonzo Querck exhaled a long breath and wet his lips. In this annoying situation he found it difficult to maintain a gentlemanly reserve. "Could I—could I get that?"

"No," said Sarver.

Querck stared. "But you said——"

"You might get two million."

"You said half—three——"

Sarver offered his cigarette case, and Querck took one mechanically. He declined a light. Sarver lit up.

"The difference would be my—fee. One million dollars!"

The cigarette crumpled in Querck's fingers. He dropped his stick. He spoke the fastest words of his life:

"My God! This is extortion!"

"You might call it that." Sarver nodded frigidly. "You might also remember that you're standing on thin ice."

"I!" Querck was almost animated. This Sarver person was absurd and impudent.

"You. If I have it right," Sarver smoked pensively, "you already are guilty of conspiracy to commit a felony!"

As that seeped into Querck's outraged intelligence, he gasped in a futile effort to retain his dignity. In his self-

sufficiency, his attitude that he had a right to Norton's money, he had not considered himself as within the angle of criminality in anything that Sarver might do to obtain the fortune for him. He heard Sarver make it brutally plain.

"Conspiring to commit a felony, Querck, would get you ten years. During these years you wouldn't need any money to speak of."

Thin lipped and contemptuous, he laughed to himself over his fellow-conspirator's consternation. There wasn't much sand behind Querck's broad front. He'd require jacking up.

"There will be no danger," pursued Sarver. "I take the risk. It's worth a million. You sit back and collect two million. It isn't really extortion. I'm making you a gift, if you'll look at it right."

Querck picked up his cane and clutched his English cap. He got up.

"Sit down," ordered Sarver. "You need the money, don't you? Keep still and you'll get it. Sit down."

His ease and the steel-gray eyes, almost hypnotic in their cold intensity, steadied Querck. He obeyed nervously.

"Ten years! Ten years!" he gaped.

"I said you *could* get it—not *would*. You won't get anything but two million dollars if you stick to me. Get that into your head and let it stay. Now listen to me."

While he compelled Querck's attention, giving him a couple of minutes to compose himself, Sarver made a mental note to raise the ante. Not now, but when he had things sewed up.

At length Querck signified that he was ready to listen.

"Y-yes?" rattled out of his dry throat.

"I'm the one that's taking all the chances," asserted Sarver. Maliciously he jabbed: "After I fix it to get the three million I'm not through. I take a chance then on getting my end."

Something of his meaning reached Querck. He bridled at the insult, delivered shrewdly by Sarver as a tonic to bring back the other's poise.

"I am a gentleman," stated Querck.

"And I've known gentlemen to welsh," put in Sarver. "I'm glad you catch my meaning so quickly. And that you've changed your mind about backing out. You'd be crazy to do that, Querck"—the blunt familiarity made the would-be heir straighten—"because you're lucky to get the long end. I might have made it fifty-fifty." He smiled anticipatively: it would be an even split at the finish.

The soothing, confident tone steadied Querck. He recollected that he would be receiving no more than his due—less. He had his position to uphold; the family honor. Without money he couldn't do that. Without money—— He shuddered.

"To whom would he leave the money?" he asked, delaying acceptance of the terms.

"To institutions—colleges and things and to create some sort of a foundation."

"How—how"—Querck's monotone rasped more perceivably—"how would you arrange—to get it?"

"I'll attend to that." Sarver saw by the greedy eyes that his man was in line. He did not ask for a direct committal; time enough for that. If he did so now Querck probably would take fright again. "I'll attend to that," he repeated, "if the million goes. What?"

Alonzo Querck nodded—and looked about him uncomfortably. For once the delay in his speech was not affectation.

"Yes." He was profoundly relieved that Sarver did not demand an agreement in writing; relieved and fearful that Sarver would. He could not consent to that. It would be evidence. Ten years!

"Then we're all set," said Sarver offhandedly. "Don't worry about it.

Querck. Begin counting your millions. What did you say?"

Querck cleared his dry throat. "When—how soon—will he——"

Sarver stifled an exclamation. M. M. Norton was his friend, damn it, and this ghoul couldn't wait for him to die!

"I wish he'd live for years," snapped Sarver angrily. "I'm not rushing him over for any damned money. Don't ask again how soon."

The rebuff got under Querck's tender skin. He did not have to take such talk from a—a criminal!

"I won't permit you——"

"You'll permit anything I choose to do. You'll stay quiet, too—or broke. As you like." Sarver got up springily and threw the windows wider. He hurried the meeting to an end.

"Here's something else I want," he said. "You have a house at Mamaroneck, haven't you?"

"Yes." Although a bachelor, Querck had an imposing little summer place which he felt was necessary to his exalted position. His surprise at the sudden turn in the conversation to it, revived his perturbation. What had his country home to do with M. M. Norton's millions?

"I want to use it," supplied Sarver. "And you. Some night soon. I'll let you know."

"For what?" Querck was too amazed to resent the confident effrontery.

"For a burglary."

"Really!" Querck floundered. A burglar in his own house! "I don't understand."

"You don't have to. Oh, come back to earth, Querck. It will be a stage burglary; nothing will be taken. But," Sarver smiled felinely, "something else will happen that won't concern you. There's a mouse I want to trap," he added cryptically. "That's all."

"A mouse?" repeated Querck vacuously. "I don't——"

"The house won't be damaged," interrupted Sarver serenely. "Nor will you—but you'll have to be there. It's one of the conditions, Mr. Querck," softly, "of my undertaking to get you two million dollars."

Painful misgiving appeared on Querck's countenance. He wanted to break off his association with Sarver, instanter, but—what could he do? He gestured helplessly.

"Very well," said Sarver. "I'll let you know when I want you. You won't care if I hurry you? There's a client waiting to see me."

Querck had no objection to being hurried. He went precipitately, thankful to get away from Sarver's compelling presence.

So swiftly did he go that he did not see the little man sitting patiently in the anteroom.

From the doorway of his office Sarver nodded genially.

"Come in, Hutton. What's on your mind?"

"Nothing particular," said the Mouse. He settled into the chair just vacated by Querck. "Those bonds you bought for me——" He had given Sarver a commission in the fore part of their acquaintance when he was studying him. "I wondered whether you could pick up a few more. I've another thousand or two that might as well be working."

Sarver laughed. The Mouse was kidding him again. The Mouse did not expect him to believe the stated object of his visit was the only one. He was kidding by making Sarver engage in legitimate business. Understanding that, Sarver laughed; but he laughed also because the Mouse had swallowed the come-on and already was lying close.

"These small investments, I know, are more bother than they're worth," deprecated the Mouse, "but—well——"

"No trouble at all." said Sarver cheerfully, and they talked of bonds while their thoughts were elsewhere—Sarver's on a prospective "burglary" and the

Mouse's on the relationship between Sarver and Alonzo Querck, whom he had recognized as M. M. Norton's nephew.

CHAPTER V.

SARVER looked from M. M. Norton to the nurse standing by the foot of the bed. He was thankful that the awnings and the drawn shades permitted little of the afternoon sunshine to filter into the room. The shadows mercifully lessened the monstrous change that had come about in the man who lay so sorely stricken—the hollowed cheeks and sunken eyes, the slow breathing through slightly parted lips that now were loose with weariness and pain, the wasted arms so feebly disposed on the coverlet.

The nurse, vivid in her crisp white amid such somber setting, shook her head with a suggestion of wonderment while she smiled compassionately. Her gesture related what Sarver already knew—that only the fighting spirit of M. M. Norton was keeping him alive; the spirit that had carried him upward in his lone-wolf battle on the Street and sustained him when at times he had been hammered down.

Together they looked at him as he rested with closed eyes, the only sign of life his faint breathing. Yes, the half light was kind. Yet they thought also of the cruel touch which made it necessary, which prescribed that the sunlight be shut out of the last days of the plunger whose life had been so full of contest and energy. His affliction had been great enough, but to crown it had come atrophy of the optic nerve, bringing darkness upon him before the spark itself went out.

The few minutes of silence became oppressively long for Sarver. He found himself straining to hear the buzz of motors on the avenue, a hundred feet away. He wished Norton would move; that the nurse would move.

Soundlessly his lips formed a question—"Asleep?"

Enabled by some sympathetic sixth sense to divine her patient's condition, the nurse gave a negative shake. Frequently he would lie motionless like this with never a sign of wakefulness though he was not sleeping. Nevertheless his manner now brought to her a little frown of doubt. He had not previously fallen into such quiet while Sarver was present.

The nurse as well as Norton regarded Sarver as a welcome visitor. He invigorated the patient, rousing his waning strength and power of resistance even more effectively than the stimulating drugs which represented all that medicine could do for him. She understood that without consciously seeking a reason, because she, too, felt the magnetism that had served Sarver in the engineering of his predatory incursions. She regretted that others did not come who could affect Norton as did Sarver; and she wondered why there were no others. It was hard to believe that the millionaire had grown into himself so that he repelled friendship, for to her he seemed gentle and companionable. His comradeship with Sarver was at such variance with that reputed trait of unapproachableness. In her eyes he was a pathetic figure, dying in lonely state when he should have been surrounded by friends.

As the minutes lengthened Sarver became uneasy. Several times his gaze besought the nurse. Finally she, too, experienced misgiving over Norton's apparent failure to respond to Sarver's tonic influence. Stepping to the head of the bed she bent to mark the weak but peaceful respiration. Nodding reassuringly to Sarver, her finger tips went lightly to Norton's neck to note the pulse.

The touch caused Norton to open his eyes. He smiled, a ghostly travesty.

"I'm all right, nurse. I was just—

thinking." He turned his head to one side and to the other, peering. "Where are you, Dick?"

"Here, old man." Sarver caught his breath, relieved to hear him speak again. His hand went to Norton's with comforting grip. But he shivered a little as the nearly sightless eyes came round to him. It hurt deep within him to watch them, bright as ever, but straining so pitifully for what they could scarcely see.

His own eyes flamed hard, angry, and his lips compressed.

"It's hell, M. M.," he whispered, for Norton was facing the fact with a courage that precluded deception as to his condition.

"Of course it is, Dick, but I'm not complaining." The thin fingers made an effort to return Sarver's pressure. "I've run my race, and I'm satisfied. It was a good race, Dick"—pridefully and with a flavor of the old fire. And softly—"you make it easier, Dick, just sitting here with me."

Sarver winced and swore beneath his breath. Shame possessed him and he lifted his gaze to the nurse across the bed as though fearful that she might read his mind. In his commiseration he had forgotten what he was about, his bargain with Alonzo Querck, to consummate which he must take advantage of this dying man who was his friend. This man who trusted him and found it easier to die because he was there.

Damning Querck for his impatience to see his uncle laid away so that he would profit, Sarver prayed that the end would be long in coming; prayed hopelessly, he knew. Sarver's heart dictated there—the heart to which he never had given much play in his cynical battle of wits against the law and his fellow men. He was a thief, an outlaw, but he was not a buzzard, hungry to feast off the dead—like Querck.

Yet for all his overwhelming sense of abasement at that moment, Sarver was aware in that same heart that he would go through with the bargain. It was in his blood to take what was not his; the game was the thing as much as the illicit reward. And to forgo this opportunity would be to sacrifice the greatest stake that ever had come within his reach.

M. M. Norton broke in on his thoughts:

"I've been thinking, Dick, of our talk the other day about my admirable nephew." The old man never could suppress the derision which Querck's vain pose inspired. "He continues to inquire—solicitously—whether I'm still alive. Doesn't he, nurse?"

"Yes." She smiled at Sarver. She had thought it strange that Norton forbade the admission of his nephew until a few days ago when Querck, through the error of a maid, had penetrated to the door of the sick room. There the nurse had intercepted him; and more specific instructions had followed, barring him from the house. She smiled with a curl of distaste at the recollection of that encounter during which Querck in his anxiety had striven to charm a way past her.

Reference to Querck brought Sarver back to the cold proposition confronting him. Sentiment had no place in business—neither like nor dislike. He had work to do.

"He phones me every day," said Sarver. "I inquired about him, as you asked, M. M. You were right. He's near the last of his string. There's a mortgage on his house."

M. M. Norton tossed his shoulders, raised his arm and let it fall.

"I'm not vindictive," he said, "but I'm glad to see that mountebank come down. I watched him, Dick, watched him through all the years that he hadn't much use for me—since I hurt his feelings by recommending that he get some of the gilded snobbishness knocked out of him. He's been my circus, Alonzo

has," he chuckled, "especially during the last twelvemonth while he's been patronizing me in the belief that he was being pleasant and ingratiating himself. He's a monkey, Dick—a jumping jack who deserves to be left in a heap at the bottom of the pole."

"He's that," said Sarver pithily. "I've been thinking about him, too, M. M. I——" He hesitated, glancing at the nurse. His gray eyes smiled on her and his brows flirted toward the door. "Would you mind—for a few minutes, please, Miss Mason?"

"Not at all." She had left them at other times to talk in confidence. "You're quite comfortable, Mr. Norton? I'm going to leave you and Mr. Sarver for a while."

The patient nodded with a vigor that informed her he was feeling the stimulus of Sarver's personality. Motioning to Sarver that she would be close at hand she left them.

Sarver at once took up the thread.

"Have you considered, M. M., that Querck might tie the estate up with a contest over your will? He's an oily devil."

"How could he do that? No; I don't see it. He has no claim—nothing to go on."

"Even if he hasn't," said Sarver slowly, "he still might set out to cause trouble. Half the will contests have no real basis, you know, but they make a lot of bother—and the lawyers are not averse to prolonging them. See what I mean?"

"Not quite." The lids drooped on the dimming eyes as he struggled for clearer focus. "He couldn't do anything——"

Sarver interrupted quietly: "Are you positive?" He was at a favorite trick of creating doubt where none existed, of instilling an excess of caution. "You're sure there's no ground on which he could move?"

"Sure as I'm alive——" Norton caught himself up, laughing grimly. "Surer than that, for there isn't much life in me. What put the idea into your head, Dick?"

"I don't know. Perhaps it's no more than a hunch. But I don't like the way he acts," he said, truthfully but misleadingly. "He's different from what he was a few days ago. His assurance has revived; aside from his infernal complacency, that is. You'd almost think he'd already come into money. But don't let's talk of it any more, M. M." He grasped Norton's hand again, and his voice fell. "It brings us too close to—to—— Have you heard——"

But M. M. Norton prevented the diversion.

"If you've got a hunch like that, Dick, I want to talk about it. Never mind how close it comes to figuring me as dead. That doesn't worry me. Tell me about Querck."

"I don't really know anything," came the reluctant reply; but there came an acquisitive gleam to Sarver's eye as he proceeded to put over his play. "It's just a feeling I've gathered from his manner—and from learning he has been in consultation with a lawyer who specializes in will contests."

He stopped abruptly and after a brief silence got the rise he anticipated.

"Who is the lawyer?"

"Jacobson. You know of him, don't you? He's been in some big contests, and, when he hadn't a leg to stand on, forced a compromise to save the estate from being eaten up by fees. Jacobson is tricky and has more nerve than a thousand."

Watching narrowly, Sarver saw that the information interested Norton considerably, but did not excite him. He had counted upon the steady nerves that had carried the plunger through hectic days on the Street to absorb it quietly. He was too genuinely attached to the old man—despite the fact that he was using him, scheming to upset his last

wishes—to aggravate his illness intentionally.

"You remember the Wadsworth case, M. M.?" he insinuated. "Jacobson handled that. When the estate finally was settled it had shrunk from a million and a half to about one third. Recall it? A niece and a nephew were the contestants, contending that Wadsworth years before had entered into a contract to provide for them and then left his money to charities. The contract generally was regarded as a forgery, but Jacobson made the most of it; and of course he alleged undue influence by the trustees of the beneficiary charities."

"I remember that," said Norton after a thoughtful silence. "But there isn't a chance of Querck working anything of the sort."

"Why, then, is he conferring with Jacobson, and looking so smugly optimistic?" queried Sarver, not too insistently building up the doubt. "He's worth watching, M. M."

"If any one can break my will let him do it," began Norton. Then he proved that Sarver had not cast seed in vain: "Lord, Dick, I'm sane," he argued. "And if I weren't sane now it wouldn't make any difference. My will was made five years ago. Surely nobody could say I was crazy at that time."

"Of course you're sane," laughed Sarver. "That wouldn't keep somebody from saying otherwise if there was the slightest possibility of getting away with it. I'm not saying an attempt will be made. I'm simply telling you what I've observed; and how it's got me wondering. So far as I could judge, this fellow Querck is up against it enough to make him take a desperate flyer."

The head on the pillow wagged indecisively.

"You've got me worried, Dick——"

"I'm sorry, old man." Sarver leaned contritely. "I shouldn't have said——"

"Yes, you should. I'm glad you did, because"—an emaciated hand clenched and uplifted—"that lizard isn't going to get hands on my money. He's a mountebank, a jackanapes."

Murmuring accord, Sarver waited. Thus far he had led. Having shown the way he wanted Norton to take the lead; or, more correctly, to imagine he was leading. In that Sarver was a practiced expert, working subtly by suggestion until the other believed that the initiative was his. Now, however, the glint which usually came to his eye at such a juncture was missing. Pity displaced it; pity engendered by the staring helplessness of M. M. Norton. He had to remind himself that though Norton was prostrate and blinded, his brain was not dulled. And that the final conflict would be not with this physically enfeebled man, but with lawyers whose eyes would be wide open.

M. M. Norton announced the course which Sarver cunningly had framed for him:

"I want to see my lawyer, Dick, and get this straight. There must be no crack through which Querck can squeeze himself. I want to make certain of that. Will you ask the lawyer to come out to-morrow—bring him out? I'd like you to be here to make sure he gets it right."

"I'll do that, of course. Or," tentatively, "I could get his opinion for you and spare you a wearisome interview. If that would be——"

"Will you do that for me, Dick? Thanks. I might get mad," he smiled, "if he were to tell me outright that Querck has a chance. I might get mad and die before I had time to seal Querck on the outside."

"I'll get an opinion to-night," volunteered Sarver. "Culbert is your man, isn't he? If I can't get hold of him I'll see my own."

"Thanks, Dick, thanks. I'll be grateful——"

"It's nothing. I don't like Querck. I'm glad to help."

A tap at the door and the nurse entered.

"Medicine time," she declared. She looked from her watch to Sarver with smiling apology. He was the best medicine she knew of for her patient, but—— "Perhaps Mr. Norton's getting tired," she hinted.

"I'm not," said Norton quickly.

"I have to go, anyhow, M. M.," said Sarver. "You get some rest, as Miss Mason says, and I'll stop in later on and let you know the verdict. And do you know"—he laughed infectiously—"I've got another hunch that everything's going to turn out all right. You'll let me in if I come again to-night, Miss Mason?"

Smoothing the pillows before busying herself at the medicine table, she looked over her shoulder and shook her head.

"I won't be here, Mr. Sarver. I'll leave word with the relief nurse at eight o'clock that you are coming and have her ask the doctor if you may come in."

"Thanks." In the act of turning away, Sarver halted to gaze at her. For a full minute their eyes held, searching in the obscurity that was more pronounced with the sinking of the sun.

Sarver frowned and his lips tightened. Her manner had changed. There was a new tensity about her. His frown gave way to a metallic smile. The Mouse was working fast and close in!

"I'll let you know as soon as possible, M. M.," he said. "Good night, Miss Mason."

"I'll look for you, Dick," returned Norton. "Bring good news."

"Good night, Mr. Sarver," replied the nurse absently. Why had Sarver stared at her so? What was the object of the little man who had talked with her while she was absent from the sick room? What could this detective she had promised to meet after going off duty want of her?

CHAPTER VI.

As the door of the Norton house closed behind him, Sarver paused to light a cigarette. He laughed inwardly. The Mouse was performing spendidly!

Very evidently the flea of suspicion, directed by Sarver, had bitten the Mouse hard. He had lost no time in getting the line-up—which presented its own conclusions. From what Sarver audaciously had told him of a prospective lawsuit of large moment, plus the sight of Querck at Sarver's office, plus Sarver's acquaintance with and visits to the dying millionaire, he had fastened rapidly upon the Norton fortune as the root of it all.

That was a logical and obvious result. And because it was so obvious the Mouse was inclined to accept it, revising his skeptical verdict on Sarver's recent avowedly frank statement which had included the warning against starting anything. Having had opportunity to know Sarver's brassy guile, the Mouse was forced to concede that in the present instance his opponent was contriving insolently in the open. Or else—and here again was doubt craftily implanted—Sarver was mocking by drawing him on to this trail, snarling the weave while he went about something remote from Norton.

Thus the Mouse was traveling in the groove dug by Sarver. He could see no other course than to remain, as he had promised, not more than one jump to the rear. Which was precisely what Sarver desired.

Over his cupped hands as he applied the match to his cigarette on top of the Norton steps, Sarver's gaze flicked over the street. The altered demeanor of the nurse he attributed definitely to the Mouse. Only a few minutes ago, then, the Mouse had been in the house. This being a personal conflict betwixt him and Sarver, he naturally would have come himself. It was like him, too, in

his quiet mousy way, to apear while his adversary was in the house.

There was a possibility, of course, that the Mouse still was inside, waiting to continue the conversation with the nurse, but Sarver did not think so. He could have learned readily enough by asking the footman about the latest visitor, but such a display of interest could only give credence to whatever the Mouse might tell regarding him. It would be unwise to show curiosity which might be construed as anxiety.

Satisfied, therefore, that the Mouse had left the house, Sarver proceeded to attach him more securely to the tail of the kite. He was speeding up his program.

Assuming that the Mouse was watching, he descended to the sidewalk, there to pull up abruptly and consult his watch. A moment of frowning hesitation and he turned to the right toward Fifth Avenue.

Walking north a block at a good gait, suddenly he flagged a passing taxi and climbed aboard before it came to a stop. His action indicated a wish to get away quickly and so shake off possible pursuit. Through the front window he gave directions to the chauffeur who immediately gave his engine gas and shot through a hole in the traffic at a speed several miles beyond the legal limit.

Laughing to himself again, Sarver glanced back into the press of motors. Somewhere among them, he was convinced, was one containing the Mouse—if the Mouse actually had been on guard. The impression of a swift get-away made to escape surveillance had been sufficient to make the Mouse follow. Whether he was doing so, Sarver aimed to determine very shortly.

Out of the Avenue his cab swung into the Eighty-sixth Street transverse of Central Park. Several other machines took the same route in his wake, but he was not concerned in them. He was looking for a taxi. It was improbable that the Mouse had picked up a private car in which to pursue.

The first cab to appear, a brown one, was a hundred and fifty yards back. Bunched behind it came a black, a yellow, and another brown.

Sarver grinned. There were four chances that the Mouse was tailing. He might be in any of these cabs—or none. Until the park had been crossed there was no means of deciding unless some of the four made a dangerous pace and passed him. And that was unlikely to happen because his own driver, with a ten-dollar bill in view, was humming along the sunken road at a rate which spelled "Good morning, judge!" if he met a policeman. The appearance of flight had to be preserved.

Emerging from the park, Sarver went on westward a block to round into Columbus Avenue. Before turning the corner he saw the black and a brown go into the avenue alongside the park. The yellow followed him up Columbus Avenue; the last of the four continued over Eighty-sixth Street.

Sarver ordered his driver to stop at a drug store. Entering the store he stood a minute, then returned to the street. The yellow taxi was halted a block away.

Getting back into his machine he drove on. The yellow did likewise.

That was all he wanted to know. He did not regard this as crude work on the part of the Mouse. Tailing in a machine is at best bound to be crude, even when the quarry is all unsuspicious. The Mouse undoubtedly knew he had been detected; must have known from the start that he would be. He was hanging on, Sarver understood, merely to see whither Sarver would lead him and in the hope that his proximity would spoil some coup.

Alighting at another drug store, Sarver telephoned. Now that he was sure the Mouse was with him, he was ready

to pull the strings. The Mouse was due to jump—at Sarver's bidding.

Getting Alonzo Querck on the wire —Querck was sitting close to the phone these days, awaiting news—Sarver gave him orders.

"It's six-thirty now," said Sarver. "I want you to be at your place in Mamaroneck by eight o'clock."

Querck objected. "I can't. I haven't had dinner——"

"Get a sandwich in a lunch room—or starve," cut in Sarver. "Be out there by eight. I'll arrive soon after that."

He heard Querck gulp at the preposterous suggestion that he should go into a common lunch room. He heard an indignant:

"See here, Sarver——"

But he let the protest go no farther.

"At Mamaroneck by eight or the deal is off, Querck. You understand? Off! I'm in a hurry. Will you be there?"

Querck swallowed his indignation. When this crook ceased to be of use, he'd thrash him—perhaps! Meanwhile there was——

"Have you accomplished anything?" The rasping monotone was eager.

"I'll tell you about that at Mamaroneck," said Sarver dryly. "If you're not there, I won't be able to tell you—and there'll be nothing more to be said. It's up to you, Querck."

Querck's tone told that the ultimatum had effect, but he offered another objection.

"The house isn't opened for the season. It isn't ready. There are no servants."

"If there were you'd have to get rid of them for the evening." said Sarver. "We won't need servants. It isn't that kind of a party! You'll have to hustle, Querck, to get out there in time."

The calm assurance that he would obey swayed Querck finally. How could he refuse, under the pregnant circumstances?

"What are you going to do?"

"Nothing serious." Sarver grinned broadly at thought of Querck's consternation when he learned of his rôle in the coming performance. "I'll arrive soon after eight, Querck. How do I reach your place? Where does it lie from the village?"

"Three quarters of a mile north—the first road to the right off the Post Road." explained Querck sulkily.

"That's good enough," said Sarver. He rang off while Querck was pressing the question about what would take place.

He phoned his own apartment.

"Get the car," he instructed Jones, "and drive to Mamaroneck. Be there by eight. I'll come by train. Keep out of sight from the station, but watch for me. I'll walk to Querck's house. Drive that way half an hour after I start—north on the Post Road and the first branch to the right—three quarters of a mile. Don't stop near the house, but look out for me along the road. Keep moving so as not to attract attention. Got that straight? I'll be home in five minutes. Be out of the way. The Mouse is with me."

"With you!" gasped Jones in astonishment. "What you taking him for?"

"A ride! Get under way, Jones. You've an hour's trip to make."

His telephoning done, Sarver drove home. The yellow taxi followed faithfully, to stop within the block when he did.

"Here's your ten dollars." He smiled at his driver. "Wait for me. You can make another ten."

"Sure." Pocketing the bill, the chauffeur sent a knowing glance after Sarver. How he had earned the money was not clear to him, but that was immaterial; he had it. He did not, however, expect to see his fare again.

In the act of moving off he turned in his seat to look at the cab which he had noticed pursuing. It surprised

him when no one issued from it to follow Sarver into the building.

"Must be a sap tailing," he commented. "That guy's going through the basement now."

But he stayed his hand on the lever and let his gears remain in neutral. It was a funny deal. But fair enough. Ten bucks for a ninety-cent ride.

"I'll give the guy ten minutes to help out his get-away," he decided generously; and he jeered at the yellow cab.

Only half the ten minutes had passed when he stared incredulously at Sarver crossing the sidewalk and carrying a small bag.

"The next ten dollars is just as easy," said Sarver genially. He stood with a foot on the running board. "All you have to do is go through the motions of trying to lose that cab back there. But for Heaven's sake don't lose it! Get me? Make him think you want to shake him, but don't. Grand Central is the next stop. You've thirty minutes to zigzag."

The chauffeur blinked, tongued the cigarette into the corner of his mouth where it drooped, then snapped to as Sarver got into the cab.

"I getcha," he remarked succinctly. "I'll make it look real."

He did. Never was more circuitous course taken to cover the straight line downtown. But once it seemed that the pursuit must be shaken off or the semblance of realism in the flight destroyed. A traffic policeman was responsible. He stopped the southbound stream just after Sarver's machine had crossed. The Mouse was caught in the middle of the block, fast in the jam of cars.

Sarver swore. He could be effectually lost before the Mouse got through. Unless he deliberately stalled until the current of traffic reopened.

The chauffeur squinted backward and realized the situation.

"That's tough he got nipped," he mouthed over his shoulder. "I'll fix it —I'll let him get us," with quick resource. "Got ten more bills, chief?"

"Twenty!" said Sarver.

"Yep!" chirped the chauffeur. His eye was on a taxi running alongside to his right. A touch of the wheel and the mud guards scraped.

The driver of the fouled taxi let out a roar. Sarver's driver gave back poisonously. Both hauled to the curb.

"Slip him ten when you see the yellow coming," advised Sarver's bandit. "He ain't scratched. I'll hold him till then."

Jumping from his seat he traded billingsgate with the other driver, each accusing and pointing to all the old dents on their mud guards as newly acquired. There was a crowd of course, for anything or nothing instantly gathers a crowd in New York; and a policeman who told both chauffeurs to shut up while in the same breath he demanded their testimony.

Sarver saw the Mouse's taxi approaching. He waved forward the policeman and the wrangling chauffeurs.

"There's isn't much damage done," he smiled engagingly. "I'm a witness, I suppose?"—to the policeman who nodded. "I haven't time—have to make a train. How about this?"—reaching a bill to each driver. "Won't that square it? That's the idea! Thanks, officer." A five-dollar note changed hands and he was on his way.

"Good stuff," he applauded his driver.

"Aw"—looping a truck with a scant inch to spare—"you gotta think quick when y're hackin', chief."

"Um," said Sarver. "Shove straight on now to Grand Central. Time's getting short."

At seven-twenty he boarded a New Haven train. Alonzo Querck was in the car ahead. The Mouse was in the car behind.

CHAPTER VII.

QUERCK stepped from the train in what he himself would have described as a beastly temper; but he had head enough about him to realize that it was quite impotent. Also, he was rather frightened. He had recalled that Sarver, when first he spoke of this journey to Mamaroneck, had added some cryptic detail about a burglary. Not seeing wherein such an undertaking could concern his own particular business, Querck determined to have nothing to do with it.

Another brave resolution reached by him was to put the brakes on the man who had promised to get him two million dollars. Querck meant to have some say in what he should or should not do. Wasn't Sarver to get a million for his services? Very well. Querck would do no more of his bidding. Nothing out of reason, at any rate. Burglary was beyond reason. He would put his foot down on that and if Sarver got nasty would call his bluff. He could not picture any man, let alone a crook like Sarver, allowing a million dollars to slip away.

These were the thoughts Alonzo Querck carried with him from Mamaroneck station in the village taxi.

Sarver alighted tardily, having remained aboard while Querck stumped across the platform to the cab. He went directly into the waiting room. There was a double object in that—to find a telephone and to distract the attention of the Mouse from Querck.

The call he made was to the Norton house in New York. Ruth Mason was just going off duty. He talked with her.

She told him that the millionaire's condition was unchanged.

"I have to use the stereotyped phrase that he is resting comfortably, Mr. Sarver," added the nurse, "but it is more truthful than usual. His wonderful will power is holding him up. He is waiting to hear from you, I think."

Sarver observed the savor of curiosity in her closing sentence. He guessed aright that Miss Mason contemplated him with considerable interest since her talk with the Mouse. She hoped that if he intrusted her with a message to Norton it might enlighten her somewhat. The fact he was telephoning instead of returning to the house as he had planned, suggested there would be a message.

"Fine," said Sarver, referring to Norton's condition. "Will you tell him please, Miss Mason, that I have obtained an opinion and everything is all right?"

Fifteen seconds ticked by. "Is that all?" she asked, and now he found disappointment in her inflection.

"Yes. Will you give the exact words, please?" He repeated them distinctly, gravely, but his eyes twinkled as he visioned her correctly frowning over the effort to glean something from the communication.

She wrote it down and read it back to him.

"Thanks." He was about to twit her further when she got in ahead of him.

"Shall I say where you're phoning from, Mr. Sarver?" she inquired innocently.

This was a toll call, not long distance, so the operator had not announced the calling station.

"It doesn't matter," returned Sarver. "Tell Mr. Norton I had to run out of town to get what he wanted. I'll see him early to-morrow. I'm in Mamaroneck now," he said disarmingly, to convince her that his whereabouts really was of no importance.

"Oh," said Miss Mason, disappointed again that he had told her where he was. She would have preferred him to be secretive, for that would have conformed to the hint of intrigue she had gathered from the little detective.

"I'll give Mr. Norton your message.

Mr. Sarver." There seemed no more to be said.

"Miss Mason——" He detained her on the wire.

"Yes?"

"Would you resent a personal question?"

"Why, no; of course not."

Sarver was merry, but his tone was sober. He put the query really as an assertion.

"You have an appointment this evening?"

Its suddenness made her stammer.

"With a man who called while I was talking with Mr. Norton this afternoon," continued Sarver confidently, but not impudently.

"Why do you say that?"

"Let it be the woman's reason—because," laughed Sarver. He sought to raise doubt in her mind, too: "I'd make him prove anything he might say, Miss Mason, if I were you. I know him fairly well."

"I don't altogether understand that."

"Get the best you can out of it, Miss Mason. Another thing——" He hesitated, laughing quietly. He regretted having to tangle her up like this. She was a nice girl—not a girl, either; probably about twenty-five—good-looking, pleasant, spunky, he judged. But she was allied, or likely to be allied, with the enemy.

"Another thing, Miss Mason. Mr. Hutton won't be able to meet you. He's out here now."

"With you?"—amazed.

"Well—practically. I'll let him know I told you he can't keep the appointment. And remember, Miss Mason, to be wary of him! I always am! I—ah—don't trust him far out of my sight!"

"You say"—slowly as she strove to reconcile Sarver's statements with the veiled fragmentary revelation made by the Mouse—"you say that he is with you?"

"He would admit it!" said Sarver with amused ambiguity. "He likes to be near me. I'll call him to the phone, if you wish!"

"Will you?" That was a challenge.

He answered it instantly: "Hold the line."

She stopped him: "No; never mind." She discarded the thought that he was lying, bluffing.

"If you wish," he insisted.

"No." She laughed perplexedly. "Is there anything more, Mr. Sarver?"

"Not now. Probably Mr. Hutton will get in touch with you in the morning. He'll want to continue the conversation, I'm sure. Can he locate you readily?"

The raillery in that was unmistakable. She called the turn.

"Tell Mr. Hutton, please, that I don't go on duty until noon. He can reach me any time before then. I'm stopping here at the house."

"I'll do that. Good night, Miss Mason."

"I thank you—for all you've said." she replied lightly. "Good night, Mr. Sarver."

Humming a gay little tune, Sarver went out on the platform. He knew that he had materially increased the puzzlement of Miss Mason. Her parting shot, it was true, showed that she had distinguished his mockery, but the aspersion he had cast upon the Mouse would have time to sink deep before that personage could combat it. Regardless of what she thought of Sarver, she would instinctively look dubiously upon Hutton when he came to explain himself.

The Mouse rose from a bench as Sarver appeared. Through a window he had had the phone booth in view lest Sarver depart through the door from the waiting room to the street. He nodded casually.

Sarver halted, nonchalantly swinging his bag.

"You do stick to a chap," he declared,

humorously chiding. "The luck is with you, though. You wouldn't be here if that fool chauffeur hadn't clipped the other cab."

"That's so," nodded the Mouse. He was beginning to wonder whether it was so. Sarver seemed entirely too light-hearted. And the Mouse recognized that an apparently accidental happening in conjunction with Sarver might well be by design.

"Friendly of you to keep me company," smiled Sarver. "Why didn't you come into the car and join me? I'd have come back and sat with you if you hadn't given the impression that you wanted to be alone. I gathered that you probably wanted to think. So?"

The Mouse nodded again. The joshing didn't annoy him.

"I just talked with a friend of yours," continued Sarver pleasantly. "Miss Mason, I mean; the nurse. Told her you wouldn't see her to-night." He grinned as the Mouse's face twitched. "Made a date for you to-morrow morning. She'll be at the Norton house, expecting you."

The Mouse came into the open.

"What's the game, Sarver?" He did not know that Querck had a place at Mamaroneck, had not seen him leave the train. "What's the game?" he repeated with candid ignorance.

"Don't you know?" chortled Sarver. "I'm surprised, Mouse—surprised! Shall I tell you? But no! You wouldn't believe me."

"It would be helpful if you did," confessed the little man. "I've a slender idea, of course, but——" He gestured dubiously.

"Make that idea grow and you may harvest something," gibed Sarver, a velvet hardness in his tone.

"I thought of that," the Mouse replied. "Which way are you going?"

His naïveté was gorgeous. Sarver slapped him on the back.

"I'm sorry I can't stay with you and be amused, Hutton, old man. I have an engagement, you know. What train are you taking back to town?"

"Same as you."

"See you later, then. There's a machine." The cab that had conveyed Querck was returning. "Ride around and enjoy the scenery. The driver can describe it to you if the night is too dark. So long, old-timer."

Giving an airy salute, he strode away, nodding a carefree good evening to the station agent. From near by came the drone of an automobile siren. That was Jones, on time.

Beyond the village Sarver could have walked on the roadside, where the grass would have deadened his footfall. But then the Mouse would have had nothing to guide him through the darkness.

Sarver never questioned that this section of his kite tail would remain attached. What else could the Mouse do? There were three ways for him to look at the situation: He was on a wild-goose chase, or he was walking plumb into trouble, or the flagrant taunt in Sarver's maneuvering was intended to discourage, to persuade him that he simply was being kidded and cause him to drop out.

However it might be, Sarver certainly was daring him to come on. So he went.

CHAPTER VIII.

For accomplices in a bid for three million dollars Sarver and Querck made an inharmonious pair. Sparks flew the instant they met. Querck was primed to declare himself with pompous bluster. Sarver was cold and agate, his expression brushed with contempt.

An angry, harassed glare was in Querck's blue eye. The very atmosphere in which Sarver had made him wait offended him; the empty house with the furniture still shrouded and dust thick over all. The lack of illumination did not improve the setting for

him, the electricity having been disconnected for the winter to remove the fire hazard, and not yet restored. Revealed in the flare of matches which threw jumping shadows, the house was infinitely cheerless, depressing; the stuffy mustiness twice pronounced. All in all, it was so unkind to his nerves that Querck was on the veranda steps, swearing with lamentable repetition, when Sarver showed up.

"Hello," said Sarver brusquely. "Let's go inside."

Querck made his declaration of independence: "We can talk here. The house has not been aired. There is no light."

"I brought a lamp—you said the house hadn't been opened." Sarver produced a flash light from his bag. "We can't talk here." Not with the Mouse prowling in the mid-distance.

Splashing the light over the veranda, Sarver moved to the door.

Querck hung back.

"I don't want to go in," he said petulantly.

Sarver stepped rapidly to his side. He snapped out the light. His voice was deadly soft:

"Listen, Querck! What you want to do doesn't count. I'm running this. If you don't like the way I'm doing it, say so. And say it quick! Don't waste time getting your mouth set just so."

In the direction of the road, a hundred feet away, a twig cracked. The Mouse was creeping closer.

Sarver descended a couple of steps. It was essential that Querck be prodded into the house before the Mouse made a noise that would betray him. Querck would run if he thought they were being watched. He would go in panic if he suspected a detective was close by and interested.

"I'm not here to argue, Querck. What are you going to do?"

The resolve not to be nose-led oozed from Querck. By stalking into the house without answering he rebuked Sarver for the insult. Again he consoled himself by reflecting that his unfortunate position had to be endured for only a brief time.

Sarver followed and shut the door. His lips, now tight, relaxed in a fleeting grin. The windows, he had observed, were snugly shuttered. He hoped the Mouse enjoyed himself nosing outside.

"The air is pretty rotten," commented Sarver with grim cheerfulness as he laid the flash light on a table. "We'll make it snappy. First of all, Querck, I have the proposition cinched. By tomorrow noon that three million will be as good as in our hands."

Querck glowered, but his eyes lighted with cupidity. Much as he disfavored Sarver, he was manifestly affected by the latter's self-confidence. He unbent from his haughty silence to ask:

"How?"

"You'll have to take my word for it just now. Don't you want to believe it?"

"Yes," said Querck grudgingly. "Was it necessary to bring me out here to tell that?"

"No. You're here to help me."

"Help you! I hired you to help me. I don't propose——"

"Don't get funny," said Sarver derisively. "You couldn't hire me—and I wouldn't hire you. We're a mutual organization, Querck, and now's the time for you to do your bit."

Querck's jaw set, and that did not improve his flaccid visage; it accentuated the jowls, which his masseur could not entirely prevent from bagging.

"Stay downstage," advised Sarver wearily. "Do you remember I said something about a burglar? Well, that wasn't wholly correct. There's a bigger angle to it. Felonious assault! You know—assault with a deadly weapon."

Querck's mouth opened, but this was not a pose. He went fish-eyed and his

throat dried. He backed away, breathing heavily and sweating. This crook, Sarver, was turning on him! He saw himself the victim of a blackmailer! That was the object in bringing him out to the silent house, separated by a quarter of a mile from the nearest neighbors! He had a wild notion to fling himself upon Sarver and flee outside, or reach the phone in the next room. But—he was afraid under Sarver's cold, penetrating, sneering stare.

"You're becoming excited, Querck—needlessly." Deliberately he turned his back while he delved into the bag. "That will be useful later, but now now. Keep your head and listen. Nothing's going to happen to you—nothing serious," he amended gently.

Then he turned to expose to the startled Querck an automatic pistol.

Retreating hastily, Querck brought up against the wall. Arms outspread in fright, as if he could force himself farther away through the unyielding surface, he flattened himself there, staring helplessly. Not until then did he see that Sarver held the gun gingerly in a silk kerchief; held it by the barrel and not by the butt.

"You'll break your legs, Querck, if your knees don't stop battering each other. Sit down before you fall down."

The icy speech stung Querck, already partly reassured by the fact he was not being menaced with the gun. He mouthed unbecomingly, with ratlike malignity, while he controlled his arid, constricted throat.

"I'm not afraid of you," he got out huskily.

"Sit down anyhow," said Sarver. "I haven't many more minutes to waste on you."

Because it afforded distinct relief to take the load off his jellied knees and because acquiescence seemed the quickest means of speeding Sarver's departure, Querck sat down. But he squirmed in the dusty chair—from which at any other time he would have revolted fastidiously—as he waited sullenly to hear what was required of him.

"That's better," Sarver commended ironically. Diamond points, his eyes locked Querck's for a minute with a compulsion that was close to hypnotism. He broke the news softly: "You're going to be attacked, Querck! Attacked by a burglar!"

Inarticulate, Querck gagged. His head shook vigorously, wildly. Grabbing the arms of the chair, he tried to pull himself to his feet, but his legs refused to function.

Sarver's tongue was in his cheek. He enjoyed harpooning Alonzo Querck, although the man was his partner in a three-million-dollar stake.

"Being attacked, however, does not necessarily imply being hurt," he elaborated. "You won't get hurt, Querck. This is going to be purely a mental assault. You won't really see the man whom you will describe as your assailant—describe vaguely. Do you begin to get me?"

His fright again subsiding, Querck nodded. But he was not visibly cheered.

"What has this to do with the money?" he balked.

"Everything. I told you that we're a mutual organization. If you can't see it that way, we might as well break up. All I want you to do is tell a story about being shot at by an intruder here."

"Shot at!" Querck jumped afresh and shivered. Sarver's way of outlining the program by degrees was too disconcerting. There would have to be some evidence of shooting, and Querck detected and feared lethal weapons. "I won't be shot at," he whined defiantly.

There seemed to be a tinge of regret in Sarver's words: "You won't," he said. "You'll do the shooting yourself. Oh, keep still! This is the wrong moment to become riotous, if that's how

you feel." He threw another shock into Querck: "We're not nearly so alone out here as you think. A detective followed me. He's nosing round the house now."

The long, sensitive fingers bit into Querck's shoulder painfully. He did not resist when he was shaken, but turned dumb eyes upward to Sarver with a blended expression of fear and appeal. He recollected that he had gone far enough to be adjudged guilty of conspiracy—ten years, Sarver had said—and a detective was on his doorstep!

"Do as I say and he won't ever bother you," said Sarver with quiet but piercing forcefulness. "I'll take him with me when I leave here."

"You'll take him!" exclaimed Querck incredulously and shakily. "Where?"

"Away from you. That's what you want, isn't it? That's all you need to know." He said it with insinuating emphasis. "How about it?"

Querck's teeth chattered. His thoughts, not quite coherent, went into the channel Sarver had suggested. His craven soul put the worst, the most deadly, construction upon the promise to get the detective away.

"What will you do with him?" The blue eyes bulged, glassily eager.

"Muzzle him!" Sarver smiled, thin-lipped. He catered to Querck's interpretation of his intention toward the Mouse. "Quiet him!"

"Ah!"

The throaty gasp was more revealing. It caused Sarver to look more intently at his companion with a new appraisal. He understood Querck's reasoning, if it could be called reasoning. To Querck he was a hardened criminal, at present with murderous intent. Yet Querck did not protest. If anything, he seemed anxiously pleased over this apparent turn. He was horrified and affrighted—yes; but his whole self-centered nature was fixed upon the acquirement of his uncle's millions. Thought of that objective might of itself have stilled his fright and horror. There was another and potent silencer: he felt that he was in danger, and so was actuated by the ruthlessness of the cur brought to bay.

Querck whispered: "He will resist! What—what if some one hears? Can you—will you—you wouldn't——"

Sarver laughed shortly. His gaze narrowed as for the first time he accounted Querck dangerous, likely to prove viperous in a corner.

"He won't resist. I'll guarantee he won't. I can"—Sarver paused meaningfully, playing again to Querck's blind imagining—"persuade him to go—quietly. Nobody will know he's been here. But it rests with you whether I do persuade him—muzzle him—or let him go ahead."

Querck's body twisted convulsively, but he took courage of a sort from Sarver's grip on his shoulder and from what he believed Sarver meant to do to the prowling detective. What happened to the Mouse he did not care, but he had to be sure that he would not be drawn into it. He was already deeply enough involved.

"You won't do anything—to him—until you get him away?"

Sarver hid a smile. Querck made his meaning so very evident.

"No." Taking his hand from Querck's shoulder, Sarver rubbed it thoughtfully on the dusty chair covering. Physically it came away dirtier, but figuratively it was cleaner.

"How will you take him?"

"I have a machine," said Sarver. He motioned impatiently. His meager regard for Querck was not increasing.

Querck breathed noisily. He would have this as a club over Sarver. He would——

Suddenly his flight of fancy was interrupted. He chilled. The program did not match up. If Sarver purposed no violence on the detective, what was the object of the mythical shooting upon which he insisted?

Querck realized that he hadn't the proper hang of things. He had gone too fast, snatched at a desirable conclusion which lacked stability.

"Why must I accuse him of shooting at me?" he demanded.

"You won't." Sarver was quick to note the shifting trend of thought. He was prepared to meet it. "You couldn't do that successfully," he went on disingenuously, "for he won't be here when it occurs. He'd have an alibi. Remember," he smiled with deceitful cruelty, "remember that he's going with me."

"Then I don't see——"

"The shooting," said Sarver concisely, "is to dispose of a personal matter of my own. You don't know the man I want to frame. You may never see him. It won't affect you one way or the other, except"—he again drove in the goad—"except that I drop out of the Norton deal unless you help me in this other affair. I'll be candid, Querck, and admit that I had my own interests in mind when I undertook to get you the cash," he declared, glibly confidential. "I saw the opportunity to use you in this certain way. I was up against it then to find a man like you, of standing and reputation," he flattered, and Querck unconsciously preened himself, "who wouldn't be suspected of taking part in a frame-up. You see? I have to bring this person I'm aiming at to time, but it's got to be done right."

Querck fidgeted. He was not at once convinced. His excursion into crime was proving much more distressing than he had anticipated. He had fallen in too readily with Sarver's proposal when it was first broached. Sarver then had represented it adroitly as a case of clear sailing without risk. Now, having before him an example of Sarver's trickiness, his misgiving intensified. What if Sarver decided to double cross him, too?

"I don't want to appear in court," said Querck plaintively.

"Neither do I want you in court," replied Sarver. "The shooting won't go that far. The man who could be convicted of it will listen to reason. He'll compromise."

"On what?"

"On the subject he and I are not agreed upon," parried Sarver suavely.

He took a second automatic from the bag. His manner said plainly that he was wearying of the haggling. The final threat in his incisive tone made Querck sit up.

"Not less than thirty minutes after I leave," said Sarver, "you will fire two shots from this gun. Shoot high so the bullets will hit the ceiling or well up on the wall. If anybody hears the shots, well and good. With the house shut up tight it's improbable that they will be heard; nobody will be near enough. Should the alarm be raised immediately, you'll be found on the floor, stunned—— No! Wait!"—as Querck waved his hands in violent objection. "You'll be stunned by the concussion of a shot fired close to your head while you struggled with the burglar—just as you knocked the gun from his hand. You follow me? Your last impression was of the man tearing himself away and bolting through the door. By the way, he entered by the door which you had left open after the departure of a visitor—myself."

Right then Querck had the appearance of one suffering from concussion. He gazed stupidly, mouth open, carried away by Sarver's cold impressiveness, unable to voice the protest that reeled through his brain.

"Should the shooting pass unnoticed," continued Sarver calmly, "you will wait five or ten minutes, of course, to recover from the shock. Is your phone working? Yes? Then you'll find the wire cut—we'll attend to that in a minute—and will have to go to the next house to call the police. That will kill several more minutes. You don't want

to rush, remember, because your—er—assailant is to be given a good start. That's all, Querck. The gun you knocked from his hand will be lying where it fell. For you wisely thought there might be legible finger prints on it. There are, so don't let it be handled. Suggest finger prints to the police. What?"

Querck was struggling for speech. When he got it out he had nothing to say.

"I—I—I——" he stammered.

"You can simply pocket the gun you use or lock it away somewhere," resumed Sarver, ignoring the interruption. "The house won't be searched; there will be no reason for doing so. Naturally you won't be searched, either. When you return to the city take the gun along. I'll get it from you if you can't think of a way to dispose of it. There's the whole job, Querck. It's simple. Two million dollars is high pay!"

For long minutes Querck gnawed at the ends of his fingers, ruining his immaculate nails. Reference to the two million, craftily injected at the exact moment, had stifled his labored decision to refuse to have any hand in this melodramatic sham. This was no time for him to court publicity—not while he was engaged in a conspiracy for which Sarver had said he could receive a ten-year sentence. He writhed, but the task was easy and the pay high.

"You'll explain that you came to the house to-night to show it to me, a prospective purchaser," said Sarver. "Incidentally, you needn't go out of your way to mention my name. We don't want to be coupled if it can be avoided, until everything is pat and you go to collect. After my departure, in a car which called for me, you stayed to hunt out some letters. Any excuse will do; you'll be questioned only perfunctorily. As you returned from upstairs the intruder met you with a gun. You jumped on him!" Sarver's grin was satiric. "He fired. The shots so near your head stunned you. In five seconds it was all over. You had no time to see his face. But—he was a little man of medium build—say about five foot six—wearing dark clothes and a soft hat—for two million, Querck," he finished softly. "It's easy money!"

Reiteration of the prize roused Querck from his daze. Oddly, every word that Sarver had said was burned on his memory. The whole picture blazed before him. The story outlined for him to tell was plausible. What chance would he be taking? He would be committing no crime in relating a fake. He would not accuse any one directly. He could refuse to identify any suspect who might, by Sarver's effort, be brought before him. Sarver would have to engineer that part of it alone.

Running his dry, flabby tongue over his lips, Querck nodded. Again he asked himself pathetically what he could do but agree?

"How," he whispered, "how do I know you'll do as you promise about——"

The words died as Sarver bent over him.

"You know it because I said so, Querck. By to-morrow noon, I said." The steel-gray eyes were boring, the tight lips harsh. "Isn't that sufficient for you?"

"Yes," wheezed Querck. He was dominated, cowed by the scheming brain which sapped his will power, and, fanning his avarice, molded him.

"I'm in for the stake, as you are," Sarver reminded him. "You don't expect me to throw away a million, do you?"

"No," said Querck docilely.

"Then make up your mind for good that you'll get yours. I'll tell you again what you have to do."

While the frame was being sketched

again Querck nodded sourly but understandingly. He asked no unnecessary questions. He even responded slightly to a rallying note which Sarver put into it. On the whole, his morale was considerably improved when, five minutes later, Sarver reached the final touch.

"One last thing," smiled Sarver. "You'll have to be marked up, Querck, just a little bit, to show how close to you the gun was fired. Wait—wait! You fly off the handle too fast. We've got to be realistic."

Producing a pill box, he showed Querck that it contained coarse-grain powder. He poured it on to a paper and put match to it.

"The small details are what count, Querck," he remarked with, for policy, a humor he did not feel toward the other. "I'll singe a streak in your hair now with a match and rub this burned powder into it. The little details, Querck; you have to think of them. Hold up your head and I'll brand you hero. Tut-tut, you can wash the smudge off as soon as it's been duly noted as an exhibit."

After brief opposition he prevailed. And he burned much more hair than Querck had bargained for, going deep enough in fact to sear the scalp slightly with the flame. Nor was he overtender in rubbing in the powder; he did his best to get some of it under the skin before his puppet squawked and pulled away.

"Two million dollars," he chanted as Querck flushed ragefully. "I'm going now. It's nine-twenty. Put on the act about ten. I'll be twenty miles away by then—with our friend the detective, fitting him for his muzzle."

He took up the gun in the silk handkerchief and placed it on the floor. The other he held out to Querck, who took it delicately, fearfully, and quickly laid it down.

"Look out," warned Sarver. "The safety catch is off and it's cocked. Just keep your head out of the way and pull the trigger—twice. But," he chuckled sardonically, "if you should get rattled and let your finger stutter once or twice, you'll get by. The other gun there was fired a couple of times to-day to give it a fresh smell, but it doesn't nail you down to only two shots. There are only four shells in the clip, which gives your nerves plenty of leeway. It's a ten-shooter, and therefore might have been fired at you six times. Savvy? Don't make it a bombardment, though, if you can help it. Come on to the door and wish me by-by."

"The detective——" Querck drew back.

"Will want to make sure you're still alive if I go out alone," finished Sarver with startling but effective exaggeration. "He knows me, Querck, and he'll be more curious than hell if you don't show yourself."

Stuffing the kerchief into a pocket, Sarver took up the empty hand bag. He carried the flash light, and without more ado Querck accompanied him to the door.

Opening the door suddenly, Sarver sent the light along the veranda to the windows of the room in which he and Querck had talked. No one was there. The light spotted the Mouse sitting at the foot of the steps. He looked round with his faint, bland smile, quite unabashed by discovery. Sarver snapped out the lamp and handed it to Querck.

"See you in town to-morrow," he said, and went down to stop beside the Mouse.

"Hello, old man," he grinned. "How are you making out?"

"Not very well," said the Mouse mournfully. "I couldn't hear a thing through those shuttered windows. You ought to give a fellow a chance, Sarver. Your friend seems scary."

"He's bashful. That's Querck—M. M. Norton's nephew, you know. It's his house."

"So?" The Mouse looked at his raidum watch and rose leisurely. "Going back to town?"

"I have a car waiting," nodded Sarver. "Want to ride in?"

"That'll be fine. I won't be in the way?"

"Glad to have you."

They broke into step together, chatting companionably.

Arriving on the highroad, Sarver looked to right and left.

"We'll meet him if we go this way," said the Mouse. "He's been loafing back and forth quite a while. Just went down."

"Thanks for noticing."

They swung along in the direction the Mouse indicated, and soon the lights of the car came to meet them.

Getting into the auto, Sarver spoke in undertone to Jones at the wheel.

"It's a great night," he sighed as the smooth-running car went into speed. "A great night. Give us some air, Jones."

They turned northward into the Post Road—going away from New York.

The Mouse also sighed.

"Driver make the wrong turn?" he wondered mildly. He had recognized Jones, and knew, of course, that the route was being taken on orders.

"Oh, well, what if we do take a roundabout way?" shrugged Sarver. "I told him to give us some air. Get that late-spring fragrance! You're in no rush. Fill up on it, man, and enjoy the ride."

"I'll try," said the Mouse wryly. He doubted whether he could, however. He conceded that Sarver was making a large-sized fool out of him.

The journey was without incident, as the outward trip on the train had been, but the time consumed informed the Mouse beyond all question that something was being put over on him. So did Sarver's gayety and his frequent mocking pitch. And the fact that the serpentine course steered by Jones circled the towns and villages whenever possible.

Only once did Sarver's fire of conversation let up. That was around ten o'clock when, so far as the Mouse could judge, they were in the neighborhood of White Plains and heading across Westchester County toward the Hudson River.

Sarver was silent while he visioned the distressed Alonzo Querck going through the motions of "attacking" himself. He was silent while he prayed that Querck would not botch it. He hoped Querck, for his own sake, would make the job good.

During that lapse on Sarver's part the Mouse took up the jollying. Without reason other than Sarver's sudden preoccupation, he felt that these minutes were significant. So to test the thought he made the conversational pace—and was allowed to run practically by himself, receiving only fragmentary replies till Sarver relaxed with the knowledge that the play was over, that Querck had made or marred. It was then, too, that the Mouse endeavored most to get his bearings topographically, and succeeded with fair accuracy in placing the car just west of White Plains.

Eleven o'clock was near when they came out on the Hudson above Hastings. By half past they crossed the New York City line on Broadway.

"Drop you anywhere you say," offered Sarver.

"I'm going down to the Circle. If you'd join me in a bite of supper——"

"I'd like to, old man, but I have to be up early in the morning, and I'm tired. The country air, I guess."

"Probably," said the Mouse. He did not believe sleepiness was the reason Sarver declined the invitation. He had an idea that Sarver did not want to be seen with him—not to-night.

At Columbus Circle Jones was stopping when the Mouse leaned forward.

"Across Fifty-ninth Street, please."

The machine went on.

"Here," said the Mouse in front of a restaurant. He got out of the car clumsily, talking meanwhile with Sarver. He slammed the door.

"Sorry," he apologized.

"All right," said Sarver. "Drop in and see me soon, Mouse. Go ahead, Jones."

Sarver laughed, and waved derisively as the car moved. For an instant he did so, until he saw what the Mouse was about.

"Damnation!" spat Sarver fervently. "The little devil!"

The Mouse was talking to a policeman not ten feet from where the car had stood. He was protecting himself against he didn't know what.

"Did you see me get out of the machine?"

"Uh-huh."

"Get the number, please."

"What for?"

"Get it!" The Mouse showed his badge.

"Got you," said the cop, meaning that he had the number. "What's the racket?"

The Mouse smiled. "I don't know."

The policeman looked and sniffed suspiciously. No; the Mouse wasn't drunk. Crazy, maybe.

"Got a complaint?"

"No. I just want you to remember that I got out of that car at ten minutes to midnight. Will you make a note of that?"

The policeman frowned over the Mouse's credentials as a private officer, employed by insurance-liability and bonding companies.

"Sounds like you were fixing an alibi," he said with heavy humor, and came nearer to the truth than he could have guessed.

"It does, doesn't it?" The idea seemed to amuse the Mouse. "A good alibi, with a policeman as a witness!"

The cop laughed with him, but his curiosity wasn't satisfied.

"Friends of yours? Or somebody you just picked up?"

"Friends—in a way," admitted the Mouse.

"And they didn't pull nothing on you?"

"Not a thing. Don't forget me. Your name is—Kearney? Thanks, Kearney. Hope I can return the favor some time."

Over a salad the Mouse pondered the evening's adventure. Or was it misadventure? He couldn't make anything of it except that for three hours and a half he had been virtually a prisoner, kidnaped in Sarver's machine. Of course he had gone of his own volition, but there had been little choice. To have refused would have been to see the last of Sarver for the night. There was a chance that Sarver had been bluffing in asking him to ride; that by accepting he had interfered with Sarver's plans. But the Mouse did not lay stress on that possibility. Frankly he was inclined to believe what was no less than the fact—that Sarver had baited him into being led out of the way for a time.

The Mouse consequently was moving with his eyes open. Before he could catch up on Sarver he had to race with him. If he had to turn some corners without knowing what lay beyond them, why he had to do it, that was all. In the going, however, he could take some precautions. As—feeling absently for his watch, he smiled—as he had done to-night.

CHAPTER IX.

RUTH MASON intercepted Sarver when he entered the Norton house in the middle of the forenoon. Her gravity disturbed him and shaded the quiz-

zical manner with which he had decided to treat her. The light remark about the breaking of her appointment with the Mouse on the previous night, already on his tongue, was dislodged as he noted her expression.

"M. M. isn't worse?" he asked quickly.

"No; he had a good night."

His pleasure over that was so unmistakable that the nurse's brows gathered and a hesitant light came to her eyes. The Mouse had telephoned her an hour ago and requested that she notify him when Sarver arrived. Recalling Sarver's advice not to take too seriously anything that the Mouse said—the inference that the Mouse had an ulterior motive, and the fact he had been in Sarver's company so soon after having delivered his innuendo—she had found herself wholly at sea as to what she ought to do.

In effect the Mouse wanted her to spy upon Sarver. But when on their second conversation this morning she had attempted to pin him to a specific reason, he had been equivocal. Later in the day, he had said, once he had cleared up a matter he was working on, he would explain to her.

Disposed to be aboveboard and fair-minded, however, she had set that down as unsatisfactory. She did not know this man Hutton. That he was a detective, or claimed to be such, meant nothing. On the other hand, she had been meeting Sarver daily for several weeks. He was M. M. Norton's friend. His solicitude for Norton she never had doubted. Accustomed to noticing the reactions of a patient to visitors, she had read much from Sarver's eyes and the mobile lips ever given to quick sympathy in the sick room. But for him, she knew, these last days of her patient would have been manifestly more bleak and lonely.

Ruth Mason therefore was constrained to be backward in taking sides with Hutton. No good ground had been advanced for her doing so. The idea of spying was abhorrent. Her attitude, she believed, was simply without prejudice, a withholding of judgment for proof.

There was a handicap, though, upon the Mouse. Miss Mason was not strictly unbiased. The native charm of Sarver, exercised so naturally and without effort, had not passed her over. She was not romantically attracted to him; not that. But there was in her a spontaneous, subconscious stirring toward him which might best be described as an unexpressed comradeship encouraged by their kindred feeling for the dying man, for it must be remembered that at the root Sarver was, complexly, fond of him. And, too, there was the doubt instilled by Sarver regarding Hutton which in the light of her reasoning was felt in the balance.

Consequently she was friendly, albeit she meant it to be with reservation, as they stood on the landing of the broad, curving stairway leading from the main hall. She had encountered him there on his way to the sick room because it was a neutral zone, so far as servants were concerned, in which they could talk a few minutes without exciting comment.

"Mr. Hutton phoned me this morning, Mr. Sarver," she said to bring the cards onto the table.

Sarver smiled into her level eyes.

"Didn't you believe me when I told you that he would?"

"Yes—I think I did. Although it seemed strange that you should be speaking for him."

"Why?" His tone was easy with that elusive mockery.

"Don't you think so?" She fell back upon a counterquery because she was just a trifle discomposed. Wasn't she presumptuous in challenging him?—for, regardless of her motive, she was challenging. She was prying, even as Hut-

ton apparently wanted her to pry. "Don't you think so—under the circumstances?" she extended to make it less abrupt.

"Ah, Miss Mason"—Sarver's eyes twinkled—"now you give promise of enlightening me. What are the circumstances?"

Knowing that he made fun of her, she flushed and smiled uncertainly.

"I hoped you might tell me, Mr. Sarver."

"If I could," he deprecated. His lazy gaze appraised her more closely. How much had the Mouse told her? Was she playing innocent to draw him out? "I don't understand your position, Miss Mason," he said half seriously. "Hutton, I believe, asked your coöperation. For what purpose remains to be seen. What would he say if he were to learn that you keep me informed?"

"I told him I would tell you." She flushed again, but angrily at his intimation that she was betraying a confidence. She spoke coldly: "I shall make myself clearer, Mr. Sarver. When Mr. Hutton admitted having been with you last night and at the same time asked me to—to coöperate with him, as you stated it, I couldn't merge these facts. I said so. He said that he had not time to explain. I told him then that I would —pardon the impertinence—give you an opportunity to explain should you arrive here before him. That was my only object in raising the subject."

"I see," said Sarver thoughtfully. "You're merely being square in a situation which you don't understand, isn't that it, Miss Mason?"

"You are complimentary." She bowed stiffly; she could not so soon forgive him for the charge of double dealing, and his last speech might have been sarcastic.

"But I mean it—please," protested Sarver, "and I do appreciate your fairness. About Hutton, however," he grimaced, "I won't say anything. Hutton has some queer ideas which he persists in trying to exploit. If they amuse him I shan't interfere. If he can persuade you that they are meritorious, probably you will consider yourself justified in assisting him. I wouldn't attempt to influence you either way. There, Miss Mason," he smilingly wagged his head, not with any suggestion that he was the victim of persecution, but rather that the whole matter was immaterial—"that's the sum and substance of it from my end. Of course I'd be sorry to have you think ill of me, but—it's a question for your own judgment entirely."

He took a step to the side to pass her and awaited her dismissal.

"I'll run on up now and see M. M.," he hinted. "He hasn't much longer, poor old chap."

She did not move, but scanned him for a sign of hypocrisy. She saw none.

"I gave Mr. Norton your message," she said, prolonging the meeting without cause except that she was piqued by failure to penetrate his pleasant inscrutability. "He laughed."

"He would." Sarver smiled a prefacing apology. "I won't ask whether you told Hutton of that message——"

"I didn't!"

"But you may!" exclaimed Sarver with that guileful freedom which at once surprised and disarmed, making suspicion seem petty and baseless. "It's no tremendous secret—it won't be. Just something about his nephew, Miss Mason; something that soon will be common property. I made it seem mysterious last night," he laughed, "because —well, I was a bit riled for the moment by Hutton."

Not too much said, not too little, but a measure neat enough to turn a point.

"Now, Miss Mason, if you'll let me go——"

"Yes," said the nurse abstractedly, "go to Mr. Norton. I shouldn't keep

you from him." But it was plain in her wide and puzzled eyes that she would have preferred to talk further. His method of attack—which she did not recognize as attack—had her completely at a loss. When she clung to a lurking suspicion that he was suppressing something, he came round without apparent artifice to that something and related it casually as trifling. It was vexing, made her feel cheap.

Mounting the stairs, Sarver mingled a frown with his smile. He had an uncomfortable notion that he was not showing to dazzling advantage. Although he had scored in the tilt with Ruth Mason, had discounted the Mouse appreciably, he was not vastly pleased over it. Somehow he disliked hoodwinking her—disliked the prospect of having to look into her level eyes when she came to know that the Mouse told the truth. As it was with her, so was it with Sarver. There was no heart sentiment in his regard for her, but he felt something of a friendly bond forged by her devotion to Norton. And he liked the stand she had taken in relation to the Mouse.

From there his thought branched logically to the base of it all—the raid upon M. M. Norton's millions. The picture of Alonzo Querck rose before him—the man he was benefiting. Against it the picture of the dying man—whose purpose he was defeating.

His hand on the door of Norton's room, he hesitated. An instant the beam hung true—then tipped downward. His mouth thinned to a line, harsher at the corners, his eyes flinted. Querck was a rat, incomparable with his uncle—but Querck was the instrument.

A million dollars! A million and a half!

Preaching to himself the old doctrine that personal like or dislike has no place in business, Sarver opened the door and went in.

CHAPTER X.

WHEREVER possible Sarver avoided lying in so many words to his dying friend. A ludicrous delicacy, he admitted, in a situation which in its entirety was a fraud and a falsehood. But it salved the unwonted restlessness within him when he let something be inferred without his having to speak the naked untruth.

The qualm he had stilled before coming into the room returned when he tiptoed to the bedside. Even he could see that despite the favorable night's sleep Norton had not held his own. The nurse confirmed that with a solemn nod and a finger to her lips.

"Be careful," she whispered. Miss Mason had told her that Sarver's presence was beneficial to the patient, but she was skeptical. "I wouldn't talk to him too much, Mr. Sarver. His pulse is poor, erratic."

Awed by the stillness of the figure on the bed, Sarver was nodding when Norton sensed him and turned his head weakly.

"That you, Dick?"

The frail, short breaths were scarcely adequate to bear forth the voice. The eyes, looking out from under the tired, drooping lids, were bright, but did not see.

Sarver's teeth gritted noisily in the hush. Speech was an effort for him, too.

"Yes, M. M. I'm here."

The hand he placed on that other thin hand lying so sluggishly on the counterpane threatened to close crushingly. In that flooded moment he wanted to grasp Norton and impart strength to him, to know his grip again, to shout to him that he must not die, and hear him shout. It was a flash of anger against death, of insanity even, which blotted out all else, leaving Sarver the man apart from Sarver the outlaw.

But quickly as it had come it passed.

Railing against death availed nothing. And the day belonged to the outlaw as well as to the man. He had to remember that.

"I'm glad you got here, Dick—in time."

The brave words chilled but aroused him.

"Don't talk like that, M. M.," he said sharply. "You——"

"I know, Dick; I know." His voice was stronger, and he smiled—if that gaunt face could wear a smile. "It's good to hear you say it. I'd like to say it myself. But I know it isn't so, Dick. Tell me about Querck."

At the foot of the bed the nurse rustled starchily and coughed to attract Sarver's attention. He stepped beside her.

"Will you leave us for five minutes, nurse? I have something to tell Mr. Norton—something he asked me to find out. No; it won't excite him."

"He's been getting hypos," replied the nurse. "It isn't safe——"

"He doesn't have to exert himself talking," interposed Sarver. "At the slightest sign of increasing weakness I'll call you. For five minutes, nurse. And," he smiled sadly, "I honestly believe that what I have to tell will stimulate him."

"Where are you, Dick? What are you whispering for?"

"Coming, M. M." He turned back to the nurse and clinched his argument: "He wants to hear about his nephew."

"Very well," she said reluctantly, yielding as much to the querulous note in the patient's tone as to Sarver's pleading. "Five minutes."

As she went out Sarver returned to the head of the bed and again laid a soothing hand on Norton's. That was the action of the man. The outlaw spoke:

"Your lawyer says the will is ironclad. Querck could not break it. But, while a contest would have little possibility of going beyond the initial stage, that possibility always exists. Conducted by this tricky lawyer whom Querck has been consulting, there is no knowing how far it might go. Probate judges are sometimes dense. The rules of the probate court are wide. You understand me, M. M.?"

"Yes. Go on."

Sarver looked away from the sightless eyes.

"In a nutshell," he said, "it amounts to this: Querck could start something on the usual ground of undue influence, perhaps produce a forged contract dated years ago, with the probability that his case would immediately be thrown out. He's so hard up, I hear, he's desperate. Again, the case might drag on, holding up the bequests and multiplying the costs. Querck is not mentioned in the will, you said?"

"No."

"There's the point you want to remedy."

"Eh? You mean put him into it?"

"That's the advice," said Sarver, and it was—his own. "Make clear beyond all dispute your intention of eliminating Querck by disposing of him absolutely in the will. You can do that by adding a clause cutting him off, stating point-blank that you wish him to have nothing; or make it even more explicit that you don't want him to benefit, by leaving him a joke amount—say, five or ten dollars. I confess that I don't fully see the point in the alternative," he deftly forestalled cross-examination, "but it is offered as the better way. Courts take odd views of things that we outsiders can't figure. There's something about the small bequest being considered more final because it demonstrates that the testator still possessed a sense of the value of money," he said. "You get the meaning, M. M.?"

M. M. Norton nodded. "That's what Culbert says, Dick?"

Sarver winced. Now he had to lie directly. Culbert was Norton's lawyer.

"Yes," said the outlaw. Hell! This was business! Why let a maudlin feeling intervene? He would lose nothing.

"Yes—Culbert. He has an important consultation this morning, but said he would try to get out to see you. Meantime he said he would draw up both forms and would send out whichever you decided upon if he couldn't come himself."

"He'd talk me to death, Dick, if he did come," smiled Norton. "Once he gets started he never stops. You've told me what he says. That's enough."

"It'll be rough on Querck," said Sarver tentatively.

"I want it to be. He's never done a damn thing, Dick, to show he's a man and not a lizard. He wouldn't go to work twenty years ago when it would have been good for his soul. Let him go to work now and see how he likes it."

His hand turned over on top of Sarver's with pitiful pressure.

"You think I'm handing it to him raw, Dick," he said. "He deserves it. He's a stuffed dummy. Lord! I don't even believe he'd fight if somebody walked on him. He——"

"Sh, M. M.," urged Sarver. "The nurse will put me out."

"All right, all right, Dick. I'll be good. And, say," he mused, "will you get after Culbert to send out the codicil —it's got to be a codicil, hasn't it?—giving Querck five dollars?"

"Five?" Sarver faced the nurse, who was looking anxiously from the door, and nodded that the interview was done.

"No—three!" said Norton. "Make it three for him, Dick."

The remark caused the nurse to look curiously as she took the patient's pulse to ascertain that the talk had done him no harm.

"Three is generous, M. M.," said Sarver, taking the opportunity to impress the figure upon the nurse. "I'll phone Culbert, and if I'm allowed, I'll sit with you till he comes."

"I want you here, Dick," asserted Norton.

"He may come if you won't overtax yourself, Mr. Norton," stipulated the nurse.

"I won't."

"Back in a minute," said Sarver.

He telephoned one of his lieutenants, Kniseley, to come to the house. Things were breaking good. M. M.'s choice of three dollars as Querck's portion was extremely happy.

Kniseley made a good appearance, businesslike, when he came ostensibly as a clerk from the lawyer's office. Sarver introduced him without mentioning names. The nurse was present.

"Here's the codicil, M. M.," he said.

"Read it, Dick," said Norton.

Like M. M., the nurse listened attentively, The instrument was brief, reciting simply, "And to my nephew, Alonzo Querck, I bequeath——"

Sarver's voice was low and husky. On the word "three" he cleared his throat. The nurse did not understand the mumble that came between "three" and "dollars," but it was none of her business, so she did not ask him to repeat. M. M. Norton appeared to have heard.

Norton attempted to raise himself.

"Let me sign it!"

The nurse put an arm under his shoulders. Sarver steadied the pen in his hand. As the labored signature was affixed the nurse tried to read the document, but seemingly by accident it folded downward, concealing the writing.

M. M. Norton sank back. The effort had told on him.

"That takes care of him, eh, Dick?" he whispered.

"Excellently," murmured Sarver,

choosing his words for the nurse's ears. "He doesn't expect it."

"Some surprise then, Dick?"

"Um. I'm having it witnessed now, M. M. Nurse—will you?"

She signed—Frances Donald—but saw no more of the writing.

M. M. Norton lay quiet, his eyes closed.

Sarver thought of the Mouse and of Ruth Mason. His lowered glance took on a hard sparkle. He motioned the nurse aside.

"Miss Donald, will you call Miss Mason, please? You and she will make most competent witnesses, having attended Mr. Norton and being professionally able to testify to his capacity to make this change in his will. Thank you." He went back to Norton. "I'm getting the other nurse, M. M., to sign."

Norton nodded; his strength was spent.

Sarver met Ruth Mason as she came through the doorway. Apprised of what was desired, she looked at him searchingly. She made no move to take the pen he proffered.

"It's a codicil to Mr. Norton's will," he explained again. "Please witness it."

"I'd rather not," she said quietly.

"My dear Miss Mason!" Sarver was genuinely surprised. "Why? Oh!" He found reason for her unwillingness. "You think it's in my favor?"

She did not answer, but her eyes accused, reflecting disappointment.

"What if it were, Miss Mason?"

"It isn't necessary to answer that," she replied steadily.

His smile went awry, wintry, mirthless. He also was disappointed.

"Let your mind be at rest," he said curtly. "It doesn't mention me. Miss Donald!"

Ruth Mason waved the other nurse away, but Sarver would not permit.

"Miss Donald, tell Miss Mason whether I am mentioned in that codicil."

"You're not. Why——"

"That's all, thanks."

Sarver stepped nearer to Miss Mason. Her face was flaming as she felt the other nurse watching across the room.

"You may suggest to Hutton," said Sarver softly, cuttingly, "that he might give me credit for looking after myself in the original will."

The sudden reference to Hutton set her back a pace. Sarver had hit it right—the Mouse had been talking with her for half an hour, and she conceded that he had a story to tell. But what chagrined her more was that Sarver again had subtly read her thought and assailed the suspicion that he was making himself M. M. Norton's heir. Being so close to Norton, why indeed shouldn't he have been provided for?

"Don't you think, Miss Mason," he derided, "that it would be crude for me to ring myself in at this late stage? I'd have little chance of collecting. Wouldn't there be strong basis for a claim of undue influence, since I've been such a constant visitor during his illness? You don't think far enough."

Angered at being again discountenanced—because he had caught her succumbing to Hutton, and promptly shown that she was on the wrong track—because therefore he had put her in the wrong—she stared at him with smoldering eyes. She had nothing to say. His mocking smile, taut lipped, burned her, dared her to witness the codicil.

Defiantly she took the pen and wrote her name.

"Thanks, Miss Mason," he said impersonally. "You may—rejoin Mr. Hutton!"

Then she knew why she was raging. It was because she had allowed Hutton to turn her even momentarily against Sarver. She admitted that to herself, and but for the cold glitter in the gray eyes that were flecked with amusement and scorn, she might have admitted it to Sarver. Instead she fled from the room.

When Sarver turned to the bedside M. M. Norton was asleep.

"Exhausted," said the nurse.

The man looked out of Sarver's eyes, compassionate, anxious.

"Is there immediate danger?"

"He may not awake," answered the nurse, "or he may live for days. Nobody can tell. The doctor will be here in a few minutes, but there is nothing he can do except give a stimulant."

"I'll wait—downstairs," said Sarver. He could not bear to sit by that still form. M. M. Norton looked so—dead!

On the stairs Sarver took the fraudulent codicil from Kniseley. His face darkened. He swore at himself—at Querck.

Again there was the struggle of dual personality. He despised himself for defeating a man who was dying—his own friend who trusted him. In passion he made to tear the document he had just procured, which meant a million and a half dollars to him.

Again the outlaw stayed the man. He was not injuring M. M. Norton. He was fighting the Mouse, who was there in the same house defaming him before Ruth Mason. He was staking himself against the lawyers who would attack this deathbed bequest.

The Mouse—Ruth Mason. He'd put it over right under the Mouse's nose—with Ruth Mason forced to affirm that the fraud was no fraud. The Mouse and all that he might do, be damned!

But there was one development of reaching effect unanticipated by Sarver. The doctor precipitated it. He feared the patient was going into coma. Hoping to revive interest, he spoke of Querck.

"Quite an adventure your nephew had last night," he remarked. "A narrow escape. Plucky of him to tackle as he did, though I suppose that if he hadn't he might have been murdered."

"Eh?" The fallen lids lifted. "You mean Querck?"

"Yes; Querck," said the doctor. "I thought you'd have heard."

Ruth Mason, on duty, listened eagerly. The Mouse had told her of the Mamaroneck episode, had wound up his indictment with it after her return from witnessing the codicil. She was sorry only that she had not been armed with this information during that interview with Sarver. He would not then have confounded her so completely. The Mouse had told her more than was in the newspaper account.

The doctor nodded satisfaction as Norton showed the desired interest.

"What did Querck do?"

"Tackled a burglar and got shot in the head. Not seriously, fortunately. A bullet grazed his head." The doctor was unaware of Norton's disdain for Querck, and painted a lively picture. "He must have put up a good fight, for three shots were fired at him point-blank. His hair was scorched and his scalp pocked with powder. A good fight he made, all right, for, although wounded, he disarmed the assailant and drove him off."

"Querck!" The astonished ejaculation was the loudest Norton had spoken for days. "Querck did that?"

"Yes, sir." The doctor was pleased over having rallied his patient. "If that bullet had been half an inch lower you'd probably have lost your nephew. As it is, the injury is trifling."

"Where—where did this happen?"

"Out in Mamaroneck—he has a house there, hasn't he?" And he went on dilating on the incident.

Once he caught a glimpse of what seemed to be amusement on Ruth Mason's face, and he frowned questioningly. He could see no cause for levity. But she did.

After the departure of the doctor she watched Norton with growing concern. She doubted the wisdom of telling him

about Querck. It had animated him too much; his restlessness and his uneven pulse showed that. The after effect was bad.

Time after time he muttered: "Querck! Querck did that!" He appeared to have difficulty absorbing that, yet bound to get it fixed in his head.

She spoke to him several times without getting an answer. The reiteration of Querck's name continued, however, and led her to believe Norton's mind was straying.

"Mr. Sarver is downstairs, Mr. Norton," she said. "Shall I call him?"

"Dick?" The name came slowly. A pause, then: "No. I want to think a while."

Another long silence, broken only by occasional muttering which the nurse could not interpret. She was convinced that he had fallen asleep or into unconsciousness when he commanded abruptly, distinctly:

"Get some paper, nurse. I want you to write—something."

He chuckled.

In the middle of the writing she had to give him a hypodermic to sustain him. Over the house phone she notified the butler to call the doctor.

When Norton finished the short dictation he was at low ebb. She gave an injection of whisky to supplement the action of the strychnine.

"It's no use, nurse," he breathed. "Get Sarver. I want to see—Dick."

To see him!

Maintaining her composure only because she was trained to it, she summoned Sarver.

Grayer of face and peaked, he hurried in. The predatory instinct was submerged. He came all in reverence, aghast at the dissolution of his friend. He could say nothing coherent, only mumble comfortingly.

"I'm going now, Dick." Norton's voice was a wisp. "I have——" He stopped for breath.

Ruth Mason's eyes were on Sarver. She knew what was coming.

"Witness it, Dick," whispered Norton. "I've made—a new will. Querck—Dick!"—an agony: "I can't—see you—Dick! Witness it—before——"

Ruth Mason handed a closely written sheet of note paper across the bed. Her other hand was on Norton's pulse.

"He is still alive," she said.

The warning galvanized Sarver. He took the paper. He saw M. M. Norton's signature, shaky but recognizable.

Without reading, without considering that this might undo the scheming by which he had made Alonzo Querck heir to three million dollars—heedless of his own half interest in that three million—Sarver wrote his name beside that of Ruth Mason.

"Dick!"

"I've signed it, old man. All right—it's all right—all right," said Sarver, harsh and loud without knowing it.

"Thanks, Dick. You take charge—of the will. You——"

M. M. Norton did not speak again. Five minutes later the nurse closed the eyes whose premature sightlessness had made him the victim of a cheat, of Sarver, his friend.

And a minute later Sarver laughed aloud in the death chamber, hysterical for the first and only time in his life.

Ruth Mason cried out. Staring at her, he got a grip on himself. He held up the will.

"Miss Mason—will you say nothing for a few hours about this?"

"Why?"

"For—reasons."

Tense and combative their eyes held.

"Yes," she said.

The entrance of the doctor broke the spell.

"Thanks," said Sarver. "I'll call you in an hour or two."

He went out, folding the last will of M. M. Norton, which left the entire fortune to Alonzo Querck!

CHAPTER XI.

WITHIN an hour Sarver sat in his office facing Querck. He was cool, crisp, self-contained as ever. His sorrow was laid aside. The reward had to be harvested, and rapidly.

Querck panted nervously and mopped his head, close-cropped to make the singed hair less conspicuous. He had just been told of the death of his uncle, and trembled to ask the outstanding question.

Sarver kept him on tenterhooks. He wanted Querck keyed to still higher pitch. To maintain the suspense he spoke of the previous night.

"You got away with it in good shape, Querck."

"Yes—yes. I did as you said. Here!" He thrust a package into Sarver's hands. "That's the—the pistol."

"You did fire one too many," gibed Sarver, undoing the parcel and dropping the gun on the desk.

Querck flung out his arms. "I did as you told me. What about—did you——"

"The police didn't doubt your story?" interrupted Sarver.

"No. Did you——"

"You hinted at finger prints? They didn't get mussed?"

"I don't know. The police took the pistol." Querck puffed. "Did——"

His eyes bulged fishily as Sarver took a paper from his pocket and unfolded it. He saw M. M. Norton's signature and grabbed.

"Just a moment!" Sarver whisked the paper away. "Calm down, Querck, and I'll let you look at it."

"I will—I will," chattered Querck. His hands hovered eagerly while his eyes devoured the writing. "Gi-give it to me!"

Sarver looked him over with lazy contempt. Evidently Querck could not stand success with any decorum. He had to be brought to earth.

"Don't you think it will look bad for you to go rushing in with it, Querck? Better leave it to me. The codicil is supposed to be in the hands of M. M. Norton's lawyer. I'll get round that by explaining that we got another lawyer in an emergency. I know the man to handle it."

He got a nod of acquiescence.

"I'll do that," he stated, "when we complete the deal."

Querck gave a cry. "But I can't do that until——"

"When you give me a guarantee in writing, I mean. I want," deliberately, "your notes for a million and a half dollars—notes for a quarter million each—demand notes on different banks."

Querck's face convulsed. He hunched in the chair, his lips quivering, pallid. His unhealthy blue eyes, bloodshot with the strain of these last few days, flicked to the gun. He had the intent just then, but not the will.

With lazy motion Sarver pushed the gun nearer to him. Watching Querck on the hook was a pleasure.

"You haven't the guts," he drawled. With a sudden fierceness he leaned: "You haven't anything, Querck! Nothing!"

Laughing, he straightened from the cringing Querck.

"One million and a half is the price." He returned the codicil to his pocket. "In two minutes I'll tear up that paper. The witnesses didn't see it. You can't prove that it ever existed. Be snappy, Querck!"

There was no dallying with the time limit. As soon as he could recover his voice, Querck whined:

"You said a million."

"The stock has gone up. It may go higher."

Sarver sighed because he could not raise the ante again, but he couldn't go beyond fifty-fifty on the three million. He took six slips of paper from under a weight on his desk.

"There are the notes, ready for you to sign. And here"—he submitted a typewritten page—"is a little statement we'll both sign and have witnessed. It's what the district attorney would call a confession of how you and I came to split three millions of M. M. Norton's money. You needn't yelp, Querck. You've got to sign. Then we can go up together if you welsh."

There was no pose about Querck's open mouth. He couldn't get control enough of the jaw muscles to close it. He babbled on, swearing that he would pay, pleading against the damning confession.

Sarver refused to listen. He was adamant in his bluff, and tickled as the gaff ripped Querck. He certainly never would put himself in jail simply for the joy of seeing some one else behind bars. Other means were available to bring Querck to time should he attempt to run out.

Signing the confession, he passed it over. Querck groaned, but he signed. He did not notice that no witnesses were called.

"The notes," said Sarver softly. "One—two—three—four—five—six—thanks."

Throwing the pen to the floor, Querck jumped to his feet in a fury. Lithely Sarver rose. The gun lay on the desk between them. Querck's hand itched for it, and this time he would have seized it had Sarver's eye, hard and piercing as a diamond drill, not stayed him.

"You'd lose, Querck," he said, so very softly the threat was more deadly. "Good day."

Querck's gaze wavered. He lumbered to the door.

Lying back in his chair, Sarver smiled happily. He had expected more trouble, but Querck was hungry for money and panicky. The stroke had been good, though M. M. Norton's last act actually had defeated him. How Querck would rave when he learned that he had given up a million and a half when, as the legal heir, he needn't have paid a nickel!

Shuffling the notes Querck had given him—caressing them, for they would have to be made good—Sarver settled down to await the Mouse. As events had turned out, he had no immediate worry over Hutton's meddling. Still, he had planned to have the Mouse on in the finale. He might as well go through with that idea and adjust the muzzle he had wrought.

CHAPTER XII.

COUNTING upon an intimate talk with the Mouse, Sarver looked aslant when Ruth Mason arrived in his company. A third person would be in the way. His ruffling brows hinted that she was out of place, but he greeted her courteously.

"I was looking forward to seeing you, Miss Mason, after I got through with Mr. Hutton," he added. "However——"

He was, in fact, nettled by her intrusion, taking it as evidence that she repented her agreement to remain silent about the will for a few hours. The reference in it to the codicil doubtless was responsible for that. The peculiarity of the fraudulent instrument he had obtained must have proved puzzling when she had time to think of it.

He jabbed at the Mouse: "Perhaps you feel the need of a caretaker. A watchman—to keep you out of trouble?"

"Oh, no—no." The quiet smile was impish. "I thought Miss Mason might be interested. She told me that she had some sort of an—er—gentleman's agreement with you."

"My presence can't embarrass you, Mr. Sarver," said the nurse. "Mr. Hutton has told me the reason for the meeting and what you expect to be the outcome. I didn't believe you'd mind my coming," she smiled, but her eyes were

serious, "as I, at your request, have placed myself almost in the position of suppressing a will."

"With Hutton's help," said Sarver, "you seem to get a more and more amazing view. You ought to find a more competent mentor, Miss Mason."

"You might try the job," suggested the Mouse, his hands drooping one in the other between his knees as he sat upright in that languid attitude. "I can recommend Miss Mason as a pupil. A day or two ago I wouldn't have hesitated to recommend you as an instructor, but now I'm not so sure, Sarver, not so sure."

The capricious tone, more than the words, arrested Sarver. He could not see where the Mouse could hold any cards in this hand. What was there for the Mouse to nibble on in this case? M. M. Norton himself, by that last-minute turning to his nephew, had closed the only avenue by which Hutton might attack. The shoe was altogether on the other foot—the muzzle was ready to be fitted on the Mouse.

Yet Sarver moved warily, alert.

"You and I could reach a much better understanding," he said directly, "if Miss Mason would leave us for ten minutes."

"I'd rather stay," she demurred.

"There's no sense in putting Miss Mason out," declared the Mouse. "You'll be surprised, Sarver, to discover how much she knows. She said something about suppressing a will. That's past me. If you want me to go while you talk it over——"

"No." Sarver ended the fencing. He spread the will before him. "I can't understand, Miss Mason, why you should have any idea that I want to destroy this. Will you tell me?"

"I didn't say you had," she objected. "But——"

"But you question my motives," Sarver finished serenely. "Will it end your distrust if I show the will to Hutton?"

A gleam of anger came to her eyes. "You're putting words into my mouth that I never said."

"Your unspoken thoughts," said Sarver suavely. "Hutton, here is M. M. Norton's last will, made just before he died. Miss Mason wrote it, so she can testify to its genuineness. Read it to us."

The Mouse crossed his ankles and accepted the paper placidly. His bland expression never changed as he read:

"'I, Malcolm Morford Norton, do make my last will and testament.

"'All my estate I devise and bequeath to my nephew, Alonzo Querck, for his own use and benefit forever, with full power to sell, mortgage, lease, or in any other manner to dispose of the whole or any part of my estate. This I do without stipulation or condition, but with the request that my nephew will find pleasure in carrying out the personal bequests made in the previous will, which this renders null and void, and that he will show a personal and generous interest in the philanthropies which I had named as my beneficiaries. I make my nephew sole legatee because of a regard for him which has come to me after years of misunderstanding. I apologize to him for the codicil drawn by me earlier on this same day, bequeathing him the sum of three dollars. I appoint my friend, Dick Sarver, as administrator with my nephew.'"

The Mouse's fair brows went up.

"Informal," he commented, "but valid, I suppose."

"I took the opening paragraph from the encyclopedia," said the nurse. "The rest is as he dictated."

The Mouse evinced a mild curiosity. "How much does he leave?"

"About six million," replied Sarver.

"Well, well! Some jump for Querck. From three dollars to six million. Kind of odd provision, Sarver, three dollars."

"That is a point I don't understand," interposed Miss Mason, watching Sar-

ver gravely. "Why were you so—so pleased when the codicil was signed?"

"Wasn't it funny—odd, as the Mouse says?" Sarver laughed. "Is that what made you think I intended to destroy the final will? Because I was amused by the—three dollars?"

"I never said you intended——" Miss Mason checked herself. Notwithstanding the circumstantial story of the Mouse, she did not yet utterly condemn Sarver. It was to see how he would confront the Mouse that she had come. She wished, if possible, to retain the comradely impression he had created during the many hours passed at Norton's bedside.

"We won't quarrel over anything I said or did not say, Mr. Sarver." She smiled faintly. "That is immaterial. So is the will just now. There is something else——" She hesitated and looked at the Mouse. "Mr. Hutton?"

But the Mouse did not immediately follow the cue. The three-dollar item attracted him. His interpretation of the relationship between Sarver and Querck was all upset. Had Sarver procured the will leaving everything to Querck, he could have understood.

"Who has this codicil?"

"I burned it," said Sarver shortly.

The Mouse's eyes widened. "You lost no time."

"It could have made nothing but trouble," said Sarver. "Things like that provide too much food for will contests."

"Perhaps. Who was to get the money under the old will?"

"Charities—I don't know what they are. There were some small legacies, mostly to servants. The bulk, I understood, was to go to some charity foundation."

"You know Mr. Querck?" asked Miss Mason.

"I do," said Sarver grimly. His lip curled. Querck!

"I saw him once," she said thoughtfully, "when he called at the house. Mr. Norton wouldn't have him in the sick room. I didn't—care much for him."

"You wouldn't!" laughed Sarver. "I don't see how anybody could."

"You've been pretty chummy with him lately," murmured the Mouse.

"Your ideas of chumminess are away off. I've had some business with him." His eyes mocked the Mouse. He was approaching a salient part of that business!

"And you finally got three dollars willed to him!"

Ruth Mason broke in: "Do you think, Mr. Sarver, that Mr. Querck will do as Mr. Norton resquests? Will he be—generous?"

Sarver's mouth tightened, but he laughed again. He was the only person who'd get a finger into Querck's pie!

"He'll be generous to—Querk. Why the pup hasn't even the decency to say a word of sorrow," said Sarver with a flush of anger, unguardedly telling that he had seen Querck since Norton's death. "He's a bloodless hound. He didn't even ask whether M. M. died peacefully. All he wants to know is how much he gets."

"Ah!" The Mouse cocked his head. "He ran straight to you to find out, Sarver, because you, of course, had had him added to the will—to the extent of three dollars!"

"What if he did?" rasped Sarver. He was mad—to think of Querck made him hot. "Let's forget Querck. I want to talk to you, Hutton——"

"Please!" Ruth Mason spoke earnestly: "Mr. Norton told me what he was doing with his money. He had a wonderful conception. His fortune was to be held in trust to establish and maintain homes for orphans throughout the country. One such home already is in existence up-State. Perhaps you know that, Mr. Sarver?"

"No." Sarver regarded her intently. She was speaking to him; not to him and the Mouse.

"It's a beautiful place," she went on. "I visited it a while ago. Not the ordinary orphanage, but an estate dotted with pretty cottages. It's a community of little folks with none of the earmarks of an institution. He built it and visited it regularly. Didn't he ever speak of it?"

Under her steady eyes Sarver felt uncomfortable. She was saying something to him more than was in her words. He shook his head.

"Mr. Norton provided all the funds for it," said Ruth Mason. "If Mr. Querck disregards his wishes——"

In the ensuing silence the Mouse blinked first at the girl and then at Sarver. He noted the possibilities in the situation, but said nothing.

Sarver sat motionless, thinking. The fine wrinkle radiated over his temples as his eyes narrowed. She was appealing to him on behalf of these parentless children whom M. M. Norton had maintained so they would have a chance in life. She was asking him to appeal in turn to Querck. That was laughable—such an appeal to Querck!—but Sarver didn't laugh.

"I might do that," he said, answering the question that she had not spoken. "I'll think about it. Let me talk with Hutton now, Miss Mason. He and I have a bone to pick."

He smiled again over the gratitude in her face and decided that Querck would have to split three ways. The orphans would get their share.

The Mouse coughed. "The bone won't break any of my teeth, Sarver," he chuckled. "Let me tell about it. Miss Mason already knows—more than you do."

Sarver shrugged. The Mouse would change his tune in a few minutes. When the muzzle was fitted.

"I remarked a while ago," said the Mouse, "that I wasn't so sure about your ability as an instructor. I take that back. What I should have said is that you don't always employ a competent assistant. Now about Mamaroneck!"

He flopped his hands deprecatingly and pursed his lips.

"Yes?" prompted Sarver. His smile held, but he had an uneasy feeling that the Mouse was about to wriggle free. Where then had there been a slip-up? If Querck—— Querck!

"You see," said the Mouse conversationally, "you couldn't have put it on me, Sarver, even if Querck hadn't tangled things up. I have three witnesses who'll swear—circumstantially they can swear—that I was ten miles away when the shooting took place in Querck's house."

"Has any one said that you were not?" Sarver could only let the Mouse go on. Afterward, when no one was present, he would show the Mouse the hole he was in.

"Not yet. But somebody is likely to." A fleeting grin transformed the Mouse's face. "The police have that gun I left my finger prints on at your house the other night. Remember that."

Sarver looked blank. The Mouse glanced at Miss Mason who, smiling doubtfully, was watching Sarver.

"But as I said, I have three witnesses who recall my passing through White Plains in your car, Sarver, at the time Querck was being elevated to herodom over in Mamaroneck," pursued the Mouse quietly. "And there's a policeman whom I had note the time I left your car at Columbus Circle. You saw him, I think? He took the license number because I thought it might be useful to be able to prove I had been with you."

"A manufactured alibi," mocked Sarver. "Go on, Mouse. And you say there are finger prints on the gun

Querck's assailant used? You think they're yours?"

"I know it! I got the print this morning as soon as I found out what had happened, and compared it with my own. No question of it, Sarver. No, sir!" He did a remarkable thing for the Mouse—he winked! "I'd have a lot of explaining to do, if I hadn't those witnesses in White Plains."

The repeated mention of White Plains forced Sarver to ask the question which the Mouse invited.

"People who saw you there?"

"No." The Mouse squinted at his toes. "It was a foolish thing to do, Sarver—I mean, what I did. But it wasn't any more so than allowing you to ride me around so I wouldn't have corroboration when called on to say where I'd been."

Sarver grinned. What if the Mouse had found a way out?

"I'm listening," he said. "It was a foolish thing——"

"It might have cost me a good watch," said the Mouse, "and done me no good. It was a hunch, though. You gave it to me—the hunch. Remember you got all tensed when the time came for Querck to attack himself? Attack himself—yes. Whether you remember or not, you did. It struck me that that might be the zero hour for whatever you were pulling off. So I figured, everything considered, that I'd better fix my location. I—ah—threw my watch at three men we passed on the road!"

Sarver burst out in appreciative laughter. Ruth Mason joined him, but restrainedly.

"Faith, Mouse, faith is the thing! What if the three had been burglars!"

"Oh, I had to take that chance. If they weren't, I surely had the time fixed."

"Most people are honest, Mr. Sarver," said Ruth Mason, meaningly.

Sarver turned to her, sobering. "Was M. M. Norton sane when he made his last will?" he asked at a tangent.

"Was he——" She floundered. "What do you mean?"

"Just that. Was his mind clear—or wandering?"

She considered before replying. "I had thought his mind was wandering," she said finally, "but he seemed lucid enough while he dictated. He had lain for a long time muttering—but all I could make out was Mr. Querck's name. Did you"—she gave back the question—"didn't you think his brain was clear at the end?"

Sarver scowled and ran his fingers through the graying hair.

"It was hard to tell. What did you say, Mouse, about Querck having made a mistake?" He did not deny the Mouse's charge that an attempt had been made to frame him. What was the use? It meant nothing now, anyhow.

"Oh, that! I'll give you a tip, Sarver. If you or Querck want the tale that he was shot at to stand up you'll have to chase out there and sprinkle some empty cartridges! The local police haven't noticed—at least they hadn't when I was out this morning—but no shells were found where the shooting took place. Ask Querck what he did wth them!"

Once more Sarver laughed. Then he jumped to his feet. His eye flashed hard.

"Back in a minute," he said. "I want to cuss—Querck! I'll take this"—he picked up the will—"it was left in my care."

While he was in the outer office, Ruth Mason plucked nervously at a handkerchief. The Mouse gazed placidly out the window.

"What——" She stopped, not knowing exactly what she wanted to ask.

"I wouldn't make any bets on what Sarver will do," said the Mouse sagely. "Wait!"

A harshness was about Sarver's face

when he returned, but a mellowness, too. The steel-gray eyes were tranquil.

He remained standing, facing both.

"Miss Mason," he said studiedly, "I don't believe M. M. Norton was completely capable mentally when he made that will. It is possible that in his enfeebled condition he put too much weight on this alleged heroism of Querck. He always had considered Querck a useless piece of furniture—a lizard and a mountebank, he said. That being so, Querck gets the fortune under false pretenses. The Mouse says the shooting was a fake. Maybe it was. Granting it was a fake, Querck shouldn't get anything more than was provided in the codicil. Isn't that so?"

"Ye-es—but——" She gasped as she realized what he was getting at.

"But who are we to decide?" said Sarver. "That can wait a minute. Mouse, you asked me about the codicil. I told you it was burned. It wasn't. I have it here."

The Mouse nodded casually.

Sarver again addressed the nurse: "In making that will, are you positive that M. M. said three dollars when he referred to the codicil?"

"Yes." She was trembling, breathless, bewildered.

"Then you are positive that in adding Querck to the original will he purposed giving him only three dollars? You didn't leave out a word? Didn't miss anything he said?"

"No. I'm sure I didn't."

"You perhaps did?"

"I'm sure I did not," she said.

"Very well." Sarver had a document, folded, in his hand. "This may offend Hutton's sense of law and order," he smiled, "but it's too late now. Because a fake influenced M. M. Norton to make Querck his sole heir—when M. M. Norton's senses were growing dim—I have burned that will! The ashes are outside. And," he added quickly, "because M. M. Norton earlier planned to leave him three dollars, you Miss Mason, can do as you please with this." He handed her the codicil. "Read it."

The Mouse got up and read over her shoulder.

"Oh!" Her hands crushed the paper as the "three million dollars" blazed out at her. "Oh!"

"Sarver," said the Mouse, "would any law be violated if this also was destroyed?"

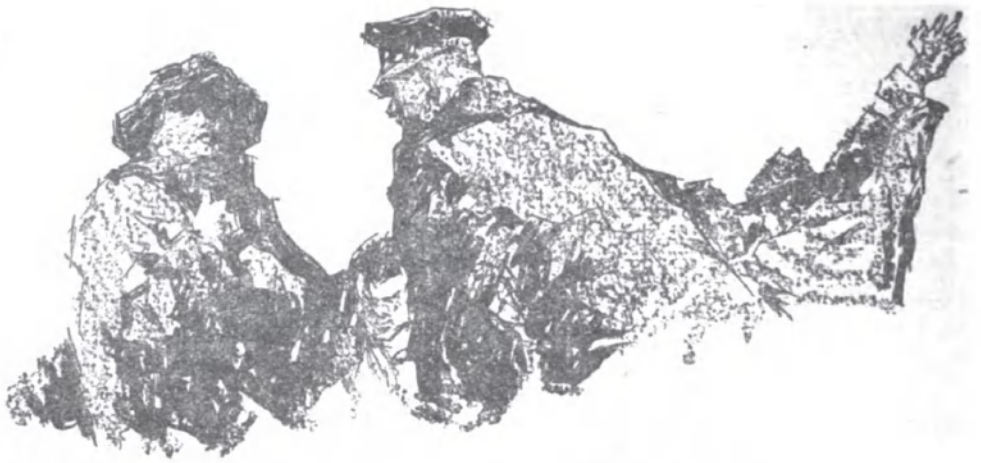
"No." The phone rang and Sarver took it up. He made no move as the Mouse gently released the paper from Ruth Mason's grasp and put a match to it.

"Querck!" said Sarver into the phone. "Yes, I'll meet you at the district attorney's office. I'm going there now! Hurry over!"

He hung up, his face puckering wryly.

"That speech cost me a million and a half dollars, Mouse! But it cost Querck four and a half! Tut-tut, Miss Mason, you haven't anything to cry over——"

Sarver walked to the window, but instead of brick and sandstone and the roofs of lower New York, he saw green fields and trees with nestling cottages—and little children.



The Darn Fool

By Arthur Lockwood

THE FIGHT DISTINCTLY WAS NOT HIS, AND GORDON COULD SEE NO REASON FOR GOING INTO IT. BUT SOME GIRLS INSIST ON A MAN BEING A HERO. . .

THERE is what I call one top-size darn fool."

First Officer Gordon on the liner *Empire State* said it feelingly. His tone intimated that he had but sparingly expressed himself. He would have liked to put it in stronger language.

"Where? Who?"

Miss Torrance followed the angle of his glance. They were in a street of sailors' lodging houses, a block from the water front.

Down the street they were crossing, a dozen men were battling energetically and apparently without favor. Toward them a man was running. Fists driving right and left he went into the fight under full steam.

"Oh!" Miss Torrance paused on reaching the farther curb and watched tensely.

Gordon grunted, muttering forcefully in undertone.

Three policemen were charging down on the fighters, their sticks swinging and rapping for reinforcements as they ran.

"I knew it!" exploded Gordon disgustedly. "There he goes—cold!"

The man who had just crushed into the conflict hurtled backward from the milling crowd. He was propelled, as both Miss Torrance and Mr. Gordon clearly saw, by several heavy fists which landed in a bevy on his face, head and body. The free-for-allers evidently had halted their indiscriminate walloping long enough to concentrate on him.

"The da—darn fool!" repeated Gordon. "What the—what'd he expect!"

The policemen were among the battlers and clubs were bouncing off heads. The man who had been knocked down lay still.

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Miss Torrance. "Come. He may be badly hurt."

With brisk step she moved in the direction of the battle.

Gordon went hastily after her—caught her arm.

The fight continued with the erstwhile antagonists now aligned against

the police. Another man dropped under a nightstick. A policeman was being hammered by two huskies who had hold of him.

"That's no place for you," said Gordon sharply. "No place for anybody but a darn fool—like Temple who's stretched out so nice and stiff right now," he snorted; "or a cop whose job it is to handle trouble."

Momentarily the girl suffered herself to be detained. She looked at Gordon curiously.

"You know that man?"

"Sure. We rode the same ship in the war."

"He's hurt!" She stated the obvious with suggestive inflection.

Gordon nodded calmly. "He couldn't be anything else under the circumstances. There isn't anything we can do about it."

Felled by a blow from a nightstick, one of the battlers reeled and ere he collapsed planted a foot in Temple's ribs.

"We could save him from being trampled." Her voice had a trace of anger. Her glance registered disapproval of Gordon's attitude.

He shrugged. "When the smoke clears," he said. "This isn't our funeral. I don't aim to be buried yet awhile."

Miss Torrance tugged to get away. He retained his grip on her arm.

Knives flashed amid the whirling group. Three more, including a policeman, were down. The two policemen still on their feet fought back to back, hard pressed but fearful to use their guns on account of the growing and shouting crowd which watched the struggle.

"There's no sense cutting in before the mêlée ends," emphasized Gordon. "Temple was crazy. It'll be over in a minute. Here comes the wagon."

The clanging gong and the roar of a speeding motor, resounding nearby, caused the half dozen assailants to wade in more viciously. The policemen became separated. One was thrust back against the crowd. A howl of derision broke out. Several hands fastened on his stick as he swung it overhead, and struck at him from behind. Letting go his stick to avoid being dragged onto his back, he fired at the men in front of them and plunged through them to escape the new attack from the rear.

The patrol wagon swung round the corner, plowing into the crowd and scattering it. The reserves tumbled out. In sixty seconds it was over. Temple, one policeman, and three sailors were unconscious. Another policeman and two of the original battlers had knife wounds. Two bystanders had bullet wounds.

First Officer Gordon, lieutenant, U. S. N. R., grinned wryly at his companion.

"Temple never did have any judgment," he commented.

Helen Torrance, R. N., lately on active service with the Red Cross and presently engaged as nurse aboard the liner *Empire State,* regarded him distantly. Her hand released his restraining fingers on her arm.

"Perhaps," she said coldly, "perhaps you'll allow me now to see if I can help your friend Mr. Temple."

"Sure," agreed Gordon cheerfully. He fell into step with her.

The police were clearing the street.

"You can wait here," said Miss Torrance in her most professional voice. She smiled disdainfully. "There may still be some danger, you know."

Sheer amazement on his face, Gordon stared at her. For the first time he observed how chilly her manner had become. The friendly, comradely sparkle that had been in her eyes a few minutes before, up to the time they had come upon the fight, was gone. The brief glance she gave him was aloof, impersonal. She seemed to have drawn away from him, far away, just when he had been congratulating himself that she

was drawing nearer to him as he most earnestly desired.

"I don't get you, Miss Torrance." That was the exact truth. A worried furrow gathered between his brows. Why should she make a slant like that at him—warn him that there might be danger?

"I mean," she said, "that if you're afraid——"

"Of what?" The implication made Gordon gasp. He couldn't figure what she was getting at, what had caused the sudden frigidness.

She didn't answer him but addressed a policeman who barred their way.

"I'm a nurse," she said. "I may be able to do something for these men until the ambulance arrives."

"Go ahead, miss," said the cop. "Hey, you"—his stick fell in front of Gordon—"where you going?"

"I'm with—her," snapped Gordon. He was mad now, because she had gone on without waiting to see whether he was accompanying her.

The policeman looked him over suspiciously then turned to look at the girl who already was bending over Temple.

"She don't seem to need you much," he remarked.

Gordon flushed. That cut harder than the speaker knew.

"That's a friend of mine who's laid out. He——"

"You in the battle?" The policeman showed interest. He herded Gordon tentatively inside the police lines.

"I was not." Gordon rated the man a fool. "I saw it from upstreet. Let me pass. I know that man, I tell you. He's mate on the *Gowanus*. He tried to stop the fight."

"You're a witness then. Some of these birds may be stiff for keeps. Go tell the sergeant, there. Say, sarge," he exaggerated characteristically, "here's a feller knows all about it."

Fuming and fretting, puzzled and angry by the abrupt change in Helen Torrance's manner, Gordon was forced to submit to a quizzing by the sergeant while she went capably about the merciful task of rendering first aid. By the time his interrogation ended two ambulances had arrived and, with the victims coming to, the scene was becoming less sanguinary.

Having finished putting a tourniquet on a slashed arm Miss Torrance turned back to Temple as Gordon reached her side. The mate of the *Gowanus* was sitting up against a wall. His battered face grinned recognition of Gordon.

"Some party," he remarked. He fingered delicately a swollen laceration on the side of his head; brass knuckles had landed there. "They got me too fast, though," he lamented. "I didn't get far."

"You didn't," said Gordon. "Aren't you ever going to get sense. Temple? What show'd you think you had?"

Temple's right eye—the left was rapidly closing—lingered questioningly on the girl. Gordon introduced her sourly—she hadn't spoken to him.

"Ted Temple—Miss Torrance, nurse on the *Empire State*. What'd you think you were doing, Temple, when you busted into this racket?"

The injured mate tried to get up but sank back with a grunt, his hand at his side.

"Ribs cracked, I guess," he bemoaned. "What you say, Gordon?"

"Did you think you could lick that mob all by yourself?" demanded Gordon again intolerantly. "The cops were coming——"

"I might have," chuckled Temple. "Fact is, I didn't think anything except that most of the battlers belong to the *Gowanus*' crew and we sail in the morning. We had a tough job getting a crew signed. If they got into jail or hospital they wouldn't be much good to us."

"How about yourself?" scoffed Gordon. "Now the *Gowanus* not only has

to fill its crew but it has to get another mate. You're due for hospital."

"Well——" Temple looked inquiringly at Miss Torrance.

She nodded. "You'll be laid up, Mr. Temple," she declared. "But"—her cold gaze flicked Gordon—"it was splendid the way you sailed into the crowd of ruffians. I thought so. Mr. Gordon didn't," she added with an insinuating shrug.

"And Temple knows it wasn't," flared Gordon.

"It was crazy," confessed Temple.

"I understand your agreement with Mr. Gordon," said the girl. "It makes it—easier for him."

Gordon chewed his lips resentfully. What the devil was she raking him for? He did not wish to quarrel with her. No! That must be the last thing in the world. He stood sullenly silent.

The ambulance surgeon came and ran expert hands over Temple.

"We'll load you up," he said.

"I'll go to my ship."

"Later," said the surgeon laconically. "Better let us sew you up and straighten out your ribs."

"I'd advise you to go," said Miss Torrance.

"If I can go to my ship after being fixed up," stipulated Temple, and with this understanding he was lifted into the ambulance.

Helen Torrance looked at the sleeves of her buff-colored linen suit. They were bloody.

"I'll have to go back to the ship," she said.

Gordon scowled. He could tell that she was glad of the excuse for returning. He knew then that the evening he had looked forward to so joyously, dinner at an uptown hotel and a theater, was off. But he still was unable to comprehend.

"We can catch up on our schedule," he said hopefully as they turned back toward the pier. Fortunately they had started early because, the *Empire State* having reached port only that morning, the girl had said she wanted to walk instead of taking a cab. "I'll get a machine while you change your dress——"

Her gaze remained straight ahead. Her voice was expressionless.

"I'm sorry," she said perfunctorily, "but I'm afraid we'll have to make it some other time. I—I don't feel quite up to the mark," she prevaricated gracefully but flagrantly, "after all that excitement."

Gordon laughed—emptily. Her characterization of a street brawl as exciting was funny. She who had seen war service!

The glance she gave him quieted his ill-timed laughter.

"Why?" he asked humbly. "Why are you spoiling the—our evening?"

"It's already spoiled," she returned. "You did that."

"I! How—when——" He was bewildered. It all hinged somehow on that damned fight. But how? "What have I done?" he asked, less humbly.

"It's what you didn't do," she explained contradictorially.

"Huh?" He couldn't get that either.

"When a man"—she stressed the word—"sees a friend in danger, in need of help, he usually lends a hand."

"Say—what——" Gordon paused. He began to get a glimmering. "You mean," quietly, "that I should have jumped into that mess when I saw Temple go?"

"I wouldn't advise you. You used your own judgment." That also was a slur.

Gordon smiled grimly. "I did," he said. He justified himself: "If I'd been beside him when he started it would have been different. I wasn't. You saw him go down and out before I had any chance to get near. I said, you may remember, that he was a fool. I say it again. And I'd have been a big-

ger fool to follow along and get my head knocked off, too."

Her "Probably" was loaded with chilling scorn.

"Positively," he said crisply. "Temple's the one that lacked judgment. He's got the notion that a mate has to live up to the old-fashioned standard and maintain a reputation as a hard-boiled bruiser. You heard him say he jumped into that racket to get his men out of it and aboard ship. If he'd stayed out of it they would have got aboard ship, a bit battered some of them, maybe, but serviceable. Now the men he was trying to round up are where they'd have wound up anyhow—in hospital or jail—and he also is in hospital. Where's the gain?" he bit off. "A ship can get along without a couple of deckhands but it has to have officers. Temple's bone-headed bucko stuff has left the *Gowanus* shy a mate."

He stumped along, waiting for her response. She must see the wisdom of his stand.

"That is one way of looking at it," she said stiffly. "Every one of course can find an argument to cover his own shortcomings. But a man who goes single-handed against twelve or more in the performance of his duty——"

"It wasn't his duty to turn policeman," cut in Gordon. "The men were not aboard ship. There were in the street, within reach of the civil authorities, the proper authorities. The police were coming. Temple should have left the job to them or at least waited thirty seconds until they could go into action with him. You saw how that gang turned on him. They were tickled to death at the chance to beat up an officer without any comeback. Likely as not he's ridden some of 'em pretty hard. They couldn't smash him on his own deck, but in this case they can claim that they didn't recognize him. Agh!" His thoughts were distinctly profane.

Eagerly he watched for some sign that she was yielding to his viewpoint. She gave him no encouragement.

They were on the pier. In a minute they would reach the gangplank. Once across that and she would be gone. She would stay in her room to avoid further conversation; or slip ashore by herself. His world became abominably dark. He smothered his resentment.

"Please, Miss Torrance, won't you see that I'm right?" he pleaded. "I'll battle anywhere, any time, if something can be gained by it or if I'm directly concerned. I won't butt my head against a stone wall when it isn't my fight—when I won't be helping any one. I couldn't have helped Temple after he got knocked out. Because Temple dived foolishly into a bunch of roughnecks wasn't any reason why I should do the same. I'd have got what he got. For what?"

"A brave man does not stop to count the odds," she said ungenerously.

Gordon swallowed that while they mounted the plank. The quartermaster saluted him, but he did not see. He was mad again.

"There's a difference between a brave man and a damn' fool," he said tartly.

His neglect to modify the adjective brought a wisp of a smile to her but she was careful to restrict it to the far corner of her mouth so that he did not notice.

"The difference between a brave man and a fool can be purely relative," she stated critically, "according to the needs of the person making the distinction."

She climbed the ladder to the upper deck and proceeded to her room. Glumly silent, he followed.

At her door he made another bid, humble again.

"Couldn't you—won't you come uptown as we planned," he begged miserably. "We could talk it over, you know—this mixup. Please—Helen!"

The fervency with which he spoke her name—for the first time and in

advance of his program; he had intended to use it that evening when they were tête-à-tête in the corner of a dining room under shaded lights while an orchestra played dreamily—his imploring earnestness made her look at him an instant with a return of that comradelike intimacy which until a half hour ago had existed between them. Only for an instant.

She shook her head slowly. Her face again was averted.

"I'd rather not," she said. "I—I'm disappointed. Good night, Mr. Gordon. I'm sorry to have—disarranged your evening."

Gordon's lips closed tight on further words. He nodded shortly. Then he was staring at the blank door.

"Hell's damnation!" he said aloud. "Why the blistering blazes did that idiot Temple—— Aw!"

He raised his hand to knock on the door, changed his mind, and went furiously along the deck. She thought he was yellow, did she! All right! Let her think it. What'n'l did he care? She wasn't necessary in his scheme. He'd got along well enough before he ever saw her, hadn't he? Betcha! He could get on just as well.

Leaning over the rail he apostrophized Temple with picturesque pungency. The last two trips, since Helen Torrance joined the *Empire State,* certainly had been the best he'd ever made.

Faced by this distressing situation which showed no signs of abating the following day, Gordon considered means of dissipating it and regaining the old footing with Miss Torrance. He pondered the question of entering upon a swashbuckling campaign, hunting trouble and eating it up, flying at any one who looked even slantwise at him. If Helen Torrence wanted a man-eater as her hero, why not run wild and qualify?

There was one big reason against such a course, however. To carry it out he would have to upset his manner of a lifetime. He could fight, and would fight, handily, whenever there was cause, as he had told her, but he never had been a trouble hunter. Unlike Temple, he did not believe that a mate had to be a two-fisted, double-action manhandler—not in constant practice. When necessary to keep his ship trim —yes; or when some one—or several some ones for that matter—deliberately sought trouble. Generally, though, he was in favor of peace, even when he had to fight like hell to get it!

Again, he was not thoroughly convinced that Helen Torrance really had as great favor for a bucko as her present attitude indicated. In their conversations, which had so rapidly increased in frequency aboard ship, she had on the contrary intimated that she was for peace; she had seen enough of war.

What then, he asked himself, would happen if he went round with a chip on his shoulder and heavy hands itching for acceptance of his defi? Drawing on his knowledge of her—and at the time of the street fight he had come to think that he knew her rather well—he judged that should he go searching for trouble he probably would earn her further condemnation as a bully! That, he reflected dourly, would be the reaction to anticipate in a woman.

The sum total of his cogitation therefore was a decision to do nothing. Nothing, that is, but sulk. Sulking came automatically when on the few occasions during the day in which he caught sight of Miss Torrance she either did not see him or passed by with a mere nod of recognition.

Another day of the same aloof treatment from her did not improve his mood. He became unusually irritable with everybody he talked to. His commands grew sharper; the reprimands he handed out were many and sarcastic,

barbed. At dinner he snapped at the captain in a way which made that worthy officer look suspiciously upon him for evidences of liquor. He was reaching close to trouble without designedly provoking it.

His opportunity to do some legitimate manhandling came that second night when he had the watch. He was lounging at the break of the lower promenade deck forward, acutely conscious of the presence of Helen Torrance in the shadows a few feet away; and pretending that he was unconscious of her proximity. From away forward discordant and unwonted sounds came to him but he was only vaguely sensible to them; his mind was too busily engaged in futile effort to forget the girl who was at once within reach and a thousand miles away.

The quartermaster scurrying up the ladder broke into his glooming. Blood was running from a cut over the quartermaster's eyes and he was patently agitated.

"They're raising hell in the fo'c'sle, sir," he puffed. "I started in to see what's what and"—he mopped his bloody brow—"something hit me."

Gordon straightened. Here was where he headed in.

"Then you don't know what's happening?"

"Looked like a battle-royal, the flash I got," reported the quartermaster. "I dunno. Big Shaunnessy, the Dutchman, a couple of Swedes, and three or four I couldn't make out, all mixing it."

Gordon took a step toward the ladder. He turned——

"See Miss Torrance and have her fix up your face. She's on deck——"

"Here," said the nurse. She had heard their conversation and come forward. She led the quartermaster under a light.

A louder shout echoed from the forecastle. She glanced round at Gordon who was watching her lay deft fingers on the quartermaster's injured head.

"You'll have to hurry, Mr. Gordon, or some one may be killed," she said sweetly. "Or isn't this your fight!"

In the act of swinging from contemplation of her to go forward the mate stopped. His jaw stuck out.

"You're right," he said with icy harshness. "It isn't my fight. Quartermaster—call the master-at-arms!"

"Yes, sir." The quartermaster moved to obey.

Helen Torrance held him. She faced Gordon.

"Get some one else to do your errand," she flared. "This man is hurt. He's in my care——"

"When I relieve him from duty. Quartermaster—the master-at-arms."

"Yes, sir." He slipped his arm from the girl's grasp and hurried away.

Gordon drew closer to her.

"You're a coward," she said scornfully.

"I'm living up to your opinion of me." He laughed. "And proving consistent by adhering to what I told you a couple of days ago. It isn't my duty to put down a fight among the men. It is against the law for me to lay a finger on any of them unless in self-defense or in case of mutiny. I thank you for having reminded me, Miss Torrance," he said ironically, "of the limitations to my authority."

The shouting in the forecastle grew louder.

"Aren't you going to do anything?" demanded the nurse angrily.

"I'm doing all within my power," he shrugged. "I've sent for the proper authority."

"You could——"

"But I won't!"

She stamped her foot. He laughed—naturally this time. For him the strain was broken. Her action was so altogether womanlike! It was childish even—like this bickering between them.

Before she knew what he was about he put a hand on her shoulder.

"Come, Helen, let's quit this nonsensical quarreling. I'll go flatten out that crowd in the fo'c'sle if it'll please you —or get flattened myself. I'll——"

She whisked out of his reach.

"I wouldn't have you make a—a damn' fool of yourself," she flung back his own differentiation. "You wouldn't be brave if you went down there—but just a fool."

"Another apt reminder—thanks."

Pivoting on his heel he went up the ladder to the upper promenade deck and thence on to the bridge. She could go be—yes—damned!

Five minutes passed. Ten. The quartermaster, with blood plentifully smeared over his sweating face, panted onto the bridge. He found Gordon slouching in a corner, gazing out on the pauseless small craft on the river and kicking good white paint off the rail.

"I can't find him, sir," he announced. "The master——"

"Get to hell and find him," roared Gordon.

"But——"

Gordon thrust his face close to the other man's.

"If you weren't hurt now, I'd throw you off the bridge. Go do what you're told——"

"But——" The quartermaster retreated. From the top of the ladder as he stood ready to make it in one jump, he imparted the information that had caused him to interrupt his quest for the master-at-arms.

"But—Miss Torrance has gone into the fo'c'sle. I saw her—a minute ago and——"

From forward three revolver shots rang out. Two more.

The quartermaster made his leap down the ladder as Gordon rushed. He barely scraped himself out of the way as the mate also plunged to the deck without touching a rung. Getting back of a stanchion he prepared to dodge this way or that. He had no need to maneuver farther. He was forgotten.

Gordon already had made the lower promenade in another jump. He hit the main deck in one more and was running full tilt for the forecastle over which an ominous silence had settled following the shooting.

The whirlwind that came down the forecastle companionway did not hesitate to size up the situation. It hit the two nearest men simultaneously. With efficient fists working it went among four others who were grouped to one side.

"You yellow-bellied scum!" roared Gordon, dodging a lashing foot and clumping its owner full in the face. "Back up, you slab-sided, gutter-wallowing, swill-faced——"

He was taking punishment but not in such measure as he in his furious assault was administering it.

"Where is she?" he shouted. "Where? If you've——"

"Mr. Gordon! Mr. Gordon!"

Helen Torrance's voice, rising above the din following his cyclonic intrusion, halted him in the motion of driving his fist into the nearest face. As he hung in suspended action, horny knuckles belonging to one of the twain he had knocked down in his initial rush struck flush on the side of his head. On his staggering progress across the deck he had a glimpse of Helen Torrance before he brought up with a jolt against the bulkhead.

His head was spinning from the blow. He ascribed what he saw to his rocking vision. Pop-eyed, he stared.

Shaking his head to clear it he faced about to meet attack. Three of the sailors he had roughed were advancing. He squared, back against the bulkhead.

"Stop, you men," commanded Miss Torrance. "It's a mistake, don't you see. Stand where you are! Mr. Gordon—you stand still, too."

Out of the shadows she came, leading by the ear the shame-faced but grinning Shaunnessy, the biggest and hardest man on the ship! Gordon gave a cracked laugh. His brain was addled! He surely was seeing things!

"Mr. Gordon," said Miss Torrance serenely, "Shaunnessy was fighting the whole crowd when I came in. He started the trouble. He's sorry. Aren't you sorry, Shaunnessy?"

"Yes'm," grinned Shaunnessy, stooping his hulking shoulders so she would not have to reach so high to cling to his ear!

"And the other men are sorry," continued Miss Torrance.

The grin was general now.

"Yes'm," they chorused.

"And"—she looked anxiously at Gordon—"it doesn't matter, does it, who fired the pistol? Nobody got hit. That can be overlooked, can't it, Mr. Gordon?"

Gordon exhaled noisily. He looked over the belligerents. Some were marked, but they were hard men and all were on their feet.

"Anything you say, Miss Torrance," he nodded, still laboring to make his dizzy brain take a true bearing in this amazing situation.

"I'm sorry, men," he apologized. "I came under a mistaken impression. You—understand. I'm sorry. No hard feelings."

His neck awkwardly kinked owing to the girl's continued grip on his ear, Shaunnessy grinned more broadly and appointed himself spokesman.

"Sure not, sir. Sure not. We was just havin' a bit of fun when the darlin'——"

"Shaunnessy!" reproved the darling, and he chuckled as she shook his head violently before letting go the ear.

"I'll look after the quartermaster now," said Miss Torrance. "It was a boot that struck him. And Mr. Gordon——"

She paused, put a hand under his chin and tilted his face to the light.

"You have an eye that can use a little doctoring. If you'll come to the dispensary——"

Gordon grinned more vacuously than any of the seamen. She was smiling on him—the hungered-for ring was in her voice.

"I guess I also made a mistake," she said softly. "I sort of get now your distinction between bravery and foolhardiness. About—I mean—about not taking a hand unless it's your fight or —or unless some one you—care about —appears to need help. I—— Oh, let's see to that poor quartermaster," she finished hurriedly and turned to the companionway.

But in the dark of the deck there was another minute's delay in attending to the quartermaster.

"If you are at liberty to-morrow night," said Miss Torrance, "perhaps——"

"I am," said Gordon—and it was then that the minute was lost.

May One Judge Mankind?

By Carrington Phelps

Author of "Sebastian," etc.

HE WAS A STRANGE MAN, WAS JOHN DORN; AND IT WAS A STRANGE AND AWESOME SECRET THAT HE CARRIED IN HIS SOUL. PERHAPS NO MAN EVER HAD BEEN IN THE TRAGIC POSITION OF JOHN DORN. . . . . .

NO fiction can possibly be written that carries the conviction or the thrills accompanying actual experience. As everybody knows. And especially is this true when it has to do with coincidence, which the fictionist's primer tells him to shun like the plague. So that, if he be even a little observant, the busiest person manifestly enjoys the finest advantage in the world over the man who writes and who, poor soul, must sit tediously at an uneventful desk to make-believe with prosaic pencil his pretended and vicarious happenings.

Conversely, the actual things of life, the so-called "true stories," rarely if ever possess the characteristics so essential to well-balanced fiction. Threads and segments of life may constantly suggest the thought, "like fiction," but they always remain mere fragments, mere raw material, awaiting the patient hand of some master assembler before serving as the basic elements of a story.

The completest and best ordered array of such facts and coincidences I ever encountered had to do with the man who called himself John Dorn, and whose identity and whose mystery to this day defy analysis by the trained minds of at least two governments.

Whether or not John Dorn was a magnificent fraud, or whether he was insane, or whether he gave me the true solution of the incredible disappearance of the *Kenobic* will probably never be known. Always he endeavored, as in that last and fatal interview, to keep his identity a profound secret. Doubtless for fear of injuring surviving members of his noble blood. And yet in checking up his statements, the government authorities found each and every one that offered substantiation to be accurate, with only a single exception, the month of the sailing of the ill-fated ship, which he gave as February instead of January, '93. All details, for example, concerning the passengers were correct. Thus Grissop had been an inveterate tippler. Gryce smoked a corncob pipe. Miss Carewe had been a singer. Furthermore it was established that a man,

apparently half demented, had been rescued from a floating iceberg by the tramp *Katie* on January 27th, 1893, a few days after the *Kenobic* sailed, and at what should have been almost the exact point in her voyage at that date. These substantiations eliminate coincidence. And, because it was coincidence and fragmentary, if actual, happenings that alone made possible the evanescent importance of the man who called himself Dorn, the first of the chain should now be submitted to make clear the catastrophic finale.

I was a mere cub of a reporter, covering a police court in the heart of New York's ghetto when I encountered the first link in the sequence whose climax was eventually to adorn the first pages of the papers of two continents and startle the curiosity of who can say how many million readers. The drab grist of the judicial mill had ground through half the day when my attention was attracted to a man who had taken the stand in an assault case. The case itself was unimportant. A tenement dweller had thrown a milk bottle at an adversary and hit a casual bystander. A passing policeman had preferred a charge, more from zeal than from necessity, for the passer-by, who now occupied the stand, had exhibited a marked disinclination to any furtherance of the issue. That he had casually choked the bottle thrower senseless may have increased his disinterest. But, as matters stood, both men were now charged with disorderly conduct.

It was, as I have said, the appearance of the man in the witness stand that first attracted my attention. He was of huge, if awkward, proportions, stooped and cadaverous and dressed in the shabbiest of apparel. Yet that first glimpse of his face drew me forward until I was almost directly in front of and staring up at him as he sat at the top of the little flight of steps leading to the witness box upon the judge's left. There was, of course, the usual jam of officers, police court lawyers, clerks and hangers-on between us, but I had managed to shove through with a sense of satisfaction because I now found myself in a perfect position of vantage. Now I could see him. Now I could hear him talk. For thus far he hadn't opened his lips.

Suddenly the gabble stopped as the clerk administered the oath. There was utter and unusual silence in the room.

What had caught my interest had evidently caught others. It was not that his was a particularly distinguished-looking face. It was rather its expression that, I think, held our attention. We were accustomed to every sort of person, every sort of pose and attitude, especially when on the witness stand. But this man sat there with his eyes fixed on a window high up in the opposite, far-off wall, not intently, not even abstractedly, but with the impersonal expression of one watching a turning wheel, cigar smoke, or a lazy cloud. It was disinterested, not quite careless, a brooding, untouched look; and it conveyed the dignity of an ancient emperor which suddenly dwarfed the little machine-elected judge to the dimensions of a robed toad. I had seen that look before. Once on the face of a great churchman dedicating a nation's dead and once on the face of a Pullman porter on his march to the gallows. And I automatically attempted to analyze it, noting the big, broad forehead, the aquiline nose, the lines of power in the massive jaw and along the chin and mouth. It was a face like Lincoln's, sensitive, powerful, but looking its kindness. And it carried the scars of a thousand mental struggles. Manifestly, I thought, here was a thinker and a fighter, a victim and a philosopher.

The little judge, abrupt and mechanical, asked a question. The witness' lips moved. "John Dorn," they pronounced almost inaudibly. The voice was low,

vibrant with reserves. More questions. More answers in the same quiet and distant tone.

I gave small heed to this dialogue, which was mere routine. I only noted that the man's English and enunciation were perfect. I was entirely absorbed in what I felt was a fruitless analysis of this impersonal creature who replied in monosyllables and who did not deign to remove his eyes from the window high in the wall. But presently that serene attitude of his irritated his honor, who was accustomed, in this room at any rate, to ubiquity if not servility. His honor essayed a sardonic commentary upon the witness' apparent inability to speak above a whisper.

The man Dorn turned at this from his window and his gaze fell upon the little judge with what impressed me as precisely the effect of a jet of icy water. He fixed him with a steady, unwavering regard, and so sustained and so painful was the second of interlude that it seemed a minute. Yet when he spoke he said nothing more than a conventional word of apology. But the judge had bushed brick-red under the unexpected ordeal and, goaded by a sense of injury, adopted his more familiar bullying attack. He received the briefest of replies, redoubled his efforts and suddenly brought down upon himself unexpected consequences.

The man in the witness box again turned his imperturbable gaze upon him, for a withering instant, and asked in level tones if this procedure was essential and if he could not be found guilty at once and be done with it. I am sure he used the word "farce." His honor burst out with a roar—did he think he could arrogate to himself with impunity the divine prerogatives of justice, or some such sonorous phrase. It was all of a piece with his honor, and neither startling nor unexpected. But its effect on the witness was both. His inscrutable eyes started from their sockets, he half rose from his chair with a harsh and animal-like cry of horror, threw up one arm protectingly before his face, stood for an instant, collapsed again as suddenly, head sunk on chest, quivering like a beaten hound. His honor, visibly alarmed, regarded him owlishly. Before he could speak the man hauled out a wallet, snatched a sheaf of bills and flung it down under his honor's nose.

"Find me guilty," he commanded. "I'll pay whatever you wish; only get done with it!" He modulated his abruptness. "I must apologize. I am ill." He resumed the contemplation of his precious window as though nothing extraordinary had happened.

But now we saw his honor's eyes bulging in their turn at the bills he was fingering and we caught his aside to the clerk, an ejaculation informing us that here was at least twenty thousand dollars. A buzz followed. His honor declaring in a mollified tone the witness had pleaded guilty, fined him ten dollars and costs and handed him back, with a certain respectful quirk of his short neck, the packet of bills. The man Dorn made his hulking way to the clerk, paid his fine and took his departure, his unseeing eyes this time on the floor some ten paces in front.

I followed him. At the next corner he entered a limousine, the driver touched his cap and he vanished. Here was a paragraph of "human interest" for my paper, but by this time I was after bigger stuff than paragraphs. From the clerk I obtained the address of John Dorn, and that very day I entered the offices of "The American Realties, Inc.," situated in an old-fashioned office building in the east twenties. It was evidently a very old concern, occupying half the entire floor, very much partitioned, very shabby, cluttered with ledgers, files, and rickety fittings, and peopled by an aggregation of ancient clerks partaking of the same

fustiness and rusty, steadfast dignity as the establishment in which they seemed literally to have first seen daylight.

To all my inquiries concerning John Dorn I received courteous, patient nothings. True, I got no further than the chief clerk, to whom I had been referred on my request for the office manager, but a glance assured me they were all of the same type and would all prove as maddeningly noncommittal. For, despite my man's serene innocence of the name Dorn, I knew, from the very perfection of his technique, that this was not a new experience for him and that he was astutely concealing something. But eventually I had to give up, baffled but hopeful.

And that was the end of the first episode. Not from any desire of mine. I wanted to know who this individual was that dressed like a derelict and looked like a statesman, who tossed fortunes about on desks and rode in limousines. Who was manifestly a somebody. Now, a newspaper's business is to find things out, for which purpose it has an amazing equipment. And yet I could find out nothing about John Dorn. He didn't exist. Not as John Dorn. Obviously the name, thought I, was fictitious. But even if he were adopting a fiction he should be in evidence with regard to The American Realties, Inc. Not so. Our channels of information told us there was connected with it no such person of Dorn's physical attributes. They did inform us, however, that that ancient concern had but a few years before been rebaptized and had presently experienced a financial rejuvenation little short of amazing. Its profits were enormous, its directors for the most part men in its employ, its guiding genius, unless one conceived such afflatus to be born of semi-senility, a mystery.

A year elapsed. It was on my return from an interview with an American of national disrepute, then summering on Long Island, that the engine of our antiquated ferry "junked itself," as the engineer explained, when we were precisely halfway across to the main land. We anchored and tooted briskly for help, and presently a large and resplendent steam yacht swam up behind and megaphoned us they'd send boats. Within an hour we were transferred and proceeding royally homeward, leaving the ferry wailing dismally for a tow. The crew of our luxurious craft were unusually active in making us comfortable. Hot soup made its appearance, together with heaping trays of sandwiches, cold meats and preserved fruits. The cabins were thrown open and this crowd, no three of which had ever been on a yacht before in their lives, suddenly became the objects of profound solicitude. Our natural reaction was to know about our rescuer.

She was, it seemed, the *Seal*, of New York; master, Georges Hodge; owner, a Mr. Jones. Where did he live? Was he on board? Oh, he was a "capitalist" and he hardly ever stepped foot on board and he lived mostly in Europe and was a queer fish, too.

So much for that. But coincidence had yet to be reckoned with. The ship was wide open and I went on a prowl, impelled by that fascination the sea and all its craft has for so many of us. Eventually I reached the upper deck and wandered forward to the pilot house, a pinnacle of brass and gold, occupied now by a broad back and attainable by the five little steps of a ladder. I ascended. I opened the door. Broadback turned scowling and ordered me out. I ignored him, for not two feet from me, sunk in a wicker chair and half facing me with his inscutable gaze fixed forward, apparently on infinity, sat John Dorn. He had not stirred either at the opened door or at the captain's gruff command, nor did he stir when that command was repeated. Only when I spoke his name did he

slowly transfer that gaze until it met my own.

He looked years older, his clothes were as outrageous as ever; his hair was much grayer, and his face carried all its old tragedy and more.

"I should like to speak with you," I said, and dropped casually the name of my paper. A flicker crossed his face. Then he rose.

"We can sit here," he said, and indicated the chairs on the deck back of the pilot house. Gravely we descended and sat down. He looked at me and there was nothing in his face to betray any hint of his thoughts. He merely sat there, his bony hands hanging limply, and I felt as transparent as a piece of glass.

"I should like an interview," I began lamely and stopped. I felt that if he didn't take his eyes off me I was beaten. "An interview, Mr. Dorn. On the real estate situation. I happened to be one of the ferry-boat crowd. I knew I'd find you."

"No," he said. "You didn't know that. And I am afraid I can't help you." He got up. "Good day."

A memory came to me, of a police court and its owlish judge, and then an absurd, an extravagant resolve. "As one who thinks he can take to himself the duties of a judge over mankind." I stopped abruptly.

John Dorn cringed before me. That great and heroic figure shrank as if a giant and invisible hand had suddenly squeezed him. He sat again and looked at me with the most profound and hopeless dispair that I shall ever see on a human face.

"Who are you? What do you wish?" he whispered.

I talked frankly to him then. I laid my cards on the table. I told him exactly what I wanted and why. I told him I wanted the solution of all this mystery, all this illusiveness, from the episode of the court room and the bank bills to the limousine, the varied peculiarities of The American Realties, Inc., and finally the *Seal* and its theoretical owner. I wanted an explanation. I was persistent on this point and I repeated myself. And suddenly I realized that I was acting like a presumptuous young coxcomb, and that if Dorn had quietly thrown me overboard he would have been quite within his rights. I would have deserved it. I could have struck myself at this moment. But I had said it. I had demanded, if you please, an explanation, and now there was nothing to do but sit there and watch his suffering and wish I had never opened my blundering mouth.

After what seemed minutes he raised his head. "I cannot talk to you," he said. "Perhaps some day I shall talk. But the time for that has not yet come. Perhaps it may never come. You see, you have found me through very curious coincidences. I am glad you explained them to me. For at first I was horribly shocked. It was clever of you to remember what the judge said that day. It must have been too evident that his words had a terrible effect on me. I was caught off my guard, as I was today. But that guard is back now and you cannot make any headway unless I see fit to permit you. I am glad you explained. Still even this might mean——" He paused and looked across the boat, far off into the distances at the horizon. His voice came again to me like an echo.

"Something," he finished. "But I cannot talk now. That is final." Again he rose and bowed courteously, looking past me, impersonal as a creature of wood, with a sincerity of disinterest that minimized the curtness of my dismissal. I knew there was now in his mind not the faintest interest even in my existence. Already he was far away from me on some pilgrimage known only to himself. I bowed and went way down the deck, and when I looked back

he still stood there, a solitary, lonely figure, stooped, faintly dogged, carved out against the eastern approach of night.

After that came another interlude of six months. And then, a quickening of events, a swift crescendo in the life of John Dorn, a climax, an unraveling, a dénouement.

First came the failure of that institution of fusty fruitfulness, The American Realties, Inc. Suddenly and without warning that aggregation of dignified senility went under, and the thunder of its collapse shook the 'Change of the entire country. They were a three-days' wonder, they and their board of hoary directors and their stupendous but unsuspected business ramifications, and their still more stupendous and unsuspected liabilities. The investigation which followed yielded little more than the verdict "bad business judgment." And yet, up to a certain and sharply defined point, their "business judgment" had been not alone good. It had been brilliant.

And then they had all gone to pot together. It was as if their presiding genius had suddenly deserted them. It was as if they had all got their antiquated judgments one morning together and embarked upon a deliberate career of judicial oat-sowing. They seemed literally to have had orgies of "business judgment" whose badness would be hopelessly unattainable by the amateur. Well, they had collapsed. That was certain. Achieving in their decease a distinction the events of their whole three generations could never have equaled. After that they had another reorganization, under the name of Rosen & Meyer, their saviors. And the last time I saw them they were apparently prospering with oil cloth on the floors and new wall paper, an office boy, electric fans. And most of the old fellows were there at their desks and files and pen wipers, though still a little dusty despite the refurbishment by Mr. Rosen and Mr. Meyer.

Now, through all this turmoil, I watched and waited for a single name to turn up. And when it did not I wondered if indeed it ever would turn up, or if by any chance it did, how and where and when. And one day, after I had discovered that the *Seal* had been included in the assets of the Realty Corporation, Inc., and had decided that now my last clew to the earthly whereabouts of John Dorn had vanished utterly, he appeared, as usual, without warning and in his customary faintly histrionic and annoying fashion.

He appeared in the shape of a note addressed in care of my office, bearing a single line. "Come at once," it commanded laconically, and gave an address over in the furnished-room section of the old Chelsea district.

I was considerably elated. I remembered his saying, "I cannot talk," and I was immensely pleased because I had never heard him utter much more than a dozen words, and apparently he was at last prepared to "talk." There were so many things I wanted explained.

I found the place, a frowsy, picturesque old beldame of a house with shutters askew and a moldering areaway and a great door bearing the battered mementoes of many generations. The landlady, dilatory and suspicious, grudgingly directed me to the top floor rear when I mentioned the name, and I ascended, accompanied by the creaks of the entire house. At the door I tapped and a voice made muffled answer and I turned the knob.

I stood on the threshold of a barren little room lit by a guttering gas jet. It contained a chair, washstand and narrow pallet bed, and on it, pale and emaciated to a degree, his hair white as snow, lay John Dorn, his eyes closed as if insensible of my presence. Once again I achieved through that apparent

insensibility to the existence of his fellow men, the effect of pure objectivity, and stood as though invisible, endeavoring to solve, in those furrowed lineaments, the elusive quality that made so convincing his superiority which was so awesome.

I was violently startled from these speculations by a sudden voice bidding me in a single syllable, "Sit!" I pulled forward the chair and seated myself with the discomforting conviction that another eye peered steadily from beneath one of his silvered locks. There was a silence as I endured what seemed to me a grim and uncanny inspection, watching him as steadily. But for the faintest, irregular movement of his breast it might have been a corpse I waited with, so deathlike was his pallor, so utterly relaxed his features and finished with it all.

Presently his breast heaved and the words seemed something animate and struggling from out his throat, so difficult was the effort.

"I've sent for you," he rattled harshly. "The time—to talk——" He stopped. "I'm dying," he presently announced, and though I quite believed it I essayed a conventional reassurance. He paid me the compliment of ignoring that banality.

"Shorthand?" he queried, and I told him that I employed a rough method, as do most of our craft.

He coughed an affirmative approval and asked me haltingly if I had ever heard of the *Kenobic*. I said I had. Her story is an old wives' tale along the water front, as any ship-news man can testify. I knew her as one of those mysteries of the sea that had never spoken earthly craft from the day she sailed or reached earthly port, one of those unbelievable obliterations that are indexed against the sum of ships as "missing."

"I was on the *Kenobic*," came the grating voice. "I was—the only survivor."

He uttered this astounding fact. And then, as if the theme had invigorated and inspired him, began to breathe with a semblance of spasmodic regularity that made me realize that hitherto he had evidently been well-nigh lifeless and was now, by some superhuman faculty of will, marshaling his debilitated powers for the single effort of speech. And no sooner had this conviction forced itself upon me than I beheld the actual functioning thereof. He lay there, wholly inert, save for the heaving of his chest. I noted that in all this tremendous focusing of failing powers he expended not an atom upon lip movement, which lent his enunciation a curious, slurring effect. At first the effort for vocal continuity was a visible and a frightful thing, but after a moment it seemingly became easier and he talked, save for that odd elision, much as he had that other day on board the *Seal*.

"Get these facts," he was saying. "Make no mistakes. I've no strength—to repeat. I want people to know. My name is not John Dorn, but it's served. Who I am doesn't matter. My kin think I'm dead, if they think.

"We sailed from Liverpool. February, 'ninety-three. Heavy cargo. Eighty passengers. A big steel boat, strong, comfortable. Nice weather. Everybody got acquainted, one does. They were an average lot. Some dumb. Some silly. Some very bright. Valuable members of society. Several men did nothing but sit in the cabin playing cards day and night. One was Grissop. Always drunk. Always ugly. Several youngish chaps, too—no brains. Two old men, white-haired. There was a man named Gryce; he'd written some fine books. There were three young mining engineers, decent young chaps. And five cattle kings, rich, fat, sitting in chairs all day, smoking fat cigars

and bullying the stewards. There was a hunchback.

The women were nothing extra. One was a girl named Carewe, wonderful, finely developed creature, a singer. Then two old maids, always together, school teachers. A number of the men's wives who read novels and did fancy work. A woman missionary, too—and two men missionaries, weak, flat-chested sisters. And some English snobs, mother and daughter, who wouldn't mix with the others. And a woman invalid. And children, some very bright, some sullen and raising the devil. All this is important, to show them just an average run of people.

"Yes. Ordinary crowd, with exceptions. I recollect 'em quite clear—in two distinct classes, and several of the stewards and crew were fine men. There was a Swede named Larsen especially. We sailed along, easy and pleasant, and it was quiet and no excitement, day after day. Until that night. It was cloudy. But moonlight when it got the chance. And a high wind and a sea that kept us rolling. I was on deck. Talking with Miss Carewe, the handsome one. It was late and she got up to go, saying it was foggy. Then the thing happened.

"At first it was a crash. Then a heave like an earthquake. We landed across the deck in a mess of steamer chairs. The ship keeled over. I thought she was going. Then she settled back. Very slow. There was a crunching and a thundering ahead and underneath. Then hell tore loose and lasted till the end. Women began screaming, far off, then nearer as they came up from below. Men were shouting. I saw a half dozen of the crew come running and swing out a life boat. I knew we were in for something serious. They lowered it, but the sea smashed it against the side like an eggshell. I said to Miss Carewe that this was bad, and went down and got my wallet and pistols. Then I ran forward. We'd hit an iceberg, at full speed. And the thing had gutted us underneath, like you'd scoop out a melon, and half buried us with ice from above. It was fifteen feet high along the bow. And already the ship was nosing deeper and deeper into the big waves. Any fool could see the end of it right there before him. And all the fools did see it, and some of 'em sat screaming. And some ran 'round in circles. And some went for the spirit stores. They fired rockets, one chance in a thousand, and set colored lights burning. And the whole ship was lit up like a carnival. The big siren was tied down and shrieking so you couldn't hear your own voice. The waves kept hammering big ice floes against the sides. Nobody knew what to do. Everybody was yelling to do something different. The captain lost his head. The officers ordered and counter-ordered. It was a madhouse. And then something all of a sudden ran through the ship. Like the word of plague through a city. And it was that there weren't boats enough. And what was before was nothing to what was now. They turned brutes. I saw women fight men and men fight women to reach the few boats left. I saw a man thrown overboard who wouldn't make way. I saw the officers beating the crew and the crew dropping the officers with whatever was handy. I watched it, and Larsen, the big Swede boatswain, stood beside me. They weren't getting anywhere except in each others' way. And she was grubbing down deeper and deeper every minute. Like a hog in a wallow. I'd given up all hope myself. But when I saw a Lascar draw a knife and start at a woman and some children that were in his way, I knew all of a sudden what I would do.

"I jumped forward and knocked him flat. I got up on the rail and walked along to the davits where they were

fighting like animals. I yelled to them. It was like yelling at so much air. So I took one of the fat cattlemen and hauled him up alongside of me. And shot him through the head and he went over the side. They heard the shot and they saw what I did. And when I grabbed another man with a pearl-handled pen knife and tried to haul him up, too, they hesitated and fell back a little. And I struck him with the gun and he dropped.

"I held them with the gun in their faces and beckoned some of the crew. And a man climbed up alongside. And it was Larsen and he took charge of handling the boat. When it was ready, I picked those who were to go, with the gun. Somebody shouted for women and children first. But I had my own idea. It was part of them or none. Because the cursed ship never had boats enough anyway. And most of what she had were smashed. So only five were left. I ordered some of the women and some of the men into the first boat. The two flat-chested missionaries crowded forward, but I forced 'em back. I picked for value, mental and physical. And for character, too, as near as I could judge. I separated families. I wouldn't have the drunk, Grissop, and he was drunk then. And I wouldn't have a lot of the women and I wouldn't have the invalid girl. I saw Gryce, the writer fellow, standing back and smoking his corncob, with his arms folded, cool, and I beckoned him. He threw away his pipe and I thought he was coming, but he shrugged his shoulders and went over and took the invalid girl in his arms. And they stood there, waiting. I understood all right how he felt. But I had my own idea and my job was a big one and I kept right on. Cattle they were, for the most part. Fawning, bleating sheep! No spines. Some weren't, though; some were game. I put three babies in that boat, being little and their mothers begging. I put down water and biscuits and a compass an officer fetched, and they lowered away.

"The sailors at the oars and the officer in charge, all ship-shape. They pulled off and I went on to the next boat. Larsen with me. And the mob followed, begging and cursing, but afraid of the pistols. They were already lowering this boat, but I took charge and made some of them get out, like a couple of old people and the hunchback and another cattle man. He offered me ten thousand-dollar bills, but I kicked him back. I put one of the young mining engineers into this boat. And Miss Carewe and others and provisions and a crew like the other, and they went off quiet and regular. We had to work quick now. The water was lapping along the deck. Like a beach it was. And the crowd was getting harder to handle, wilder and fighting. But Larsen and I managed. And the next boat smashed against the side, though we were to leeward, and we had to haul them aboard again. But some of them fell out and were drowned. And the next boat had a hole in her, and that left one. One boat! Not enough for a quarter of them. And they knew it. They closed in, trampling. Like kneading dough it was. We'd drive 'em back one place and they'd bulge in another. Then the tackle fouled and they stopped cursing and fought, quiet and brutal, for who'd survive. It was the worst yet. It made me sick and it made Larsen sick. We had to get them in hand, though. The stokers, all black from below, were the hardest. All the culls were here from the other boats and mad with fear, knowing by now what I was doing. A shambles! Yes. A shambles! For their own good, though. All for their own good. They got two of my sailors and they knifed Larsen in the legs, and the hunchback almost broke my shoulder with an oar until they stepped on him. For a while it

was which of us would win out, but I'd had time to reload both my pistols.

"I put one of the English snobs in that last boat, the daughter having body and brains and worth. Slow work, though. They crowded so. The water was getting nearer. It was like seeing death crawl on you. They rushed us. Somehow we got the boat down and Larsen and his trusties slid down the ropes. As he went he said he'd wait for me. But I yelled to pull off quick without me. Because already they were going down the ropes and jumping, and the boat pulled off sharp and left 'em hanging. I threw down my pistols and told 'em to do what they wanted. I was through. I was staying with 'em. It was over for me. I'd done my best. But they were stupid, partly because I was staying with 'em and they didn't expect it. And partly because they knew now what was going to happen. Maybe in two minutes. With no getting away from it. No more struggle, no more chance for them. They were through, too. They were quiet and I asked if there was anybody who could pray. And one of the missionaries began and a lot of 'em came and knelt around.

"The water was lapping closer on the deck now and the waves and ice were breaking clear over the sinking bow. There was a rumbling underneath, of watertight compartments bursting, or boilers or something, and she shook sidewise and settled quick and stopped again. A man came down the slope of the deck, drinking from a bottle. A stoker grabbed the bottle and smashed it across his face. I stood on the rail. I thought of how she'd plunge now any minute, and then of the struggle to live and to keep up. With nothing under one. And of choking and knowing it to be the finish at last. And a flash of green hills and home came to me, so that, for an instant it seemed almost a nightmare and I tried to wake up. And then I realized it wasn't dreaming, but death. And I lost the grip on myself and the brute terror I'd been fighting in the others caught hold of me like a hand. I heard a voice calling my name and it was Larsen. And I turned and jumped. As I came up and started swimming I heard a sort of moaning behind and I looked over my shoulder and the rail of the *Kenobic* was lined with their faces, and a woman cried out, 'Coward!' And then they were quite silent and I knew it was because the man who had ruled 'em and chosen to die with 'em had deserted. Left 'em to die alone, without a leader. For they would have followed me to death quietly enough if only I'd continued to lead 'em. But I never thought of that. I wasn't big enough for that. Oh, no! I was too busy just then thinking of my own worthless hide and how to save it. I didn't realize all this at the minute because it was cold in that water with a cold that shot through you like fire, and it was all I could do to swim the few feet to the boat. But I thought of it afterward. You may be very sure I thought of it afterward.

"Larsen took me aboard and we pulled away till the ship was only a dim glow in the fog. Then we waited. Lying on our oars we waited, shivering and afraid. It was like hours. Larsen said it was a minute. Then we heard something like a wail, like a chant, come through the fog and then shots and the glow disappeared, and there was a muffled jarring like drum beats and we were alone in the middle of the ocean. And there wasn't any sound except the wind and the ice grinding around us.

"That night the storm grew worse and we took in a great deal of water. It was very dark, and toward morning we struck against another berg, a small one. But enough to smash in the side of our boat. We were all thrown out and I caught hold of the thing and pulled myself up on it. There were big

waves washing around and I took my knife and chiseled footholds and climbed higher up until I was out of reach of the water. I got very cold. After a while I lost consciousness. I woke up in the forecastle of a tramp freighter. They'd seen me, and at first they thought it was a seal until they came nearer and then they took me off. I was frightened. I wondered if any of the others had been saved. But I didn't ask any questions. I wanted time to think; and when they asked me questions I lied. Pretended to be a little off and told them of being carried out to sea in a fishing boat. They believed me, made up a purse, took me to Liverpool. I still pretended to be a little off. They examined me, but they didn't hold me and I slunk away. At last I had time to think.

"Mark that well, my friend. I had time to think. At first I didn't comprehend that point. At first I only mulled things over, again and again, until I realized time was going past and I wasn't accomplishing much. But I had plenty of time. I had more time, it seemed, than any other man on earth.

"I had plenty of time to think. At first I hoped there might have been survivors and I haunted the shipping offices, and there was never any news at all. And after a while the ship was listed as missing, and I new none were left alive except myself. But it took a year for me to give up that hope. All the while I was thinking. All the while I had an accursed interest in the fate of that ship, the *Kenobic,* and I couldn't tell why. For the ship was gone and so were its people. I had done my best. There it was. Finished! Fate had had its way. Not God, mind you, or any other power. Just luck or circumstance. For I was a profound atheist. I didn't believe in God or man or anything. And I had good and sufficient reason for so believing. I had Science on my side. Science! And Science explained Life. And religion was a creation of civilization to satisfy what were still primitive needs in humanity. Because humanity hadn't guts enough to stand on its own two feet and take the gaff alone and unaided. No! I believed in nothing.

"And so I went away. To Buenos Aires. I acquired a knowledge of the cattle business. I speculated in hides. Slowly I got on my feet. I was always a money maker. Then I got into exporting. I was successful. I had position in the city. I was a prominent man of affairs, large affairs; and all in a very few years, say eight or ten. And always I concealed my identity. I sneered at God Almighty because I feared nothing, but I was afraid of letting anybody know my real name. Yes. I grew rich. I married. We had a child. Life held everything a man could wish for.

"I said I believed in nothing. Nothing. But I found myself finally beginning to believe in the *Kenobic.* And eventually I achieved a very firm belief in that noble tramp, reposing at the bottom of the Atlantic. She became a profound conviction with me. She intruded herself on my family life. I used to hear her last futile rumblings as I went to sleep. Having brains, I analyzed the situation. As if analysis were the solution!

"Get this carefully, because it will make things clearer. Here was I, John Dorn, and I'd set out to pick and choose those who were to live and those who were not to live. I hadn't thought of saving myself when I took charge on the *Kenobic.* And everything went well. And if I had stuck by them and led them to heaven or to hell as the case might be, all would still have gone well. But I didn't. I deserted. I set myself up to judge matters of life and death. I staked myself on it and I flinched. Cowardice! The earmark of humanity! I'd meddled. I'd fiddled with destiny. Now mark this. I had

flinched, hadn't I? I owed something, didn't I? I owed something to those I had deserted just when they needed me the most. I'd taken hold of the handle and I'd dropped it when it got too hot for me. That's how I thought it out. And so I tried to forget it. I told myself I was letting it affect my intelligence. My magnificent human intelligence that was equal to God's or any other power's. I told myself not to be a fool and to eat three square meals a day and to work and forget it. All very nice. But it seemed I was not to forget it. Not at all. It seemed that it was to remain with me for an indefinite period.

"And my life became a nightmare by day and a sleepless hell by night. I remembered that when I first came to South America my mind had been fairly at ease. A new country, new people, new activities had absorbed me to the exclusion of all else. So I determined to go to another country. To America. I would assuredly find activities enough in that excited land to eclipse even a *Kenobic*. I closed out my business. I made my family comfortable and left them. I came to New York. I invested judiciously in a semi-moribund concern and I revitalized it. I called it The American Realties, Inc. And I began a period of enormous success. It was merely my agent. It operated as coördinately as my two hands and I did not appear in it. I found the staff had an amazing knowledge of their business. So I supplied the cold-bloodedness, the daring, the sinews of war.

"I managed to forget the dear *Kenobic*. She passed completely from my mind. What time had I for sentimental sniffling over spilt milk! What was a *Kenobic*, or a hundred, for that matter, in my life? Until my cheering experience in the police court, with a tuppeny judge booming that reminder in my ears again. D'you think that it just happened? I do not. It was a finger reaching after me at the moment I thought myself most safe. And once the old wound was reopened the *Kenobic* began to come again into her own. Once more I began to think.

"Remember, I didn't believe in anything. Religion was a byword with me, so trivial in meaning that I had long since given it over as too weak an adjunct even of profanity. Remember, too, I had intelligence. And I used it. I claimed I was superior to faith and the dogmas that rule the earth and all that sort of thing. I used to sneer at what I designated 'the so-called human race.' Unconsciously I considered myself above them. And therein I made a mistake. I forgot that I was human. I forgot that I, too, was one of these crawling vermin I figuratively spat upon. In damning the pettiness of human life I forgot I was a part of it. I found out that I was tied, hand and foot, to humanity. I discovered I was a prey to all its weaknesses, to all its fears, to all its conscience. There your atheist makes his mistake. There he goes wrong. He may whistle himself bravely enough into the presence of death. But a moment comes, you may be sure, just as he faces the executioner, alone and too far gone to mention it, when his soul is a craven, trembling thing of humanity that fears its God. Well, I found I was weak, a feather in the whirlwind of humanity's instincts. I had been in deadly fear of making this discovery when in South America. I found now this had been one of the reasons I had run away.

"I had made the cheering discovery and I asked myself what I should do with it. I believe all this must have been very amusing to the powers who operate the universe. Certainly it was worth no aid. I now know that none was intended. It had become a matter for me to work out with blood and sweat and death.

"You will comprehend that I wished to liquidate my obligations in this matter. I owed a debt. Quite obviously. I owed something because, as I've said, I'd bargained with those of the *Kenobic* and I'd flinched. Earmark of humanity. But that debt I could pay, with the only thing I had of the same coin. I would give my life. And it was at this juncture that I closed up all my affairs. I settled a substantial amount on my family. I terminated my relations with The American Realties, Inc. I gave them some good advice and a financial start. And they eventually went into the ditch. Taking practically the rest of my fortune and the *Seal* along with them.

"Meanwhile I had prepared to take my life. And because I was too cowardly to use a sure thing I tried others. And each time a hand reached down and plucked me back safe and whole. And I told myself it was 'Fate.' There was no fate about it when it happened for the fourth time. My life was charmed and I used to experiment to see it proven. Until I was thoroughly cured of that amusement by being rather horribly hurt. And by suffering for months afterward.

"And then I discovered that it was intended I should continue to live. And I set out to make the best of it and to be happy and eat and work and, if possible, forget. For I had ample time on my hands. Oh, ample time! And so I absorbed myself in realizing my mistake concerning my actions on the *Kenobic* and in thorough repentance and contrition. For, I thought, of course this exemplary state of mind would satisfy matters and thereafter I would have peace. And for a time I was fairly content. It actually appeared as if I had at last achieved my goal. And I was nearer happiness than I had been in many years. Until one day you walked into the *Seal* and showed me what a dupe, what a trustful fool I had been. For it seemed I was not to get off so easily. It seemed I was not to get off at any price. It seemed that this newest attitude of mine was calculated to deceive nobody and that I was to experience if anything a far more active hell than any I had as yet enjoyed. That I was to embark upon a lifetime of repentance. Compared to which sackcloth and ashes were trivialities.

"I was to consider my mistake and that consideration was to be a continuous matter. And next I told myself I would accept it callously, and that presently I would get used to it and manage to have a fairly good time out of life after all. It was not allowed. I was not allowed even to make known my identity. Because I had not the courage to do so and to acknowledge the part I had played in the last moments of the *Kenobic*. True, I might have glossed that matter over and lied out of it, but I knew that I could not do it with conviction. That my story would not be believed. And so it went—for months—and there were times when I thought I was losing my mind and thanked God for that mercy, but when I went to specialists they wagged their heads and said, no, all I needed was a rest, a change of vocation; perhaps an ocean trip. And I laughed and thanked them and went back and faced it again.

"All my life I have been a fighter. I have always faced my punishments. And now I faced the final, naked truth. I was an outcast upon the earth. I was a dead man condemned to life. And I revolted. I demanded a tearing agony of retribution. I demanded an immediate tribunal. A cessation of horrid doubt. Of damned procrastination. And so yesterday I took poison. And within the hour I knew I was to face that tribunal I so eagerly demanded. But it was ordered that before I appear I make known my part in the whole shameful matter. I could shield my own people, but my own soul must

be stripped and laid bare for such as might care to examine it, or to emulate my career. And so I sent for you, who have played a part in this serio-comedy. And now that I have spoken, it is finished. When I say the word I am dead. Never mind how I know. That is my affair. I demand that you make known the facts as I have given them to you and that you be honest therein. There is no more."

His voice ceased, and with the taking of the last word I raised my eyes. I was dizzy with the fatigue of concentration, and my cramped fingers fairly ached with the effort of writing so long and steadily.

At first I thought he was asleep, or, at most, in a coma. He lay so still, so stripped of motion. I touched his arm and a certain unyielding quality about this most insignificant of juxtapositions inspired me with a repugnance that was as revolting as it was sinister. It was not a matter of death alone. Prescience of that had impelled my gesture.

Despite this, and as if without my own volition, I felt over the heart and recoiled with a horror that crept up and into my throat with an effect of strangulation. I cried out in nameless terror and fled that accursed room and its eloquent occupancy. For my hand had encountered flesh that was literally stiff with cold, that shocked me, hardened as I was, with a sense of having achieved a contact with the supernatural.

I returned after a time, in my right mind and in company with a young doctor I had routed out of an adjacent side street. He examined into certain matters with infinite and judicial care before he turned to me.

"You say you were talking to him just now?" he queried. I nodded.

He wagged his youthful head gravely and muttered something about "suspended animation."

"Queer case," he went on. "Queer. Saw it once before. Every indication points to the fact that this man has been dead at least ten hours."

I indicated my rather brusque disbelief in such a possibility.

"Well," said the young doctor briskly, "one thing's sure, and that is he's certainly dead now."

And that was the end of the man who called himself John Dorn.

And because all efforts failed to find his family or even a friend, the body was unclaimed and was buried in potter's field.

The Man from Detroit

By Julian Kilman

Author of "Be Bold! Be Bold!"

JARVIS WAS A BIG MAN IN BUSINESS, AND BIG IN OTHER WAYS. WHEN HE HEARD WHAT HAD HAPPENED TO STANDBRIDGE HE GOT BUSY. . . . . .

STANDBRIDGE left the street car with its crowd of wet, steaming humanity and, bending his head against the rain, started down the three long blocks to his flat. It was seven o'clock, which meant that he was unusually late, indeed. The long legs of the accountant easily enabled him to overtake and pass other belated wayfarers most of whom carried umbrellas. Standbridge had none with him; instead he carried a green baize bag which was weighted with books procured that noon from the public library.

In front of his dwelling he observed a large automobile. This caused him a momentary flash of surprise as the lower flat had been unoccupied for two weeks, and he and Addie had no friends who drove a limousine. He hurried up the stairs.

His wife, who had evidently been watching for him, met him in the hall.

"Jim Jarvis is here," she announced, pecking at him with a kiss. Then swiftly: "Why, Ned! What is the matter?"

Standbridge snapped off the electric light, so that man and wife stood for the moment in complete darkness. From inside came the sound of a laugh, hearty and full-throated, followed by a thump-thump and shrill play cries of two children.

"Is that his car in front?" demanded Standbridge.

"Yes," returned the wife. "But you don't tell me what——"

"There is nothing to tell," interrupted the husband harshly. "It is all over."

"Ned!" broke from the woman. "You've lost your position!"

The couple remained standing in the hallway. Mrs. Standbridge was a large woman, quite as tall as her slender husband. She loved him fiercely and now threw her strong arms about him in a "mothering" embrace.

"It will turn out all right, dearie," she murmured.

The door was thrown open and a child of six rushed at them. She was followed by the visitor who carried high on his shoulder a small boy. The man cried out:

"Look who's here!"

"Hello, Jim," said Standbridge.

They passed into the living room where the two men examined one another with many a "Well! Well!" from the visitor. They had been schoolmates and were now seeing each other for the first time in fifteen years. The eye of the bigger man caught the green book bag.

"What you got there?" he demanded.

Standbridge removed from the bag two or three books.

"Books, eh?" exploded Jarvis, his red face still redder from recent exertion with the children. "My God! Are they still making such things? Now, over in Detroit, to be perfectly frank, a man caught lugging books around instead of automobile parts would be hanged."

The Standbridge children tumbled themselves about the rugged masculinity of Jarvis, and he promptly launched into a story. After a bit the father stole away to the kitchen.

Addie, frying potatoes, glanced at him anxiously. She noted that his eyes were heavy; that he was wan. A surge of sympathy for her husband as an individual, something detached and apart from herself, swept over her. She fought it down.

"What did Mr. Haines say?" she asked presently.

"He said my work was satisfactory—'able' is the word he used," Standbridge replied unevenly.

"I should think he would!" loyally exclaimed the wife.

"Oh, don't, Addie," said Standbridge, with irritation. "He told me that it was no fault of his or mine; simply that the selling end had not developed as had been expected."

"When are you through, then?" ventured the wife.

"Oh, he gave me the usual thirty days. They are transferring Hilliard here from Detroit. He'll be at the office to-morrow."

Mrs. Standbridge made several quick trips to the dining room, putting on final touches to the meal.

"Come, Ned," she cautioned. "You must go in. Jim will think it funny, and we must not let him know."

Standbridge stood up, facing his wife with an odd expression.

"And this giant," came the voice of their visitor, "wore a pair of big boots made of solid gold. The boots cost him a million dollars and——"

"'Cost him a million dollars,'" imitated Standbridge crossly. "How typical! That is all your successful business man of these days knows or thinks about. He is a chucklehead and is self-centered and greedy." The complaining man paused. "'To be perfectly frank,' there——"

"Don't, Ned."

"How long is he going to stay?"

"Why, Ned, dear! He's going on to-night. He is driving all the way to Bar Harbor where his family is. They have been there all summer."

"Humph! Millionaire stuff, eh. I suppose he has told you that he wears summer underwear the year around and can put his name to a check for six figures?"

The sudden look of hurt in the eyes of the wife warned Standbridge. He stopped.

"I think you grow bitter," she said quietly.

When supper was finished and the children in bed with a neighbor to stay in the house for the evening, Jarvis, in high feather, bundled his friends into the automobile and started downtown for the show.

"Ain't had anything so good to eat in a dog's age, Addie," he called back.

"Gosh! How you can make German-fried potatoes! Say, Ned, you was a lucky scoundrel to get Addie. You know that?"

During the dinner that followed the theater there came an interruption when Gamble, one of the salesmen from the office, caught Ned's glance and beckoned him to the corridor. Gamble held out his hand.

"Shake, old man," he began. "We all know it's a squeeze play. But it's tough —I'll say that."

"Yes," Standbridge admitted. "It hurt some."

"Have you got anything in view?"

'Why, yes. I have," Standbridge heard his faithful tongue.

For the moment they chatted while Addie and Jarvis talked swiftly.

"Addie. This won't do at all," Jarvis instantly had declared on Ned's withdrawal.

The look of surprise on the face of the wife did not have to be simulated.

"What do you mean, Jim?" she asked.

"Why, something's wrong with you and Ned. Good Lord! Just because I am a sort of good-natured chucklehead from Detroit you don't think I'm blind?"

He glared at Addie.

"Ah! I knew it!" triumphantly murmured Jarvis. "Now, out with it before he gets back—have you quarreled?"

"Ned has been discharged."

"You don't mean it!"

"Yes. He only knew it to-night. He was telling me in the hall, when you came out with the children."

"Say!" Jarvis cut in. "Who's his boss?"

"Mr. Haines."

"Arch Haines, who used to be with plow people in Detroit?"

"Yes. I think that is his full name."

"Why, the darned old toad!" exploded Jarvis. "And he's gone an' fired Ned?"

"He hasn't exactly fired him, Jim," replied the wife defensively. "He's only given——"

"Yah! I know, Addie. Arch used a lot of high-sounding words—probably called Ned an 'able chap' so as to camouflage it. But that don't kid anybody, Addie—Ned's been fired—f-i-r-e-d."

The big man sat glaring straight before him.

"Now, keep still a minute, Addie. I want to work my bean, and I ain't got much time."

Standbridge joined them before they could talk further and the trip home was made with no reference to the thing uppermost in the minds of all three.

Half an hour after he left the Standbridge flat, Jarvis stopped his car in front of his hotel where he consulted the city directory and paid a bell hop who knew the streets to come with him. They reached a fine residence in the Elmlawn district, and Jarvis was at the door. Persistent ringing of the doorbell finally brought response.

"I want to see Mr. Haines," announced Jarvis.

"Well, sir," said the flunky, "you can't, sir. It's too late, sir."

"Not for me, *sir,* Mister Britisher. Now, just tell a guy where he is."

" 'E's at the Country Club, sir."

Jarvis laughed. The Country Club, as he was to learn, was only fifteen miles away as the crow flies, but owing to a fallen bridge there was a five-mile detour over mud roads. This, together with the fact that they mistook their route twice, made it nearly three-thirty when the limousine pulled up to the club.

The man from Detroit found an attendant dozing near the desk.

"I want to see Mr. Haines," he stated.

The name was found on the register. Jarvis did not wait for the elevator but bounded up the stairs. He grinned at the light which showed through the tran-

som of the suite he finally located; there came the murmur of modulated voices; almost he fancied he could hear the click of chips.

"Playin' poker," he said to himself.

He knocked softly. There was instant silence but no response. He banged the door heartily.

"Who's there?" demanded a sharp voice.

"I am looking for Arch Haines," returned Jarvis gleefully.

"Who the devil are you?"

"Open the door and find out."

"I'll do that little thing!" was the shout.

There were swift steps. The door swung open by a man exceedingly wroth in appearance.

"Jim Jarvis!" he exclaimed. "What are you doing here?"

They shook hands. Jarvis hauled Haines into the corridor.

"I want to state, Arch," he explained, "that you've pulled a mean trick."

"What's that?"

"You've gone and fired the best accountant in town. Ned Standbridge is clever, always was—why, man, he actually reads books! Think of it! Now, about this job of his——"

"You didn't come all the way from Detroit to discuss that?"

"No, I just happened along. Standbridge don't even know I know. But he and his wife are friends of mine and, by George, Arch, I'd travel a lot farther than from Detroit to help them."

"Oh, pshaw!" snapped the other. "You're dramatizing the thing too much—mountain out of a mole-hill. Standbridge can get another job—why not employ him yourself?"

"Can't. Can't be done. Standbridge is proud. And, to be perfectly frank, he's right. I admire him for it."

There was a pause.

"Well, what can *I* do?" complained Haines. "The old man has sent Hilliard on from Detroit. He is due here this morning."

Through the window there showed the faint signs of approaching dawn. The other players were calling for their host. Jarvis glanced at his watch.

"I've got it," he said. "What time does Hilliard arrive?"

Haines considered a moment.

"Let's see. I think his train gets in about six a. m. He'll probably sleep until seven or so and then go to some hotel for breakfast."

"Good!" Jarvis caught the shorter man by the arm. "Now, look here, Arch," he went on. "I've fooled away this whole night on the proposition when I should have been on my way to Maine, and I think I've got it straight, but I want to make sure. You fired Standbridge?"

"He was laid off."

"That's the difference between tweedledum and tweedledee. Standbridge is out of a job?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"But he is a good accountant?"

"Absolutely, A 1."

"And if you had a job open you'd gladly give it to him?"

"Certainly. He's an able——"

"That's the stuff! Now, sir, I'm going to tell you something, Haines."

"All right. Shoot!"

"It's this: that your concern has a job open for Ned Standbridge."

"I'll be the goat. How do you figure it?"

"Because I'm going to employ Hilliard myself, and to do it I'll top what you people are paying him."

Haines smiled.

"Fair enough, Jim," he said. "But what about young Hilliard himself?"

"Easy! You and I will go and see him about it."

"When?"

"Right away."

"Not me. I'm going back to that game."

Jarvis laid a heavy hand on his friend. He looked grim.

"Now, Arch," he said. "Ordinarily I'd swear—but this is too serious to be profane about. I've got to have you with me to satisfy Hilliard. Get your coat and come along."

It was nearing six o'clock when they reached the depot. The Detroit train had just arrived. Jarvis pulled his friend Haines along with him to the ticket office where he learned that the next train back for Detroit left at eight-ten a. m. Here he purchased return transportation.

"Now, sir," he said grimly. "We'll see this Hilliard person."

The gatemen permitted the two men to go through.

"Anybody up yet?" Jarvis asked the porter in the Pullman.

"Don't know, mistah. Mebbe so."

"Go and see!"

The porter grinned at the size of the gratuity Jarvis handed him and disappeared. He returned in a moment.

"Man in twelve is just putting on his pants."

Jarvis started down the aisle.

"That'll be Hilliard, after his new job." The big man made his way along. "Oh, Hilliard!" he called.

A sleepy voice immediately back of him answered, and in a moment Haines was shaking hands with a good-looking young man in a suit of pink pajamas.

"You'll know Mr. Jarvis, of Detroit, Hilliard," explained Haines. "He has a proposition to make to you."

Jarvis thrust the tickets into the hands of the young man.

"Here is transportation to Detroit, Hilliard," he announced. "Your next train back leaves at eight-ten this morning—little more than an hour. From this morning on you go on my pay roll in Detroit at twenty dollars a month better than you were to get here with Haines. Haines agrees to let you off. How about it?"

"Me—for—Detroit!" was the instant decision of the young man.

In front of the hotel Jarvis roused the bell hop dozing in his car and the two sleepy men descended and entered Two of them proceeded immediately to a suite of rooms where one of them grumblingly donned borrowed pajamas much too big, long, and ugly for his taste; then he crawled into bed and yanked the covers over his head to keep out the daylight.

Jarvis was studying the telephone book.

"Here's the number," he called. "Hey! Haines. Get up! I want you to telephone. I hate to horn in, but you ain't quite through yet."

The other grumbled.

"The first game I've had in two years, and you come all the way from Detroit to spoil that. And now I'm tryin' to sleep, and you're spoiling that! By the eternal, Jarvis, if I ever get——"

"Aw, shut up! Here's the number: they'll just be eatin' breakfast. You know what to say."

Two minutes later the telephone bell in the Standbridge home startled the occupants. Mrs. Standbridge answered.

"Mr. Standbridge?" she repeated. "Just a minute. I'll call him."

Standbridge went to the instrument. His wife heard him end the short conversation with "Thank you, Mr. Haines."

She was waiting for him in the kitchen.

"Addie, Addie," he cried, as he came to her. "It's all right, dearie. My position is still open to me. Mr. Haines has arranged it, after all—and, what is better, I'm to have an increase. Oh, sweetheart, I'm so glad of one thing." He hesitated a bit. His wife watched him intently. "Do you know," he said finally. "I was on the point once or twice last night of actually confiding our troubles to Jim."

John Solomon, Incognito

by H. Bedford-Jones

Author of "John Solomon," "Barbary Gold," etc.

WHAT HAPPENED IN PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

Aline Lavergne owns Cypremort, a small plantation in the Louisiana bayous, left to her by her father. She leaves the management to an old retainer, John Philbrick, a hard drinking man, but a kindly soul who writes poetry in his spare time. Aline's uncle, David Macarty, lives on the next plantation, with his son, Felix. The two Macartys are smooth scoundrels—under pretense of watching over her interests, they plan to get Aline's plantation. One of their moves is to dam one of the bayous so that her property can get no water and be valueless to her. Then they try to get rid of Philbrick. Aline suspects the Macartys, however, and goes to New Orleans. She consults Jack Fortier, a young lawyer. Fortier takes her case and finds a fight on his hands, for the Macartys are all powerful. They try to bribe him off; then try to have him beaten up. Meanwhile, unknown to Aline and Fortier, John Solomon, the quaint and mysterious little old man, is taking an interest in the girl's affairs. He was a friend of her father, and Ah Lee, the Manchu, who also knew Aline's father, tells Solomon what the Macartys are planning to do. Solomon goes into action—first by getting the job of steward on the Macarty yacht, the *Watersprite*. Fortier has decided that he must go to Cypremort for a personal investigation. The Macartys make a clever move—they drop open hostilities and invite Fortier to go to Cypremort with them and Aline on the *Watersprite*. Fortier, though on his guard, agrees to go, even though he knows that the attack on him the night previous had been engineered by the Macartys. John Solomon, appearing from nowhere, had rescued him. Just before the *Watersprite* sails, Fortier gets a telegram from Philbrick saying that he, Philbrick, was going away for a short time, and was leaving the plantation in charge of a Captain Wrexham. Fortier shows this telegram to Aline. They wonder what it may mean, but they say nothing about it to the Macartys.

CHAPTER VI.

IT was well past noon on Monday when the *Watersprite* started on her hundred-mile voyage to the Gulf coast. Fortier had heard nothing further from John Philbrick.

In his younger days an enthusiastic amateur yachtsman, David Macarty was nominally captain of this commodious little cruiser. In reality, his two mates did all the handling of the craft. There was a crew of six white men—one of them a quartermaster, Gros Michel by name. A fat, hulking ruffian, this.

On coming aboard with Macarty and Aline, Jack Fortier was introduced to the second officer, Thompson. The latter touched his cap, without apparent recognition, and Fortier chuckled to himself at the sullen features.

Yet, this slight incident worried him. David Macarty had undoubtedly sent Thompson to him. Macarty would now

know that he must recognize Thompson, yet was unconcerned. Why so? What game was David Macarty playing so genially and affably?

Of his friend, the steward, Fortier saw nothing at all until the city was behind and Solomon served drinks under the after awning. The man's face was blank, expressionless as ever. He was a perfect servitor.

Early in the afternoon, David Macarty retired to his own tiny stateroom for a nap. Before departing, he presented Fortier to the first officer, his actual captain—a fine, brisk seaman named Wright. Fortier liked the man, guessed him to be thoroughly reliable. Wright shook hands and departed to the bridge.

"How do you like the boat?" inquired Aline, when she and Fortier were alone beneath the awning. Fortier met her gaze, and found it sweetly poised as ever, yet somewhat probing and questioning. He puffed at his cigar a moment, then removed it from his lips.

"She seems a fine craft," he responded slowly.

"And—her crew?"

Fortier looked into the gray eyes again. A smile curved his lips.

"You have an uncanny fashion of reaching to the heart of things, Miss Lavergne!" he answered. "Is it intuition?"

"I think so," she said quietly.

"H'm! I believe it is. Well, I'll be frank—I don't like the crew! That chap, Thompson, was in my office last week; he had a big fat bribe to induce me to go to San Francisco on a mythical legal errand. He was inspired to it, of course."

"Oh!" she said. "Then there can be no doubt——"

Fortier made a slight gesture, and she fell silent. Two of the crew, hangdog rascals, with Gros Michel, the quartermaster, were approaching. The three men set to work furbishing the brass of the quarter-deck.

"Not a fraction of a doubt," returned Fortier in his usual voice. "By the way, when do we reach your island?"

"Some time to-morrow if all goes well." Aline Lavergne eyed the distant river shores as they slipped past. "We should reach Latouche in the morning, and may stop there for mail and supplies. As a rule, uncle leaves the *Watersprite* there when he is not using her. Latouche is the parish seat, you know."

Fortier nodded.

"By the way," said the girl, after a little silence, "I have with me a number of papers that father had left in his safe-deposit box in the bank in New Orleans. They all seem to be deeds and old papers dealing with the estate. Would it be worth while your looking them over? I thought we might as well have them at hand, in case it becomes necessary to raise any more money by mortgages——"

"Certainly, let me see them!" exclaimed Fortier. "One never knows what may turn up among such things."

"They are in my bag. I'll get them."

Aline rose and went below.

Fortier drew at his cigar, sipping occasionally at the lime concoction which Solomon had provided. The three men of the crew furbished away at the brasses, exchanging occasional remarks among themselves in the back-country patois; all three were Cajuns. Fortier, who spoke the tongue as well as he did English, gleaned that they were discussing certain ladies of Latouche, and dismissed them from his mind.

Presently Aline Lavergne returned, putting into his hand a legal envelope stuffed with papers and documents. She sat down with some sewing, and left Fortier to look over the papers undisturbed.

He ran through them rapidly but carefully. Nearly all proved to be documents relating to Cypremort plantation,

and some of these went back two hundred years. As he shuffled them, a thin slip of paper fluttered into his lap. Glancing at it, Fortier, to his surprise, perceived that it was a receipt for board and lodging, written in curious English and dated at Port Said in 1905.

"What's this—something valuable?" he said, smiling. He handed the slip of paper to the girl, who glanced at it in surprise. Her eyes softened.

"Oh! No—I suppose father kept that as a memento of his trip," she said. "He was in Syria and northern Egypt about fifteen years ago, on business. He was there for nearly a year, and made a good deal of money. I believe that he always intended to return some day, but of course the war broke up all his plans, and then he died the year after the war. He must have kept this because of its funny English."

Fortier glanced up, to perceive the pudgy figure of the steward before them. Solomon touched his cap apologetically.

"Beggin' your pardon, sir an' miss," he said. "If so be as you wants tea, I'll 'ave all ready, shipshape an' Bristol fashion, whenever you rings."

"Thank you," rejoined Aline. "It's a bit early yet. We'll wait until Mr. Macarty comes."

The girl kept the bit of paper in her fingers. Presently, as though reluctant to sever this link with her past, she slowly tore it into fragments and let the wind carry them over the rail. Fortier had resumed his survey of the documents.

"Your father died suddenly, I understand?" he asked presently.

"Yes. Very suddenly. It was heart failure."

"Then, I suppose, you never learned the meaning of this writing?"

Fortier passed her a legal form. On the blank reverse side of this folded paper were written some words in pencil—evidently a hurried scrawl. It bore an abbreviated date, at sight of which the gray eyes widened.

"Oh! Why, this must have been written just before father died! I never noticed it——"

"Read it," said Fortier. "I don't understand it myself."

Aline read, in puzzled silence:

Memo. Show Aline stones held in trust. Sea-moon, Queen of Sheba, & Gemini in separate case.

"Why, that is singular!" murmured the girl, frowning a little. "What did he mean by stones held in trust? And Gemini—that means the twins, Castor and Pollux——"

Fortier saw the hulking figure of Gros Michel turn and dart a seemingly careless look at the speaker. He quietly held out his hand and took the paper.

"There's no telling," he said, inwardly cursing his lack of caution. "Something that he meant to tell you about, evidently. Perhaps Philbrick will know."

"Oh, of course he will!" exclaimed Aline, relieved. "Philbrick knows everything—my father always told him everything. And there's uncle now. Shall we have tea served here, Uncle David?"

Macarty came up, and Fortier put away the papers in his pocket. He attached no importance to this hurried scrawl, yet it might have some meaning. He determined to ask Philbrick about it upon reaching the island.

That evening, Aline retired early, leaving the two men to smoke together. Fortier found his host no less charming than at their first meeting; indeed, Macarty seemed exerting himself to make a favorable impression upon the young attorney.

Fortier smiled, for he could read the other man's mind like a map. Macarty fancied that his guest was a raw youth, easily impressed, who could be twisted around a deft finger without trouble. By his studied flattery, Fortier conveyed

the notion that he cherished an immense respect for Macarty's opinions. And Macarty was just shallow enough to know no better.

This little game amused Fortier a good deal, and did no harm.

It was ten o'clock when Fortier retired to his little cubby of a cabin. He paused for a word with Wright, who had the bridge, and learned that barring trouble they would reach Latouche in the morning. When he had undressed, he crowded himself into his small but comfortable berth, and was asleep immediately.

He was wakened by the sound of his cabin door slammed violently shut.

Fortier sat up, blinking. A glance at his illuminated wrist watch told him that it was almost exactly midnight. Had his door been open? He was certain that he had locked it upon retiring. Had he been mistaken in the sound?

As he sat there, hesitant, he heard a sudden pound of bare feet on the outside deck. After this, a sharp cry.

"By George, something's up!" thought Fortier, and sprang out of bed.

Throwing on his coat over his pajamas, he glanced out into the passage, then left the room and passed to the deck. There he found the electric lights switched on, and several men standing about a dark object. The mate glanced at him.

"That you, Mr. Wright?" asked Fortier. "What's the trouble?"

"Murder," said the chief officer curtly. "I had turned over the bridge to Mr. Thompson, and was going below when I stumbled on him——"

Fortier looked down at the motionless bulk of the quartermaster, Gros Michel. The man had, apparently, been stabbed in the side and lay there dead. Yet, oddly enough, as the body lay on its face, one hand was twisted about to the back of the neck.

The chief officer stooped, lifted one inanimate arm, and examined the knife that still lay gripped by the dead flesh. A startled exclamation burst from his lips, and he straightened up.

"Ask Mr. Thompson to step down here," he snapped at the nearest man. Then, as he stood erect, the hand of Wright shifted to his coat pocket. Fortier caught the gleam of metal.

"No disturbance now," commanded Wright sharply. "Don't wake any one. Mr. Fortier, I'll be glad to have you remain, if you will. I believe you're a lawyer?"

Fortier assented quietly, sensing something strange about this murder.

The second officer appeared.

"What's this, Wright?" he demanded. "Gros Michel murdered? Why——"

"Murdered, Mr. Thompson," said the mate. "I'd like to have you look at the knife that did the work. Do you recognize it?"

Thompson stooped. An oath fell from his lips as he straightened up.

"My knife!" he cried, amazement in his sullen face. "My knife! Why, why what——"

"Perhaps you can explain how it got where it is?" said Wright calmly. The second officer stared at him, then swore luridly.

"Here, none o' that talk, Mr. Wright! How the devil should I know how it got here? It's my knife, all right—got my name on it. But I lost that cursed knife yesterday! Must have mislaid it somewhere."

"I'm glad to hear that," said the mate. "Did you mention the loss to any one? This may be serious, Mr. Thompson—go slow now!"

"What the devil have I to go slow about?" stormed Thompson, perplexed and furious. "Anybody says I'm a murderer is a cursed liar! Yes, I told the steward I lost the knife—that little fool of a cockney, Solomon! He promised to keep a lookout for it."

"Good! Call Solomon," ordered Wright.

"Here he is," said somebody. "Here he is, sir!"

Solomon was pushed forward. An ulster was flung over his night attire, and he blinked stupidly from the body on the deck to the keen scrutiny of Wright.

"See here, steward!" said the latter brusquely. "Did Mr. Thompson have any conversation with you yesterday in regard to a knife?"

"No, sir, not as I knows of," returned Solomon wheezily.

"Damn your eyes!" burst out Thompson, enraged. "Don't you dare to——"

"Shut up!" Wright lifted his pistol. "Not a word, Mr. Thompson! Now, steward, you think hard about this. Tell me just what Mr. Thompson said to you about his knife."

Solomon started suddenly. "Oh!" he exclaimed. At this word, at his evident recollection, there was a general movement of interest. Every eye was intent on the steward.

"Out with it," said Wright.

"Oh! Yes, sir, it comes back to me now, just like that!" said Solomon. "Why, Mr. Thompson, 'e comes to me and 'e says as 'ow that knife is a werry fine one, and 'as 'is name on it, and 'ow 'e is mortal proud of it! Yes, sir, I remember now."

There was a general relaxation. Obviously, Thompson was cleared. Wright nodded, and his frown vanished.

"And," prompted Wright, "he told you about having lost it?"

"No, sir," said Solomon, with a blank stare. "Not at all, sir. 'E asks me to clean it up a bit for 'im, which same I done, sir, and give it back to 'im——"

Thunderstruck by these words, the group of men stared at Solomon. But Thompson leaped forward, fist upraised, a storm of oaths on his lips.

Without hesitation, Wright intervened and struck at him—hit him across the skull with the pistol. The second mate staggered and went down, senseless.

"This is a serious matter, steward," exclaimed Wright sternly. "Can you swear to this evidence in court?"

"If so be as I 'ad to, sir." The guileless blue eyes of Solomon looked perturbed and frightened. "I 'opes, sir, as it ain't a-goin' to get Mr. Thompson in trouble?"

Wright did not answer the question. He ordered two of the men to bind Thompson and to carry him forward. Then he looked around.

"This is a hell of a mess!" he uttered fervently. "Anybody know any cause for this thing?"

There was no response.

"Anybody seen Gros Michel and Mr. Thompson together, the last four hours?"

It was Solomon who spoke up.

"They was 'aving a bit of an argument outside the galley door, sir."

"When?" snapped Wright.

"About an hour ago, sir. I was a-layin' some oatmeal in the fireless cooker, sir, and I 'eard them two talkin' werry 'ard at each other."

"That's a fact, sir," spoke up one of the men. "But there wasn't no harm in it. They was arguing about what color shirt was best suited to Michel's complexion, sir——"

"That's enough," snapped Wright. "Carry the body for'ard and get this deck holystoned before daylight."

Fortier, obeying a sudden impulse, leaned over and touched his fingers to the neck of the corpse.

"Steward, fetch some ice water to my cabin, please."

"Werry good, sir," rejoined Solomon.

Fortier went below, switched on the light in his stateroom, and waited. Presently Solomon appeared, bearing a tray.

"Set it down," ordered Fortier. "Shut the door. Now, look here!"

Solomon gazed at him placidly.

"That man," said Fortier, "was not murdered by the knife. He was killed by being hit a terrific blow at the base of the skull, Solomon. What do you know about it?"

"Me, sir? I knows nothing and I says nothing, just like that."

The blue eyes were very wide and guileless; the rotund face was entirely blank.

"Confound you!" exclaimed Fortier. "I don't know what to do. I owe you a good turn, but I'm cursed if I'll compound murder! And I don't believe you're half the simpleton you look, Solomon. Where's that knife of yours —the one with the lead haft?"

"Why, sir, I lost that 'ere knife today. Lost it over the side, sir."

"After it struck Gros Michel, it went overboard, eh?"

Solomon made no response, but stood in placid silence.

"See here!" exclaimed Fortier angrily. "I think your testimony is a mass of lies. Why on earth would you swear an innocent man into the noose?"

Solomon chuckled. "Me testimony don't count, sir, until it's took down in court, just like that! And if so be as I changes my mind, why, Mr. Thompson 'e won't be conwicted——"

"Oh!" Fortier gasped at the audacity of the little man. "Then you actually confess that you murdered——"

"I ain't doin' of no such thing, sir," spoke up Solomon suddenly. "That 'ere man was not murdered, sir. 'E was killed in self-defense, sir! What's more, nobody can be conwicted for a-killin' of 'im, 'cause why, 'e ain't inside the law! 'Is right name, sir, is 'Ennepin, and 'e's the brother o' that 'ere P'tit Jean——"

Fortier sprang to his feet. Petit Jean—Michel! The brothers who were outlaws!

"Is this a fact?" he demanded swiftly.

"Yes, sir. That 'ere Thompson is a-goin' to get 'eld in jail until they find out that this Gros Michel was an outlaw. That's all, sir. And, if I might make so bold, these 'ere papers was in 'is 'and when 'e was killed, sir."

Solomon held out an envelope, then departed. Fortier did not prevent his going. He stood there, staring at those papers like a man paralyzed. For they were the identical ones he had received that afternoon from Aline Lavergne.

It all flashed upon Fortier suddenly —the slam of his cabin door as Gros Michel had left with the stolen papers, the heavy fall on the deck.

"By gad, that man Solomon is a smart one!" murmured Fortier admiringly. "He caught the fellow in the act—and Michel got killed. Then Solomon threw the blame on Thompson—arranged to have Thompson jailed—why? Did he know that Thompson was one of Macarty's henchmen? Did he know——"

Fortier turned out the lights and lay down again to think it over. The more he thought, however, the more John Solomon became to him nothing but a startling, perplexing question mark. Who and what was this little, pudgy man?

John Solomon——

CHAPTER VII.

In the great white manor house of Cypremort, John Philbrick sat at dinner with his guest. Captain Tom Wrexham listened without saying very much at first. His protruding eyes were always staring at the wonders of the huge rooms—had stared, thus, ever since his arrival. He seemed never to see enough.

Uncle Neb, black and wrinkled, served the two men punctiliously. Wrexham ate like a gentleman. He seemed to appreciate the silver and glass and snowy linen, as a man who

has been deprived of such things for a long while.

The dining room was a great chamber all paneled in black old mahogany, lighted by candle sconces and a squat candelabrum on the table—the mahogany table which, fully extended, would seat fifty guests. In the dark recesses of the room lurked black shadows and the dim sheen of silver; smoked portraits about the walls, a mammoth carved buffet loaded with plate.

"I might ha' had a place like this of my own," said Wrexham suddenly, "only for the law. No use for the law. That was up in Canada; place like this, all the same."

John Philbrick nodded his shaggy head with a sage air.

"Thought all along you might be a Canuck," he commented. "Funny how folks around here brag about Louisiana being settled by the French! It was really Canadians. Iberville and his Hudson Bay bunch—the same crowd hung together, same names and all. All Canadians born. Well, try this venison, now! I don't guess you've had much venison at sea."

"Mighty little," admitted Wrexham. "I'll not go back to sea for a while. I've no crew, and no particular use for one. I've got money enough to loaf a bit, enjoy life."

The talk languished.

Outside, darkness shut down on everything. Out in the bayou rode the schooner of Captain Wrexham, her riding lights dotted against the obscurity. The plantation house was entirely lighted by candles—not even a lamp anywhere, for old ways clung close. Sconces, mostly of solid silver, were everywhere.

In the dining room the two men partook of a dinner which would have driven Epicurus mad with desire. Crab bisque, turtle, venison, bayou oysters—a dozen things such as can be had in combination only from Louisiana cooks. And all the while the two men were studying each other, as they had done for days past, ever since Wrexham's arrival here.

John Philbrick was a tremendous man, browed and bearded like the "Moses" of Michelangelo, thewed in proportion. The gray, shaggy beard hid weak lines, however; somewhere in his face was an unsteadiness, a weakness. Like his guest, he was attired in white, but untidily so. His open shirt collar betrayed a powerful throat, his coat was flung on a near-by chair, his garments were not at all spotless.

Wrexham, on the contrary, was something of a dandy. His whites were tailored. In his snowy cravat glowed a small black pearl, set below the luxuriant, curly brown beard, which was trimmed square and brusque. His eyes, somewhat protuberant, were pleasantly wrinkled at the corners, after the fashion of men who look much into the open depths of sky and sea.

About this sea captain was something puzzling, baffling. In the carriage of his head was an aggressive challenge, in his sharp look a brusquerie; yet the man was inwardly troubled. His thoughts seemed ever reaching backward, as though he were living through past scenes and days.

John Philbrick felt this oddity. At times his bright eyes, half hid beneath their shaggy brows, would dart a probing glance at his guest. He asked no questions. He knew that any man who showed up here along the bayous, without a crew but with a marvelous boat, and who was content to sit and dream, had some inward confusion in his soul. It was perfectly evident that this Wrexham was no virginal young man, either.

Wrexham betrayed himself often, perhaps from carelessness. Perhaps it was the refinement, the silver and glass and wine, that worked on him. A shadow in his eyes would linger hauntingly; his face would shift into hard,

harsh lines of cruel purpose. One fancied that this man's crew had left him with good reason. He bore a callous air, seeming unmoved by anything that chanced, as though if he so desired his experiences might astonish any one.

Something of this crept into his talk.

"I don't like it," he said, apropos of nothing. "I'm used to action, and up in these seas it's a rum go. A rum go, and no mistake!"

Philbrick pushed over the whisky decanter, and laughed.

"You can get your action," he said. "Go shoot up that devil, young Macarty."

The skipper shook his head very decidedly.

"Not *me*," he said, with emphasis, and poured a tall drink. "I know when I'm well off."

The two men drank. Philbrick chuckled as he set down his glass.

"You can get action in the bayous. Outlaws there, no end of them—honest men they are, too! The sheriff never bothers the canebrakes. I'd not be surprised to be there myself one of these days. You know that big nigger I shot the other night?"

Wrexham nodded, with a curious glance.

"You don't mean they'd get after you? For shooting a black?"

Philbrick shrugged his wide shoulders. "All things are possible. An odd situation, this one! Did you ever see anything to beat it?"

"Often," said Wrexham calmly. "Often. If you want to see queer things, go pearlin', or after bird skins, or even shell. Why, I remember——"

He broke off, smiled thinly at his glass, fingered his beard. After a moment:

"Dashed rum go, down there! I owed a man a debt, d'ye see? Owed him a good deal—passed my word on it. Well, I had the chance to pay it back. In order to pay it back, I had to play a rotten trick on another crowd. I managed it, but it left a bad taste. Two men and a woman, they were. I went away from there in a hurry, I can tell you! Didn't know 'em, never saw 'em before or since. Left a bad taste just the same."

The jerky speech was followed by silence. Suddenly Wrexham went on, thinking aloud:

"I'll make it up some day," he said thoughtfully. "Only I've never had the chance. And I've been lookin' for one, off and on."

"Come in on this deal," offered Philbrick, watching intently. "You know the odds. You know the situation here. If they get me, who's to watch out for the girl? Nobody. Throw in with me."

Wrexham smiled sardonically.

"Not me! You can run your own blessed show. And I don't want to mix with your friend Macarty; don't like his looks. I've got enough enemies now, without taking on more."

His eyes went insolently to the troubled gaze of old Philbrick. He seemed to bristle against some offer which tempted him, yet which he was resolved to reject. Philbrick sighed, and rose.

"Come along to the library. Uncle Neb! Bring out coffee and cigars."

The old darky followed them with the thick creole coffee and a box of cigars into the library. Here a smoldering fire in the great fireplace banished the damp chill of evening. The two men settled into deep chairs.

"Confounded pretty face!" said Wrexham. He was staring at an enlarged photograph which stood on the mantel. "Most amazin' face, that!"

Philbrick merely grunted. He seldom betrayed in words the poetic urge that was in him. Sometimes it came forth in deeds, but he shrank from talking of it. Not for worlds would he have it generally known that he wrote verse. It was in him, however, and it

came forth in more ways than one—sometimes very surprisingly.

"Aline is a wonder-girl," he said. "Looks exactly like her mother, too."

Had Wrexham rightly understood this remark, it would have altered his entire life. But he failed to heed it. He was staring at the picture on the mantel.

The aroma of the parched coffee and good tobacco mingled pleasingly in the room. It was a large room, paneled like the others, and not confined to books. Jewels, both artistic and intrinsic, hung upon the walls. Through a hundred years and more the men of this family had brought their spoils home to this room, spoils of diplomacy and work and battle.

A case of jeweled orders; presentation swords incrusted with gold and gems; four ancient oils worth their weight in hundred-dollar bills. A woman's picture—Aline's grandmother—set in a frame of ivory, studded with huge, rough sapphires; and so on, in an infinitude of detail. Wrexham glanced about the walls, a predatory glitter in his eyes.

"Wonder your niggers don't walk off with some of this truck!" he observed.

Philbrick grunted again. "Nonsense! They're family darkies."

"And no wonder your friends the Macartys want to loot this house!" Wrexham's eyes narrowed. "Anybody'd want to. I'd want to myself! Might come and do it some night."

"You?" Philbrick smiled in his gray beard. "You're not that sort."

Wrexham suddenly flung a snarl at him.

"Don't know me. Bah! You fools who live and rot and die here under the hand of the law! You don't know what goes on in the world! I tell you there's no crime worth the name that I haven't——"

He checked himself with an oath. "Too much liquor!" he went on gruffly. "If I could carry it like you, now! Well, it's a rum go."

"So you've pirated in your time?" said Philbrick softly. "Like they do in books?"

Wrexham leaned back in his chair and vented a burst of hearty laughter.

"You *are* a boy, aren't you?" he said amusedly. "I believe on my soul you just wait and scheme to get me talkin' about pirates an' murders on the high seas, and so forth!"

"Well, I like it," admitted Philbrick sheepishly. A wistful note crept into his voice. "I've always wanted to go to sea, and never had the chance."

"With all the sea at your door?" scoffed Wrexham.

"Aye. And I've liked to talk with sailors, and hear them tell things——"

Wrexham sniffed in wondering scorn.

"Then you've learned a fine lot o' profanity and smut," he said brutally. "If you think there's any damned romance—hell! You're a boy, that's all."

Philbrick was silent under this outburst. He was probably ashamed of his own half confidence. When he spoke again, the subject was changed.

"I wish now that I hadn't killed that big black," he said. "They'd like nothing better than to get me off the place long enough——"

"Ain't you got the right to protect your own home and life?" sniffed Wrexham.

"It's not that." Philbrick frowned. "Macarty owns the parish, sheriff, and all. He can frame up anything. There's no ultimate danger, of course, but if he could have this place at his mercy for a little while, he'd play merry hell with things. Who's that? Oh, come in, Uncle Neb!"

A knock had sounded at the door.

At the knock, Wrexham jumped. His eyes dwelt upon the advancing figure of the negro with a strange uneasiness, as though he divined something of stiff import to himself.

"Mistuh Philbrick, suh!" exclaimed Uncle Neb, his voice tremulous. "One o' dem slue-footed town niggers jest drapped down to de landin' and left dishyer note fo' yo'——"

He broke off to extend a folded, dirty scrap of paper.

Philbrick took it, opened it, and held it to the light. Then he crumpled the paper and flung it into the fire. He leaned back, put his cigar again between his lips, and gave Uncle Neb a calm order.

"Get that little brown hand bag out of my room and bring it donwetairs. Put in it that bottle of whisky Captain Wrexham brought. And fetch a rifle, Uncle Neb; don't forget a box of cartridges. That'll do."

The old darky retired, and the door closed. Philbrick looked calmly at his guest.

"Some kind soul sent me a warning," he said coolly. "The sheriff will be here in half an hour or so to take me away for that shooting. It's a pretext, but good enough. You can't murder negroes, even in this country. All they want, of course, is to have the place left at their mercy for a while."

Wrexham stiffened in his chair. "What the devil! Are you serious, man?"

Philbrick nodded. "I'm off. Can't take the chance of lying in jail a month or two before I get loose. There's too much at stake. I'll take one of the launches or a canoe, and go into the canebrakes like many a better man! I'll find plenty of friends, never fear."

He spoke calmly of this. Calmly—as though it meant nothing to flee from the law, to live in canebrakes and bayous like a wild beast, in the company of rogues and murderers and devils incarnate. Wonder sat in the eyes of the staring seaman.

"You're devilish cool about it!" said Wrexham doubtingly. Philbrick smiled.

"Why not? There's no rush. Five minutes' start is quite enough—they can't trace me at night, you know. Will you send a wire for me, to-morrow or next day? One of the boys will be glad to take you up to town."

"Of course. Do anything I can."

Philbrick rose and went to a desk in one corner. Here he moved a candle closer, and sat down to write out a telegram. Just to his right was the case of jeweled orders and decorations. After a minute he looked up and jerked his head.

"Come over here, cap'n."

The seaman obeyed. When he walked, it was with the peculiar side sway of one who sets his weight against the swinging heave of a deck, feeling the ground as he treads it. Philbrick handed him the telegram.

"You'd better read it. But first, look here——"

As he spoke, Philbrick loosened a hook on one side of the case of orders. He swung the case out from the wall, like a door. Behind it was revealed a safe set in the wall.

"Everything's in there," he said calmly. "Money and family jewels and papers."

"Eh? What d'ye mean?" Wrexham's voice was startled.

The door opened. Uncle Neb appeared, carrying a rifle and a small grip. Philbrick came to his feet and held out his hand to Wrexham. He was laughing silently.

"Good-by, Wrexham! Read the telegram. I'll leave now. I'll perhaps be able to send a message to you in a few days—luck to you!"

Wrexham, astonished, shook hands. Philbrick turned to the old darky.

"You'll hear from me later, uncle. Now give me the cartridges, please, sir! Thanks. I'm off to the brakes. While I'm gone, Cap'n Wrexham will be in charge. Understand? He'll look after things until Miss Aline gets back.

"Wrexham! Young Macarty may

show up with the sheriff. If he does, look out! There's a brief note inside the desk, placing you in authority here —you may need it. Good night."

Philbrick turned to the door, and his great figure vanished. Uncle Neb followed him, and the door slammed.

Wrexham was left alone in the room, a picture of blank astonishment, staring after them. Presently he recollected the telegram in his hand, and glanced at it. He seemed to waken from his daze with a start.

"The devil!" he cried out protestingly. Then he realized there was none to hear his protest.

"Why, the old scoundrel! He's a slick un and no mistake. Worked me, he did—worked me like a blasted fool!" A note of admiration crept into his voice. "I'll be damned! If the old rascal didn't go away and leave me in charge—*me*, mind you!"

He stood gazing around the dim room as though unable to comprehend it. Thrusting the telegram into his pocket, he went to the center table. There he took a cigar from the open box, bit off the end, and returned to the desk. He dropped into the chair before it, and held the candle to his cigar. Then he leaned back and surveyed the room again. A struggle was in his face.

"This is a rum go, a rum go!" he exclaimed roughly. "Fancy this, now! What ud old Hvarson say to this, eh? What ud any one say who knew me?"

Presently he rose again and went back to the fireplace. He stood there, his feet planted wide apart, and stared hard at the enlarged photograph of the girl on the mantel. It gazed down at him from wide gray eyes, crystal-clear. The struggle deepened in his face. His brows drew down as he looked at the picture.

"I wonder if that old rascal realized a few things?" he cogitated aloud. "Damn him, I believe he did! Told him too much about myself, that's what I did. Well, young lady, your property is in the hands of a cursed bad rascal, and that's the truth! Nothing to say about it, have you? But it's a damned mess—confound it, don't look at me that way! I didn't mean to swear in front of you!

"Now, ma'am, do you suppose that if I was to stick on this here job, that little matter back in the coral sea would be forgiven me? Do you, ma'am?"

He stood motionless, his head slightly cocked, staring up at the picture. Suddenly, as though some inner answer had come to him, his lips parted in a wide smile. Through his beard flashed strong, even teeth like white ivory.

"Well, Miss Aline, it's a bargain!" he cried out exultantly. "Damme if ever I thought I'd look into eyes on earth like yours! Eyes of an angel, that's what. I'm a rotten fool and no mistake—but I'll do it. I expect it'll come to no good end, neither. If this isn't a bad crowd we're up against, I don't know one! But it'll be a novelty to be fightin' for something decent, won't it?"

He laughed again, and bowed to the photograph.

"I'll do it, ma'am, and thank you for the chance!"

CHAPTER VIII.

CAPTAIN WREXHAM having made his decision, displayed no further hesitation. He turned from the fireplace, walked over to the case of decorations, and planted himself before it.

"Ah!" he observed, blowing a cloud of smoke. "It's only fair to have a look at what I'm in charge of, eh?"

He swung back the case from the wall, held a candle closer, and inspected the wall safe. A chuckle broke from him. White teeth flashed through his beard.

"The old rascal left her in charge o' me, but thoughtfully forgot to tell me the combination! Well, if that safe ain't thirty years old, I'm a Kanaka."

Still chuckling, he leaned forward and touched the knob. For a little while he stood thus, only his fingers moving deftly. Then he straightened up, nodding as though well pleased with himself. The safe door swung open to his hand.

Decidedly, this was not Captain Wrexham's first encounter with a safe!

The scene which followed flung a singular light upon the ethical impulse of this waif cast up by the sea. Another man would have been in thought of the coming officers, and in nervous waiting, but not Wrexham!

The skipper attended to the business in hand with a cool and unhurried enjoyment, an air of relish, of keen satisfaction. Indeed, since he had looked into the pictured eyes of Aline Lavergne and made his decision, there had come a new flash into his eye, a new resolution into his manner. Strange, that a photograph should so sway the mind of such a man, even to altering his very life course!

The safe open, he laid bare the drawers within. One by one he removed them for his inspection. If he had expected treasure, he found it—not in money, but in the jewels of dead women; glittering things, heirlooms of vanity and love. Into the man's face came a fiercely predatory air.

"Lord!" he exclaimed throatily. "I've seen the time when I'd have——"

He did not finish. He had drawn forth a packet of papers, heart-sacred documents of the family's past. These he opened and read, coolly and deliberately, quite ignoring the obvious fact that he was violating the first principles of a gentleman. In five minutes he had absorbed from these papers a tremendous amount of information about the family.

There was little else in the safe to repay his exploration. Last of all, he drew out a thick package, wrapped, sealed heavily, and addressed to Aline Lavergne. After turning it over in his hands, Captain Wrexham calmly broke the seals and inspected the contents. He found it to be a book—rather an astonishing book, too.

Sitting down comfortably in the desk chair, Captain Wrexham puffed his cigar alight and gave his attention to the volume in hand. Evidently, John Philbrick had had this book made. It was a thick book with blank leaves, bound in leather; upon the cover, stamped in gold, were the words: "The Book of Aline, Her Beauty—For Her Eyes Only—by John Philbrick, Gent."

"John Philbrick, Gent.!" commented the skipper sardonically. "A rum go, I call it!"

He opened the volume, and gained his first intimation that John Philbrick was a poet.

Upon the blank pages, Philbrick had laboriously and beautifully inscribed his own verses, most of them tributes personal and delicate to the girl whom he loved. Wrexham glanced through the pages, reading a line here and there. Then he tossed the book carelessly back into its place and sat in moody silence, his fingers curling about his square brown beard.

"I've lived too long, that's what's the trouble," he said at last, with a sigh. For a little he was silent again, then he broke forth petulantly.

"What've I got out of it all, now that I'm here? Not much. Lechery o' women in the high latitudes, and strength o' men in the low; well, I've held up my end with 'em all, bad and worse! Now I'm here, with some money in my fist—and the picture of a girl tellin' me to be good. That's hell for you! No hell worse than that: to see what you can't ever have again, but might ha' had once!

"Don't know what's got into me, for a fact. Runnin' true to form, I ought to load up this junk in the *Nautilus* an'

go about my business somewhere down the Caribbean. Anyhow, I want to sight that girl in the flesh, just to satisfy myself that pictures lie—just to have the pleasure o' saying, 'I told you so!' They aren't made like her, I tell you! Not possible. And who'd think that old graybeard rascal was a poet, eh? Only last night he was wild drunk. If *I* could get drunk, now, maybe it'd help some."

He sat with his head sunk, his beard brushing over his white shirt, in an attitude of pessimistic gloom, of utter dejection.

What pictures he beheld in his mind's eye, what visions of past years, lost chances, sneered-down virtues, were for himself alone. The wonder was that a girl's picture had compelled this sea-wastrel into such a mood. Yet, perhaps, that picture had only come at the right moment to cast its weight into a long-wavering balance. Who can tell about these things?

Suddenly there was a sound. On the instant Wrexham became a different man.

A trampling of booted feet on the veranda—or "gallery," as is the Southern term—and the man was out of his chair in a flash. So swift were his movements that they were almost incredible. Within five seconds he had closed the safe, swung and locked the case of decorations before it, and was on the other side of the room. He flung his dead cigar into the fire and took a fresh weed from the box.

The hall door opened. Uncle Neb appeared and said something in the patois. Wrexham did not understand. The old negro spoke in English.

"Sheriff Swords is heah, suh, an' he——"

"Ask the gentlemen in," said Wrexham, cold as ice. He stood passive, waiting, alert.

The two men who entered the room came to a dead halt at sight of Wrexham. Obviously the sight of him astonished them. The foremost, a burly person who wore a holstered revolver prominently displayed, was undoubtedly the sheriff.

"Well?" said Wrexham coolly. "Who are these gentlemen, Uncle Neb?"

The old darky rolled his eyes. "Sheriff Swords, suh, an'—an' Mistuh Macarty."

"Ah!" said Wrexham. "Glad to meet you, gentlemen. My name's Tom Wrexham, master and owner of the *Nautilus*, anchored out yonder. How may I serve you?"

"Where's Philbrick?" demanded the sheriff, scowling a bit.

"You refer to Mr. Philbrick?" drawled Wrexham.

"Reckon I do."

"Well, Mr. Philbrick had sad news to-day." Wrexham sadly wagged his beard. "It seems that the owner of this place—a girl, ain't she?—is away in New Orleans or somewhere, and he got word only to-day that she wasn't expected to live after the accident——"

"What's this?" Macarty came forward with a cry. "What's this?"

The skipper regarded him coolly.

"I'm talkin'," he rejoined. "You see, the girl was run over by an auto, and she wanted to see Mr. Philbrick most particular. So he went off to see her, that's all."

The ruse succeeded. Both visitors were flung off balance for the moment.

"Aline—an accident!" exclaimed Felix Macarty. "See here—we happen to know that Philbrick was on the place this very afternoon!"

Wrexham grinned. "Well, sir, if it makes you happy to know it, I'm not the man to object. Sit down, gentlemen! Have a drink."

Macarty watched him with an angry flush rising in his face. There was no denying that Felix was a handsome young devil, like his father; there was

no caution in his face, however. Instead, the face ran to a keen, sharp sophistication. It was touched with cruelty.

No weakness in it—none! A quick brain flamed behind the smoldering eyes. From thin lips to level brows, it was the face of one who had fought hard and cruelly. Wrexham knew the type for a bad one, knew well that this type would not break or yield.

"Has there been any accident?" said Macarty slowly.

"For all I know, there might ha' been," and Wrexham chuckled. The sheriff growled and drew forth a paper.

"Here's a warrant for Philbrick's arrest, charge of murder," he proclaimed. "I want him, and I mean to get him even if——"

"Get him, by all means!" said the skipper. "I suppose you'll go to New Orleans?"

"None o' that!" snapped the badgered officer. "He's on this here place, and if you're tryin' to hide him——"

Wrexham broke into a hearty laugh.

"Here's a rum go!" he uttered. "Take him with you, by all means! I don't know where he is this minute, and that's a fact."

"I reckon I'll just take you along, too." The sheriff's hand moved toward the weapon at his belt. "You prob'ly know a good deal——"

Wrexham stiffened a trifle.

"You just try it on!" he said calmly, holding the cigar out in front of him. "You just try it on, that's all! I'll shoot two fingers off your hand before you can pull that gun, my man! If you want Philbrick, you go get him. If you want me—why, you just try it on!"

Felix Macarty touched the arm of the sheriff.

"Be careful," he said quietly. "This gentleman knows nothing. You'd better look for our man, though I'm afraid he's slipped us."

"That's sensible," put in Wrexham. "Oh, Uncle Neb! The sheriff wants to arrest Mr. Philbrick. Show him to where Mr. Philbrick is, and let him do his arresting. Look over the place, sheriff—she's all yours."

Smothering an oath, the sheriff turned and left the room.

Felix Macarty had not moved his gaze from the face of Wrexham. Now he came forward to the table, took a cigar from the box, lighted it. He was as cool as Wrexham himself.

"Pretty schooner of yours, cap'n," he said.

"True enough." Wrexham appeared mollified by this opening. "Sit down?"

Macarty nodded and dropped into a chair. Wrexham followed suit, and lighted his own cigar.

"Fast, isn't she?" asked Macarty. "She has lines, that craft."

"Fast? You ought to see her with a good following wind, not too stiff!" said the skipper with enthusiasm. "Let her out wing-and-wing, and I'll guarantee she'll walk over anything in the trades! Why, I remember once down in the Paumotus, there was a French gunboat poking around after us, one of those old tin pots that can do ten knots at a pinch!

"Well, sir, she pops out around the point of an island, not two miles away. We turned tail, I can tell you! She put two shots over us and two more in the water. By that time the old girl was walkin' away from her with the sails wet down and a bone in her teeth—and we went on walkin', that's all! She'll do her fifteen if all's right."

Macarty nodded at this confidence. He fell to staring into the fire embers.

"Remarkable craft," he said after a bit. "By the way, I don't suppose you'd consider a charter, at high terms?"

"Might," said Wrexham. "High terms, high risks—eh? It all depends."

Macarty glanced at the door; it was closed. He shifted a little in his chair,

so that he could better study the face of Wrexham.

"I know a man who could use such a craft," he said. "A Chinaman, named Ah Lee."

Wrexham nodded knowingly, and fingered his beard.

"Heard of him from Philbrick—he's makin' arrack and loadin' the black folk into hell, ain't he? Well, I don't mind sayin' that I've carried liquor before this. So he'd give me a good charter! A partner of yours?"

"Of mine?" Felix Macarty smiled thinly. "My dear cap'n, I have no partners. Neither has Ah Lee. I have, however, turned over occasional deals to him, and he's a man of his word. I don't doubt that he'd make the charter to your advantage. What he deals in, I can't say. It might be rice liquor, and it might be other things."

"I see!" said Wrexham sagely. "A touch of hop, eh? All the better."

There was a little silence. Macarty was studying this man, so ready to break the law. Presently he spoke again.

"So old Philbrick got a hint and skipped out, eh? Let him go—he can't do much hurt from the brakes. Perhaps you know that my cousin owns this place?"

"Heard something about it," said Wrexham calmly.

"Very good. Since Philbrick is gone, I'll move in here until she returns from New Orleans. The place should be taken care of."

Wrexham chuckled in his beard.

"What about me?" he said dryly.

"You?" Surprise lightened in the eyes of Macarty. "Why, you——"

"Philbrick put the place in my care," explained Wrexham pleasantly. "Legal enough, I guess. Anyhow, I'm here."

Macarty was silent for a long moment; these words, pleasantly spoken, yet held a very strong significance. Captain Wrexham smoked and stared at the fire, ignoring the dark gaze that was fastened upon him.

"See here!" said Macarty suddenly, a stir of anger in his tone. "What's your game?"

Wrexham looked at him reflectively.

"Well, to tell the truth, I don't know! Wish I did. I might load the schooner with some of the pickings around here, and go away. I've been thinkin' of it, for a fact."

"What's your price?" queried Macarty bluntly.

Wrexham glanced up, met the smoldering eyes, held them with a level look.

"Did you ever see a man playin' straight because he was tired o' makin' crooked money?"

This oblique answer held Felix Macarty thoughtful for a moment. It was hard for him to understand the skipper. Gradually he had sensed antagonism here—a stone wall, hidden, yet powerful, through which he could find no opening.

Macarty rose and shook his cigar ashes into the fire. As he did so, he asked a question—asked it with elaborate carelessness.

"Ever hear of the Gemini? Or the Sea-moon?"

"Eh?" Wrexham frowned. "You mean a lunar rainbow? I've seen 'em often, off New Caledonia."

Another silence. Wrexham studied that question in his mind—he could not fathom it. Felix Macarty smiled thinly, and rose to his feet.

"I suppose, if you're in charge here, that you know the situation? Philbrick told you about the dam and all?"

Wrexham rose also, and assented. "Philbrick explained all that. Why?"

Macarty took a folded paper from his pocket and laid it on the table.

"There's legal warning that you must install pumps or otherwise contrive to irrigate this plantation at once. Otherwise, the rice crop will be lost."

"Oh!" said Wrexham. "D'you mean —the dam's finished?"

"Yes. The water goes down to-morrow. The rice will need water for another month at least—and it's up to you. You understand?"

Wrexham nodded carelessly. "Yes. All right. I'll attend to it."

Macarty chuckled at this. It was clear that the seaman knew little of a plantation.

"You'd better think the matter over—my offer, I mean. If we can't work together, you and I, we'll have trouble."

"Squarely put." Wrexham met his gaze. "We'll see about it."

"Very well. I hear the sheriff returning—good night."

"Glad to've met you," said Wrexham.

He stayed where he was, while Uncle Neb escorted the visitors back to the landing and wharf. Then the skipper sank into a chair and laughed softly. He glanced at the girl's picture on the wide mantel.

"That young devil is a tough un!" he confided. "No mistake, neither! Got a head on him; cool as you please all the while. Figured me for what I am, just about. Only he didn't figure on a girl's picture makin' a fool of me."

He was silent again, ruminative, now and then indulging in a soft chuckle, as though he perceived some inward fact to amuse him.

"Trouble with old graybeard," he said presently, thinking now of Philbrick, "was that he was too legal-minded. All his life afraid to run off to sea; reg'lar poet, he was! Civilized! Too damned civilized to take a chance! And the law got him in the end.

"That ain't my way, I tell you! Irrigate? I'll irrigate this place inside o' three days! If I'm goin' to turn plantation manager, then I'll make things happen and no mistake, neither! But what did that chap mean with his question about the Gemini? There's a rum go! He meant somethin' by it, but blessed if I know what!"

The door opened, and Uncle Neb appeared. Wrexham turned to him.

"Gone, have they?"

"Yes, suh, praise be! Done gone a plenty."

"All right." Wrexham's tone was curt, incisive. "You have a dozen boys waiting for me at two bells to-morrow morning—nine o'clock, savvy? I want to lay that ship of mine close in to the wharf here, and moor her steady. Understand?"

"Yes, suh. Yo'-all fixin' to stop a while, suh?"

"Well—I might."

And Wrexham glanced whimsically at the portrait on the mantel.

CHAPTER IX.

UNCLE NEB and Aunt Sapphira, who between them had kept the household arrangements of the plantation running like clockwork for unnumbered years, stood on the front gallery and listened rapturously. They were watching the work at the landing, whence the voice of Captain Wrexham came to them with startling clarity.

Aunt Sapphira rolled her eyes. "Sho' is scandalous talk, Uncle Neb! Dat man is got de mos' masterful use o' langwidge what I heerd sence ol' Jedge Lavergne——"

"Hush, woman!" Uncle Neb put a hand to his ear, and grinned. When he spoke again, it was in the creole patois. "*Laplie tombé, ouaouaron chanté!* The frogs sing when the rain is coming, eh? The water is going down fast in the bayou; the sheriff went away last night like a monkey in a calabash! And now this man——"

"You and yo' gombo!" snorted Aunt Sapphira. "Is you gotten too stuck up to talk plain speech, niggah? I ain't studyin' 'bouten dat talk you is passin' off fo' creole! If you is gwine talk

creole, den talk it; but if you is gwine talk field-hand talk——"

"Huh?" Uncle Neb glared indignantly at her. "Sence dat gal of yours went to de city to study school, you's been talk a heap 'bout creole an' gombo, ol' woman! Dat gal, she figgers to talk French like quality folks —stuck-up yaller wench! If'n I was you——"

"Hey, Uncle Neb!" broke in a hurried voice. "Cap'n say fotch him a rifle an' shake yo' foot!"

A black boy had run up the walk from the wharf and was panting below the gallery. Uncle Neb caught the message and hastened into the house.

Captain Wrexham was having his troubles. With a dozen half naked, laughing black men at work, he had brought the *Nautilus* into the little cove and anchored her bow and stern. He had barely completely this operation, when he discovered that she was aground. The water had gone down, swiftly and without warning—Macarty's dam was closed.

The skipper swore and sweated, but in five minutes the schooner was nicely heeled over in the mud; only a tug or a raise of water could float her. It was at this juncture that Wrexham had sent for a rifle.

He stood on the landing, while the black men hastened to get the boats and launches out to where the water would still float them. The wharf was already high and dry. Out midstream in the bayou appeared a launch, floating with the slow current. Captain Wrexham chewed on his cigar and eyed this boat in malignant fury.

The boat carried two men. In the bow stood Felix Macarty, watching the work ashore. At the sudden subsidence of the water, at the grounding of the schooner and Wrexham's storm of curses, Macarty had broken into a wave of hearty laughter. Across the water swept that vitriolic mirth, more deadly than Wrexham's foulest oaths, stinging the seaman like a whip.

"Laugh at me, will you?" Wrexham shook his fist in air. "Laugh at my craft, will you?"

And he sent the boy for a rifle.

Perhaps Felix Macarty made a mistake when he laughed thus mockingly. If there were one thing on earth for which Wrexham held a deep and true affection, it was this schooner that now lay heeled in the mud.

Your true seaman hates the ocean and fears it, most terribly; and with corresponding fierceness he loves the ship which stands between him and the ocean. Yet Wrexham, more than most men, loved this ship of his. She was to him a sensate creature, delicate in the highest degree. He knew every timber of her. Under his hand she would perform miracles. Often he had owed his life and liberty to this knowledge, to this skill, to this hand-in-glove intuition which made the ship a part of himself, and him a part of the ship.

This craft was no ordinary trading schooner, lousy with rotten copra, stinking with melted oil in the bilge, her deck uncalked by tropic suns. Not at all! She was a schooner, but a schooner in perfect miniature, incredibly small and perfect to the final detail.

A trader, indeed, yet with rather the look of a yacht. Her brasses were polished, glittering in the sunlight; her paint was scrubbed and gleaming white. Even her furled canvas showed immaculate. Her varnished spars shone against the blue sky like streamers of cobweb.

It was true that she drew little water, and that her cargo capacity was obviously quite limited. What of that? She had come from far seas, distant horizons of romance.

There are some craft which do not need to carry great cargoes; there are some cargoes which do not need much

room for stowing. There are ships that slide across the bar of palm-strewn pearling atolls, and carry a freight of wealth in the compass of their cabin safe. There are ships that swing across the muddy waters of Sumatran rivers, do their trading for gold or diamonds, and slink away before the Dutchman can arrive. There are ships that nestle among the greenery of Dyak creeks, taking aboard their gum camphor, while the British patrol puffs by outside in sheer blissful ignorance.

And now this miniature schooner hung in the mud of a Louisiana bayou, while the man who had trapped her was laughing in shrill mirth to see her crippled!

The black boy, panting, fetched the rifle. Those at work with the boats paused and stared, their eyes rolling. Wrexham took the gun and clicked a cartridge home.

"Laugh, will you?" he roared out, so that his voice lifted and rolled amazingly across the bayou. "Laugh and be damned! You're not dealin' with Philbrick now!"

He lifted the rifle and fired.

With a cry of shrill and startled rage, Felix Macari leaped upright—the bullet had splintered the wood under his arm. Wrexham threw out the empty shell, clicked another into place, and fired again. Another splinter of wood flew up. Macarty cursed his negro, and his launch swung out and headed away as the power drove her propeller.

Wrexham threw the bolt, lifted the rifle again. His protruding eyes were hard and chill. He sighted on the back of Macarty, and his finger drew on the trigger; then he lowered the rifle and shook his head regretfully.

"No—that's enough. I'll learn you things, damn you!" He handed the rifle to the waiting boy, then looked down at the men below. "Any of you boys know how to handle that mahogany launch and find the way to Latouche?"

"Yas, suh!" shouted several at once.

Wrexham picked out one of them, indicating the handsome mahogany launch which Aline had recently bought.

"Fill her with gas and get her ready. I'm going to town in ten minutes."

"Sho' will, suh! Yas, suh, cap'n!"

Whoops of eager laughter and loud talking, such as black men use to disguise the strain of tense moments, echoed in the ears of Wrexham as he strode up to the great house.

He had brought ashore some of his things. Now he dressed carefully in fresh whites, shaved, clipped his square brown beard, changed into newly whited shoes. He made sure that he had money and Philbrick's telegram, which was addressed to Fortier. Philbrick had told him about Fortier.

"Some cursed ninny of a lawyer!" thought Wrexham scornfully. "That girl should ha' laid off draggin' a lawyer into this mess."

Informing Uncle Neb that he was going to town for the day, he went to the wharf. The water had ceased to subside. The schooner lay well heeled over, hard and fast aground. Wrexham surveyed her with his lips tightened in a thin line. He beckoned two darkies.

"Carry me over that mud. If you drop me, I'll cut the hearts out of you!"

They grinned at this, picked him up, and waded across the glistening new mud to where the launch awaited him. A moment afterward the craft was chugging upstream.

"Up the bayou," directed Wrexham. "I want a look at the dam o' that power company. Then to town."

"Yas, suh."

Wrexham studied the shores, his brows drawn down in concentration; he was working out an inner problem of his own.

The lay of the land was not hard to grasp. Half a mile behind the plantation house was one outlet arm of the bayou that meandered across the delta, much of which was made land. This arm had now become a tiny trickle, and would soon be dry. Some distance farther upstream—for a bayou is no more than another name for river—was a large tributary, the commonly used thoroughfare to the town of Latouche.

The rapidly drying outlet arm had served to water the broad rice acres of the plantation. On the opposite shore of the bayou, a thin strip of land which was really part of the island, stood the Macarty house, hidden amid a clump of trees. These two plantations stood isolated, alone, stately but decaying monarchs of the Gulf coast. The town of Latouche was miles away through the bayous.

At sight of the dam, Wrexham ordered the engine checked, while he studied the place. It was not imposing. The dam was neither wide nor high—but it was sufficient to serve its purpose. Wrexham discerned only a couple of men idling near by.

"H'm!" thought the seaman. "Philbrick told the truth. These Macartys are only making a bluff—sheer bluff! Well, they have the wrong pig by the ear this trip, I tell you! Lay my schooner in the mud, will they? Just wait a bit!" And, aloud: "All right, boy. To town."

They glided along through the bayous—long, sunlit alleys of water, overhung with clustering, trailing masses of grayish-green moss. They followed trackless ways where slimy green things slid away and vanished, or thin snakes seared through the water and were gone.

Wrexham sat motionless, absorbed in the thoughts that gripped him, unseeing this tropic environment. They could not have been altogether pleasant, those thoughts; his eyes were savage.

Perhaps he was taken back to that other day and place, where he had paid a debt to a man by mortgage of his soul to the devil. Perhaps he was thinking of the two men and a woman whom he had once upon a time betrayed, and whose memory haunted him ceaselessly. Or he might have been thinking of other occasions. He did not lack things to recur to his mind, this man. He had much to remember—and, probably, he had much to forget.

There was, for example, that Chinaman of Macassar, whose junk had been looted and burned under Palembang Island. Wrexham had really forgotten this incident, although one or two long-distance threats had followed him from Chuen Ying. It was only an incident, and lay far back in his life. Wrexham had never learned that it is the incidents which lie far back of which one should be afraid. He had never learned even to be afraid.

The launch popped suddenly into a large and open stream, Bayou Latouche. Here were other boats, horses, men; from somewhere the whistle of a locomotive, bringing first wonder to the eyes of Wrexham, then a laugh. A bend in the stream, and Latouche appeared, rapidly growing in size. Ten minutes, and Wrexham tossed his boy a dollar, then strode uptown to lunch and attend to business.

It was not a large place, this parish seat, but it was strange and interesting. Of late years the Cajun population had been augmented by odd strata of yellow and brown and white, most of whom lived by or from the sea. Filipinos, Japanese, Arab, Chinese—one encountered many such. Except for a few fine houses, and the parish buildings, the town looked hot and listless. David Macarty had a residence here.

After luncheon, Wrexham went to the railroad station and dispatched Philbrick's telegram to Fortier. This accomplished, he sought the post office and went to the general-delivery window.

"I ordered mail forwarded and held here, from San Francisco," he said. "Cap'n Tom Wrexham, schooner *Nautilus.*"

After a slight delay, he was handed a letter, much marked about and forwarded, and a curious glance followed him as he turned away.

When he was out in the street, Wrexham examined the letter curiously. It was from a man in Zamboanga in the Philippines, a former partner of Wrexham in many deals, a man whom Wrexham trusted.

The skipper tore at the envelope. Into his fingers came a letter, and with it a newspaper clipping. His eyes widened on this clipping. His sturdy fingers clutched it fiercely, his figure stiffened as he read the words. Astonishment flooded into his face, followed by a flush that might have come from some inward relief or deep pleasure.

"If this ain't a rum go!" he ejaculated with an oath. He lowered the paper and stared blankly before him. "A rum go and no mistake! The only time in my life I was guilty of havin' a conscience—and now to find it's all been wasted!"

He read the clipping again, incredulous. No, there was no error! The two men and a woman, the three whom he had betrayed, had come to no ill end after all. His remorse had been needless. There was nothing for which to blame himself; his action had resulted in no harm at all. The clipping told him all this.

The wonder of it oppressed Wrexham. The ironic humor of it struck him and evoked a laugh. On the heels of this feeling, a thought: Why had he learned this fact only to-day? Because, obviously, he had accepted the duty imposed upon him by John Philbrick and the girl's photograph. Because he had sincerely wished to make amends for his former actions.

In a moment, this conviction became deeply and ineradicably imprinted upon Wrexham's mind. It was a vague notion, but it fitted well with his vaguely formulated ideas of an overruling providence and an offended Jehovah. Wrexham was in no sense religious, but he did have beliefs. His canons were Masonic rather than theologic. It was, to him, indubitable that this information had come to him as a reward for what he had undertaken here.

"A rum go and no mistake!" he repeated, a trifle awed.

He remembered the letter, and glanced over the writing. It made no reference to the newspaper clipping. It was concerned only with business. There was, however, a postscript:

> P. S. I hear that the chink of Macassar, Chuen Ying, pulled up stakes two or three years ago and vanished.
>
> They say he went to the States, and I hear he was no chink at all, but a blooded Manchu. If you meet him over there, give him my regards—and look out!

Chuen Ying! For a moment Wrexham puzzled, before he remembered that burned and looted junk under Palembang Island. Then he laughed.

It was a sweeping, honest laugh, caused by the newspaper clipping and the great relief this had brought. Wrexham tore the letter across, and watched the fragments flutter away. Once more he had forgotten Chuen Ying. The newspaper clipping, however, he preserved very carefully.

"If this ain't my lucky day!" he reflected. "I'm comin' out all right, I tell you. Now, I'd better buy some stuff and get back home. No time to waste floatin' the schooner and irrigatin' that cursed rice crop. Warn me to irrigate, will you? I'll do it, blast your eyes!"

A furious exultation was upon him for the rest of that day. He could scarcely sit quiet while the launch chugged back home through the bayous.

Immediately he reached the plantation, Wrexham went aboard the schooner, clawed up the steeply inclined deck, and vanished below. He was busied there, alone, until sunset. Then he emerged into sight, yawned and stretched himself, and hailed the bank. A negro in a canoe fetched him ashore.

"Leave this canoe with a paddle in it," said Wrexham. "I want to use it to-night, but I'll do my own paddling."

"Yas, suh, cap'n," came the answer.

Wrexham dined alone that evening. He enjoyed being master of this place, and it was very certain that every one in the place enjoyed having him for master.

Darkness had fallen when Wrexham called Uncle Neb to the library, and stated that he was going out. He demanded a dark coat, which Uncle Neb produced. With this, he left the house and started for the bayou.

Two hours later he returned. He was met by Uncle Neb, who was excited and nervous.

"Cap'n, boss, dere's been a gen'l'man here two times axin' fo' you-all," said the old darky. "Ol' Mistuh Philbrick, suh, done said he wa'n't to come around heah no mo', but I reckon——"

"Eh?" said Wrexham, coming into the hall from the gallery. "Some one here, you say?"

"Dat yaller man, suh—Mistuh Ah Lee! He's settin' in by de fiah right now. Oh, my lawd, cap'n, boss! Why, suh, dem elegant white pants is all wet and——"

Wrexham, in fact, was soaking wet to the waist, and stained with mud. He glanced down at himself, and laughed.

"Ah Lee—that's the man, eh?"

"Dat's him, suh. I done tol' him to set an' wait——"

"Quite right, Uncle Neb. I'll change my clothes and be right down."

Wrexham went upstairs to the room which he occupied. He got out fresh clothes, and laughed softly to himself as he changed. Once he glanced at his watch, as though expecting something. Then he shook his head.

"Not yet—a good fifteen minutes yet!" he murmured. "I wonder if Macarty sent this chink to see me? Wants me to run some liquor, or maybe some hop, for him. That'd be a cute trap to catch Tom Wrexham in, wouldn't it? H'm! After the news I got to-day, the whole bunch can roast in hell!"

He broke into a cheery, albeit tuneless, whistle—a most singular thing for Wrexham. Yet, why not? This day he had received great news. He was a happy man. The load that had weighted his mind was gone. He went down to the library feeling that twenty years had slipped from him. He felt quite prepared for any game.

In this mood, he stepped into the library. He came face to face with the man who rose to meet him. Wrexham stopped dead still.

In the candlelight, his face went absolutely livid. His hand slipped to his pocket, and found that he had left his pistol upstairs. He drew a deep breath and stood waiting, expectant, as though he were facing death.

"Good evening," said the yellow man quietly. "You did not expect to see me, captain?"

"I—I expected Ah Lee," murmured Wrexham. His voice was hollow and dead.

"I am Ah Lee," said the other. The wrinkled yellow face smiled. "Also, I am—or was—Chuen Ying of Macassar. I have hoped to see you for several years. Shall we sit down?"

To be continued in the next issue of PEOPLE'S, November 25th.

The Longest Side

By George Allan England

Author of "Dan Hamilton, Crusader," "Powers of Darkness," etc.

THEY WANTED VESTINE TO BE THE "FALL GUY." HE WENT THROUGH WITH IT, BUT THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY GOT THE SHOCK OF HIS LIFE. . . . . .

NOW see here, Bogan," said Cozzens, when his touring car had struck into the long, smooth, beach boulevard. "You're my confidential right-hand man, and I can talk plainer, perhaps, than I ever have before."

"You can," answered Bogan—"Best-policy" Bogan, by nickname. "Must be somethin' mighty important, or you wouldn't be drivin', yourself, an' you wouldn't of took me out, this way."

"It *is* important," admitted the politician. "And in an important deal, there's no place like an auto. No keyholes for people to listen at in an auto. No chance for dictaphones. Give me an auto for absolute privacy, every time."

"Correct. What's on your mind?"

"You've got to find me a 'fall guy' for that Wheat Exchange Bank forgery and the Hinman murder that grew out of it. A good, high-class fall guy. No roughnecks."

"What's the idea?"

"I might as well speak right out in meeting. I've got to have my daughter Nadine marry Coolidge Brant."

"Assistant district attorney, you mean?"

"Yes," assented Cozzens. "The way things are shaping now, I've just got to have a string on that young man. He's directly in line for the district attorneyship, inside of two or three years, and I want——"

"I see," smiled Bogan. "Honesty's the best policy, all right. It's a case of rip things wide open, after that, an' get away with it clean, eh?"

"You put it rather crudely."

"Facts is facts. I get you, the first time. An' the daughter's balkin'?"

"I'm afraid she is, a little. She and Brant have been going round together for over a year, but he hasn't made good. That is, not enough to suit her. She's got ideas about efficiency, like lots of girls these days. She won't have

him till he's shown some real pep. The press is slamming him, some. So——"

"I'm wise. If he can land somebody right, for those stunts——"

"What I like about you, Bogan," said the politician, "is the way you grab an idea. Well, now, can you work the law of supply and demand for me again? You've done it before. Can you do it once more, and do it strong?"

"Sure! How much is it worth to a man that'll stand for the pinch an' go through?"

"That depends," judged Cozzens, opening the throttle a notch. His big blue car hit a livelier pace down the summer-sunlit boulevard. "Naturally I'm not looking to throw money away. I want you to put this through as cheap as you can."

"Bargain rates won't get a guy to stand a roar for scratch work, knockin' a bank cashier cold, an' bumpin' off a business man. Them's tall, man-size charges to go against."

"I know it, Bogan. But, of course, he won't be running any real risk of anything but a few years in the pen."

"You mean the frame will be fixed so he'll be acquitted on the murder charge, an' will only do time for the forgery an' assault?"

"Yes, and not much time, at that. Four or five years, and then a quiet little pardon, you know. That's at the outside. Maybe he won't draw more than four or five in all. Get me?"

Bogan remained silent, his thin jaws firmly set. He looked out over the beach, the surf, the careless holiday crowd, past which the car was flicking with a *burrrrr* of knobby tires.

"Well?" demanded the politician. "Can you fix it right?"

"Sure. If you'll guarantee the acquittal."

"Oh, *that'll* be O. K."

"Yes, but they never stick a guy with a small charge when there's a big one on him. F'rinstance, if a man's robbin' a hen house, an' croaks a farmer while he's doin' it, you never hear nothin' o' the petty larceny."

"I can fix that, all right. *Got* to, to square the bank. They're sorer than boiled pups, and ready to knife Brant. I'll have him docket it as two separate cases. After the fall guy's cleared of the murder charge, he'll be rearrested on the others and put through."

"I don't see what good that'll do," objected Bogan. "*That* wouldn't be such a devil of a big feather in Brant's Panama."

"It'll be enough. I'll see that the papers play it up, right. Nadine will fall for it strong. She likes Brant, all O. K. It's only that he hasn't done anything much yet. You get the fall guy, Bogan, and I'll attend to my end of it. Well, what say?"

"When do you want him?"

"Right now. And when it comes to cash——"

"I'm on!" smiled Bogan. "I know just the fella."

"Where is he? In town, here?"

"No. New York. An' he's some smooth worker, too, I tell *you*. Show him the coin, an' he'll go the limit."

"That's good enough for me," said Cozzens decisively. "Now we'll get back to the office and fix you up with expense money to take the night boat down." And Cozzens stepped on the accelerator. "Let's get to it."

"Right!" agreed Bogan. "We'll do this honest an' square. That's always the best policy. Let's go!"

II.

ALBERT VESTINE, Scandinavian by birth, and by profession race-track follower, gambler, and man of various activities—all of them dubious—was wary as a partridge when Bogan called upon him by appointment. Vestine had traveled in too many cities, States, and lands, spoke too many languages, was too

clever with his pen and brain, to mistake the type that Bogan represented. Besides, he knew the man personally; which made him all the more cautious.

He received Bogan in his little apartment on Lyon Avenue, the Bronx, and after a few commonplaces such as old-time acquaintances might exchange, asked him his business.

Bogan looked him over before replying. In his own way, Bogan was just as keen as this cosmopolitan with the high-domed forehead, the tendency toward baldness, the thin cheeks of unnatural pallor. As Bogan appraised him, from gray and conscienceless eyes to slim, dexterous fingers, he realized this was, indeed, the kind of man Cozzens needed.

The price Bogan knew would be high. Vestine was no "greasy-coat stiff," to be bought for a song. On the contrary, as Bogan observed his correct linen and cravat, his fine blue suit with the almost invisible vertical stripe, his custom-made shoes, he understood that here was just what the politician had meant when he had demanded: "A good, high-class fall guy. No roughnecks."

He thought, furthermore:

"If I can work this right, there's promotion in it for me, and maybe a little rake-off on the side. I'll play it for a wad o' good, honest graft. Honesty's the best policy, all right."

"Well, Mr. Bogan," inquired Vestine, "what can I do for you?"

"You know me, Al," Bogan replied. "When I say I got a good thing, I got one."

"Yes?"

"An' now, I got a bundle o' kale for you."

"That sounds interesting," smiled the Dane. "Sit down, and tell me all about it." He gestured toward a chair. "How much, why, when, where, and what?"

Bogan sat down, lighted a cigar to give himself countenance—which is one of the principal uses of cigars in this world—and opened up:

"You know the burg I hail from, don't you?"

"Somewhat. I've done a little business there, off and on."

"Well, supposin' some big guy there had to marry his daughter to an assistant district attorney, an' she wouldn't fall for him till he'd pulled some stunt to give him a rep, what would you advise?"

"I'd advise having the stunt pulled, by all means," answered Vestine, likewise sitting down. His eyes were watchful, in his pale, intellectual face.

"Correct," approved Bogan. "We've got to get a fall guy."

"I see. Well?"

"There's hefty coin in the job, an' nothin' more'n about four years—easy years—in the pen."

"What's the case?"

"Some guy forges the name of John C. Wycoff to a check on the Wheat Exchange National, for seven hundred and fifty-five dollars and fifty cents, about three months ago. He's an A-1 scratch man, an' the name looks right. He gets a gents' furnisher named Markwood Hinman to cash it. Hinman's found two days later, croaked, in a hallway on Oregon Avenue. The bull's dope it that Hinman got wise to the scratch work, an' went to see the guy to get him to make good, or somethin', an' the guy bumped him off to keep him from tippin' over the bean pot. That's all old stuff."

"Yes, I remember reading something about it in the papers," agreed Vestine. "The forger cracked Hinman's skull with brass knuckles, didn't he? Back of the left ear?"

"That's the case! Well——"

"What then?"

"The check's in the bank, see? The murder jazzes the bank up, investigatin', an' they get wise the check's a phony. Henry Kitching, the cashier, takes it an'

heads for the district attorney's office to raise a roar an' start things. He gets out of his auto on Kent Street an' goes in through the rear alley entrance to the courthouse. He's found slugged there, five minutes later, an' the check's gone. Brass knucks, again."

"Clever!" smiled Vestine. "I suppose the criminal trailed him, and gave him what I believe is called the K. O., from behind."

"Yes, that's the way it looks from here. An' that's how the story'd be put over. But nobody was ever sloughed in for none of it."

"I see. You mean, then, you're looking for a scapegoat in the wilderness?"

"Huh?"

"I mean, a fall guy."

"Oh, sure. Goat, yes—I get you. I see you're wise. Well, then——"

"And this hypothetical goat would have to stand for all the charges, so as to establish the assistant district attorney's reputation for brilliancy?"

"Yes, but the murder charge won't stick, no more'n a red-hot flapjack to a greased griddle."

"How can you guarantee that?" insisted the Dane.

"Cinch!" And Bogan, his eyes kindling with enthusiasm, pulled at his cigar. Vestine, by the way, never smoked, nor did he drink. Both things, he knew, worked on the nerves.

"Please explain?"

"Why, it's this way," Bogan expounded. "We'll fix the story right, an' copper-rivet it, so it can't do more'n establish a strong suspicion. An' it's all circumstantial evidence, too. Nobody *seen* the guy croak Hinman or sneak up on Kitching. That's one point. Another is, we'll have a hand-picked jury. There'll be at least two on that'll stick for acquittal till New York approves of Volstead. So that'll be a disagreement, an' the fall guy gets away with the murder charge, all right. I've been into this thing pretty deep with Coz—with the man I'm workin' for, an' he'll go through with his end of it."

"Stop beating round the bush, Bogan. I know Cozzens about as well as you do, and I know you're asking me, for him, to take this job. I know, too, he'll go through, if I *do* take it. I've got enough information about him to kill him politically if he tries to renege. *You* can't double cross, either, or I'd have both of you on a charge of conspiracy to do an illegal act. There are three of us in on this. It's a triangle, understand? All go through, or all collapse! I hope I make myself quite clear?"

"Oh, I get you, all right," answered Bogan, shifting uneasily in his chair. "We'll play this frame-up honest. That's the best policy, every time. All you'll have to go up for will be forgery an' assault."

"H'mmmm! That's enough, I should say," judged the Dane. He pensively brushed a tiny thread from his sleeve with manicured fingers. "How long a sentence——"

"Four years is the limit. Good conduct would cut that down a few months, too. An' you gotta remember this, too—nix on the hard-labor stuff. You got brains, you see, an'——"

"Thank you."

"An' it'll only be a job teachin' arithmetic, or writin,' or French an' them guinea languages, in the pen school. See?"

"Nice, pleasant little program you've got all mapped out for me, isn't it?" queried Vestine.

"Sure it is! You can figure you're workin' on salary. So much time, so much coin. Ain't much worse'n bein' a college professor, at that, an' you'll pull down a hell of a lot more coin. We'll have you happy, an' Cozzens happy, an' his daughter, an' Brant, too—he'll think he dug up the case, himself—an'——"

"Regular little love feast, all round,

eh?" commented the gambler. "I shall consider myself quite a philanthropist —if I take the job."

"Sure you'll take it!" urged Bogan, with increasing eagerness. This man's quick intelligence and grasp of the situation far exceeded his hopes. Why, things were surely coming very much his way. "You gotta! Think o' the good you'll do! An' ain't it always the best policy to be honest an' do good? You'll square the bank, land a rich wife for Brant, put Cozzens where he can rip things wide open, an'——"

"How about the man that really did the forgery, killed Hinman, and assaulted Kitching?" put in the Dane. "I suppose he'll be happy, too? After I'm tried and acquitted for the killing he'll be safe. And all the time I'm behind bars——"

"Oh, forget him! Just think what you'll be gettin' out of it!"

"I *am* thinking of that, every minute, you can rest assured. And I may as well tell you right now, I'm a high-priced man."

"That's the kind we're after. No cheap stiff, but a ketch that'll really burn some red fire in Brant's front yard! Fine!"

"You realize, of course, it's no joke to be what they call 'mugged,' and finger-printed, and sell four years of my life, and——"

"'Twon't be four. Not over——"

"And then, after it's all over, have to clear out——"

"You've cleared out before now, Vestine, or whatever your name is," asserted Bogan. "Don't play none o' that injured-feelin's stuff on me! You got a dozen aliases, an' you're as much at home in China as you are on Broadway. So we'll tie the can to all that 'no-joke' stuff, an' get down to tacks. Will you take the frame?"

"I might, if you pay me my figure."

"Name it!" said Bogan, hands tightening on knees.

III.

"Fifty thousand dollars, spot cash."

"Oh, hell, no!" Bogan vociferated. "That's ridic'lous!"

"All right, then. *I* didn't ask for the job. You can probably go down on the Bowery and pick up a dozen men that'll do it for a thousand. Don't let me detain you."

"But see here, Vestine——"

"Of course, the fact that after Cozzens gets next to the throne he can clean up a million or two—of course that has no bearing on the case at all. Naturally, such being the prospect, you stick at fifty thousand. That's quite characteristic of men of your stamp. Well, good evening, Mr. Bogan. Don't slam the door as you go out."

"I might go twenty 'thou,' you bein' such a big ketch."

"Rubles, you mean? Bolshevik money?"

"Twenty thousand good hard seeds!"

"Forty," answered the gambler. "That's my rock-bottom."

"Nothin' doin'!" declared Bogan. "Be reasonable, can't you? Make it twenty-five, an' say no more?"

"Twenty-five?" smiled Vestine. "See here, now. I know Cozzens, all right. He's a good sport and likes a fair gamble almost as much as I do myself. I've got a proposition according to his own heart."

"What's that?" demanded Bogan, leaning forward.

"Doubles or quits."

"How d'you mean?"

"Double that twenty-five thousand, or not a sou. Fifty thousand or nothing. We'll stick the book for it."

"Gawd!" ejaculated Bogan, and for a moment remained pondering. Into his thin-lidded eyes crept a gleam of craft, exceeding evil. Then he shot back the answer decisive:

"I'll go you!" Much agitated, he stood up.

Calmly, as though about to pitch pennies, instead of gamble for infamy and nearly four years of his life, Vestine reached for a book on the table—"The Arrow of Gold," for in his literary tastes the Dane was unimpeachable. He laid the book in front of Bogan and handed him a sharp steel paper cutter.

"One stick, each," said he. "Right-hand page, and high last number wins. After you, my dear Alphonse."

Bogan's hand trembled as he made the first cut.

"Two hundred and fifty-one," he spat, with a curse. "*I'm* done!"

"Never say die," laughed Vestine. He took the knife and thrust it deep between the leaves.

"Ninety-one," he announced, without a quiver. He seemed but mildly interested. "Two ones. That's an even break. Come again, Bogan. Here." And he handed back the knife.

"One forty-seven," said Bogan, with an unsteady laugh. "That's a seven-to-ten shot I've got you, or tied. Looks like you're done!"

"If I am, I'll go through just the same," answered the Dane, unmoved. "This is a trifle to some games Ive gone against, and I've never welshed yet."

Again he knifed the book. Without the quiver of an eye he flung back the page.

"Eighty-nine," he approved. "That's good. At four years and some months that makes a safe income of about twelve thousand dollars a year. A thousand a month for conducting some little classes in congenial studies—not too bad. And when am I to arrive in your illustrious city, for what you call the pinch?"

Bogan's lips were trembling so that he could hardly answer:

"You stay right here, see? That's half the game, lettin' Brant nail you in New York. About ten days from now there'll——"

"And when do I get the excellent and desirable fifty thousand?"

"Oh—let's see—damn it all! Cozzens will raise——"

"That's immaterial to me, my dear Bogan, so long as he raises the fifty—in legal tender, you understand. When is it to be?"

"It's Wednesday, to-day, ain't it? I'll be back with the stuff Saturday, sure."

"That's perfectly all right for me. Well, then, there's no more to be said. Must you be going so soon?"

"I—I—yes, I better be gettin' along."

"Good night, then. See you Saturday."

"Good night," said Bogan, and departed.

On the stairway he kicked himself, groaning.

"What a damn fool I was not to take him up at forty! Why, Cozzens was countin' on fifty, anyhow. I could of knocked down ten for myself, easy as pie. If I hadn't tried to grab the whole fifty—— My Gawd, *when* will I learn that honesty's the best policy, after all?"

IV.

THE wedding was one of the most brilliant ever held at St. Simon Stylites' Church. Brilliant, too, was the future of Mr. and Mrs. Coolidge Brant held to be. He, as the only son-in-law of so prominent a politician as old Dexter Cozzens; she, as the wife of a man destined in short order to erase the word "assistant" from his present title, received innumerable felicitations.

The papers gave the ceremony brilliant write-ups, and mentioned the brilliancy with which young Brant had run down—from very slight clews—the forger responsible for the death of Markwood Hinman, for the assault on Henry Kitching, and for the theft of the forged check in Kitching's pocket.

The trial, everybody remembered, had been brilliant. Only for the unfortunate "hanging" of the jury, on account

of circumstantial evidence, brilliant justice would have been done. The criminal, however—a Norwegian named Aalborg, and rather a brilliant fellow—had got four years. So everybody agreed it had all been very brilliant, especially as the criminal would have remained quite undetected had it not been for young Brant's exceptional legal ability. The general brilliancy made everybody happy, and the papers all predicted a crushing campaign against the crime wave, a clean-up of municipal politics, and all sorts of lovely and desirable reforms.

Not the least brilliant of all developments from the case were those that before very long began to smile down on the stanch old war horse and reformer, Dexter Cozzens. His fortunes soon began to prosper, rapidly though quietly. For brilliancy of this kind is usually kept hidden under bushels—nay, even under pecks. And this, of course, is all as it should be.

Another brilliant feature of the affair, likewise unknown to the public, was the kind of instruction given at the pen by Aalborg, now known only as No. 45327. He undertook to teach the tough idea not, indeed, to shoot, but to explore mathematics, penmanship, and foreign languages. His services were recognized as exceptionally brilliant. They were willing, too. No. 45327 was never "stood out," got all kinds of good-conduct marks, became popular with everybody from the warden down—or up, as you choose—and seemed to enjoy his work almost as if he were getting paid a thousand dollars a month for it. So brilliant a teacher he became, and so model a prisoner, that before long special privileges were extended to him; and, though confined, his punishment hung not too onerously upon his gray-clad shoulders.

Thus everything turned out most brilliantly for all hands, save for Best-policy Bogan. He, strangely enough, took scant joy of anything connected with the matter. For some reason unknown, he seemed to be cherishing a secret sorrow. But as his opinion, one way or the other, was not of the slightest importance, nobody cared.

Thus time passed, Cozzens waxed fat, Brant became powerful, Aalborg was forgotten by the world; and presently three years and seven months were gone. Then the prison gates swung open for him and he walked out—a man who had well served his purpose, a free man, with his debt to society all paid.

Society, having long since dismissed him from its mind, gave him no slightest heed. What is deader than dead news?

Another question: Does all this mean our story is completely done? Not in the least, as we shall very presently see.

V.

HALF a year after Aalborg's release, Aalborg himself sent in his card to District Attorney Coolidge Brant. The card read: "John Carl Enemark." The visitor requested only a few words in private. Brant, expansive with prosperity and power, bade the clerk usher Mr. Enemark into the private office.

"Mr. Brant," said the visitor, laying his hat and gloves on the glass-topped desk, "I did you a great favor, just a little more than five years ago. Your conviction of me was the first case that brought you prominently into the public eye. I am not overstating the facts when I say you are now district attorney because of that case. Do you remember me?"

"Perfectly," answered Brant, which was quite true. Vestine, Aalborg, Enemark—whatever you choose to call him—had not changed appreciably. He had grown a little higher in the forehead, perhaps, where the hair had faded; had taken on a few pounds of flesh, and showed a fresher color, that

was all. His clothes still were of the quiet blue with the faint vertical stripe, that he always wore. He looked content and well-to-do. Prosperity seemed to have knocked at his door and found that door open.

"Are you amicably disposed toward me, Mr. Brant?" asked Vestine, for so we shall name him.

"Sit down, please," invited the district attorney with a smile.

Vestine sat down, crossed one leg over the other, and waited.

"Well?" asked Brant.

"I still have a question before you, Mr. Brant. Are you amicable?"

"Perfectly. To be frank with you, Mr.—er--Enemark, I'm sorry I couldn't send you to the chair. I did my best to, and failed. That's all part of the fortunes of war, and I hold no ill will. So long as you go straight, and break no laws, I bear no animus."

"Neither do I against you. I am planning to go back to Denmark in about a month. 'My native country, thee,' and all that sort of thing. Before I start, I have a favor to ask of you."

"What is it?"

"I want to get married."

Brant smiled and drummed his fingers on the desk.

"That's very laudable," he answered. "Marriage is often an excellent asset to a man's success and honesty."

"Quite so. Have I your permission to marry the young lady of my choice, under honorable conditions?"

"Certainly! Why ask *me?*"

"There's a very special reason, Mr. Brant."

"Which is——"

"She happens, at present, to be under indictment for forgery in this city, and out on bail. This forgery she committed without my knowledge or consent, in a kind of moment of inadvertence, so to speak. Her bail is two thousand dollars. I'm her bondsman—indirectly. Well?"

"Well?"

"I want the indictment quashed and the bail bond returned. She could jump bail, easily enough, and I could afford to lose two thousand dollars without serious inconvenience. But that doesn't suit my purpose. First, because two thousand dollars is really money; and second because forgery's an extraditable offense, and I don't intend to have my wife a fugitive from justice. Therefore, I'm asking you to do me this favor."

"Well, you *are* a cool one, I must say!" exclaimed the district attorney.

"Very true. Will you arrange the matter for me?"

"I like your nerve!"

"I'm glad of that, Mr. Brant. It's helped you before now. Please make a note of my fiancé's case. It's docketed as No. 327, for the spring term. And——"

"Why, this is preposterous!" cried Brant, reaching for the push button. "Good day, sir!"

"Wait," smiled Vestine, gently pushing back the other's hand. "Suppose you refuse me, what then?"

"Why—why——"

"Imagine the disastrous effect on you, if the facts of my trial and conviction—the inside facts—should come out."

"What d'you mean?"

"I mean," answered Vestine, with not a trace of emotion, "that if you refuse me what I ask, I shall positively have to tell you the truth about yourself."

"What truth?"

"Truth that you won't want the opposition newspapers to get hold of. Will you quash the indictment?"

"Certainly *not!*"

Vestine sighed, as if with regret for Brant's obstinacy.

"Too bad," said he. "You force me

to disclose facts that might so easily have remained hidden. Facts that will forever destroy your peace of mind and your confidence in—well, in certain persons you might prefer to trust. Before I tell you, I ask again whether you will do what——"

"Why, this is insanity! I should say not!"

"It can all be done very quietly. 'No bill' is a formula covering a multitude of errors. And I am prepared to make restitution on the check forged by the young lady. Then away we go, back to Denmark, and all is merry as the traditional marriage bell. What do you say, Mr. Brant?"

"I say this interview is ended! And do you realize you're trying to intimidate me, to suborn justice? Do you know what the consequences of that may be to you?"

"My dear Mr. Brant, pray listen to reason," persisted Vestine. "I assisted you in your marital program, and brought happiness to your wife and you. Now I am asking a little reciprocation, that's all. In the name of your excellent wife, I beg you will allow another woman to become mine, free and clear."

"See here, Enemark, or whoever you are," rapped out the district attorney, "we're not going to discuss this any further. My wife's name isn't going to be dragged into any matter by a man who——"

"Sh!" smiled the Dane imperturbably. "My good young man, I see you are one of those unfortunate beings who can't be led, but must be driven. Well, then, on your own head be it. The fact is——"

"I don't want to hear your 'facts!' I've heard enough, had enough of you. I advise you to go, now, before——"

"The fact is, Mr. Brant, in that famous case of yours I was what your American slang so picturesquely calls 'the fall guy,' that made the corner stone of your success. I was bought and paid for in the market—bought and paid for, like a herring, by your esteemed father-in-law. And the price paid for me was just exactly——"

VI.

"THAT'S a damned lie!" cried Brant passionately, starting up.

"The price paid for me was just exactly fifty thousand dollars, which I at once very securely invested in Danish securities," Vestine calmly finished. He, too, stood up. "With accrued interest, and the rates of exchange as they now are, I am comfortably well off 'in my ain countree.' I have exchanged a life of chance and insecurity for one of respectability and competence. I no longer need continue any activities that might bring me into conflict with the law."

"You—you——" choked the district attorney, but could articulate nothing.

"I have purchased a controlling interest in a reform newspaper at Aarhus, Denmark," smiled Vestine. "My wife-to-be, whom you will release, will help me do uplift work—quite like yours. That is perfectly safe and pays fine dividends, as Mr. Cozzens, the Honorable Mr. Cozzens, well knows. As your humble servant and fall guy, I ask you the one favor in question."

"Fall guy, nothing! It's a damned lie!" Brant had grown quite livid with agitation. His hands twitched.

"Please phone the Honorable Cozzens," requested Vestine. "Ask him to come to this office for a few minutes. And tell him to bring Best-policy Bogan with him. Say Mr. Vestine is here, spilling immense numbers of appalling beans. Go on, Mr. Brant, call your father-in-law, who 'framed' you to success."

Brant gasped, paled, reached for the phone, but did not take it up. Suddenly he sat down, with an oath.

"It's—it's all a——"

"Of course," laughed Vestine. "All

a fairy story of mine. Hans Christian Andersen, my esteemed compatriot, isn't in it with me as a raconteur, is he? By no means! For that reason I am so intimately acquainted with the way the first clew was fed you; with all the details leading up to the arrest; with a score of other factors in the case, as I'll prove directly. For that reason I am——"

"Hold on!" choked Brant. "What number did you say that case was?" His eyes looked hunted. "That case you—the case of that woman?"

"My fiancé, you mean?"

"Yes, your fiancé."

"Ah, that's better. It is No. 327, on the spring list. I see your memory needs refreshing. I can refresh it to any extent you may need. And you'll attend to the matter at once?"

Brant nodded.

"I've had enough of you," said he hoarsely. "Get out! I wish you were both in hell!"

"On the contrary, we're leaving it for good. Well, I'll expect you to take action inside of twenty-four hours. That will square everything. I squared the bank, squared your highly necessitous legal record, squared myself with fifty thousand dollars of your esteemed father-in-law's money—which really bought you your present success as well as my own—and squared your father-in-law."

Vestine smiled at Brant, who, disarmed before him, stood there speechless and staring.

"Just one more thing before I go," said the Dane. "This case represents a very pretty mathematical problem. It is known as the Theorem of Pythagoras. Mr. Cozzens and you and I form a triangle. Perhaps I may state it better by saying we three are the three sides of a right triangle. I insist on being the hypotenuse, or longest side. I'm the hypotenuse, because the square of the hypotenuse equals the squares of the other two sides, added. And I'm going to be squared, now. I'm going square. Hope you and the Honorable Cozzens are, too."

Speaking, he drew from his pocket a slip of paper, a blue check, and looked at it; and as he looked, he nodded.

"No more prison for mine, thank you," said he. "Under your law, a man can't be twice put in jeopardy of his life or liberty for the same crime. Even though guilty, if he's tried and acquitted, that lets him out. So I'm safe now. Therefore, I don't mind telling you——"

"What?"

"See this check?"

"What is it?"

"It's the one that Markwood Hinman cashed. The one that was taken from Henry Kitching, after he had been knocked cold in the alley."

"The forged check that—that disappeared?"

"Yes."

"But how did *you*——"

"Listen, my dear young man," answered the Dane. "What I got for being the fall guy, and agreeing to be tried by you before a fixed jury—facts that your father-in-law will verify—was a good deal more than fifty thousand dollars. I got——"

"What else? What more?"

"Perpetual immunity. Now you know. But you will never dare tell the world. That would ruin you. But now you understand."

He struck a match, lighted the check, and held it till it flared. He dropped the ashes into the wastebasket, picked up his hat and gloves, and turned toward the door.

"Here, wait a minute!" gulped Brant. "What—what's the idea? Where did you get that check—and what do you mean by immunity, if—if you aren't the man that—that killed——"

"Ah, but I *am*, you see," smiled Vestine impassively. "Good-by!"

The Tonokomoth Tiger

by C. C. Waddell

Author of "Up from Big Shanty," "The Eagle of the Sea," etc.

ALWAYS THE GREAT WHALE KNOWN AS THE TONOKOMOTH TIGER CAME TO THE AID OF THE STARTOPPS AND THEIR DESCENDANTS. A STRANGE AND FASCINATING ROMANCE FOUNDED ON A TRUE LEGEND OF AMERICAN WHALING HISTORY. . . . . .

THE steam whaler, *Egersund*, eighty tons burden, was cruising off the New Hebrides.

"There she blo-o-ws!" The centuries-old cry of the seven seas sounded from the lookout.

A mile or so off to the northwest showed the blue backs and twin spoutings of a school of killer whales—a round dozen of them.

The course was immediately changed and the vessel headed in their direction, while the captain hurried for'd to the stumpy little cannon in the bow—the harpoon gun—to strip it of its canvas covering and make sure that everything was primed for the shot.

Then as the ship drove on at full speed, there suddenly breached directly in her path and not more than three hundred yards ahead, a broad, finless, black back which rose to the surface like a floating island. A second later, emerged a monster, wedge-shaped head, big enough to serve as a house for a family of four, and from the forward point of it spouted sparkling in the sunshine a jet of spray and water thick and high as the blow-off of a Texas oil gusher.

The captain clawed his stubbly beard excitedly. "A sparm!" he shouted. "An' he looks like the daddy of 'em all. Hunderd an' seventy-five bar'l, sure."

He bellowed back an order to shut down the engines, emphasizing it with wavings of his arms. As the churning propeller ceased its revolutions, and the vessel swept along under only its own momentum, the members of the crew not otherwise engaged hurried eagerly to the rail to see the expected prize.

Small wonder for that flutter of avid interest aboard the *Egersund*. The sperm whale or cachalot, which once as "king of the boundless seas" roved every ocean by the thousands, is a rare sight

nowadays. Decimated in numbers and grown wary from constant attack, he holds to the fastnesses of arctic ice where even the boldest skipper cannot pursue him, and is seldom seen in other waters. And this one, appearing out of all reckoning here in the Coral Sea, was of a bulk to stagger even the imaginative yarns of the old-time whalers. As a catch, he was worth more to the *Egersund* than the entire school of killers ahead—worth a dozen such schools.

"Steady!" the captain called back over his shoulder to the steersman. "Hold her as she is!"

He bent over the gun, shifting it slightly on its swivel bearings as he sighted for the mark.

The distance between boat and whale was rapidly lessening. Not more than a couple of ship's lengths now separated the two. But the mighty cachalot showed no sign of nervousness or apprehension.

Again he spouted. Then, curving his huge flukes in a flourish which might almost have been interpreted as a defiance, he sunk his tail and standing perpendicularly in the water, his head protruding at least twenty feet above the waves, commenced that leisurely revolving movement peculiar to whales by which they take a survey of their surroundings.

His under side was toward the vessel as he started, showing his narrow lower jaw, barnacle bearded, slued a little to one side from the crash of some ancient battle; and his row of gleaming ten-inch teeth, the feature which differentiates him from those species whose mouths are fitted only with whalebone plates. Four or five of these ivory tusks were broken off or missing, doubtless also as the result of his encounters.

Then as he slowly whirled he brought into view his thick neck with the twisted, rusty stumps in it of two or three harpoons, mementos of the ill success which former captors had met in trying to match their puny skill against his resistless strength.

But what especially caught the eye was the creature's strange individual marking—two broad bands of orange-yellow athwart the shining, wet black of his blunt forehead.

A grizzled old sailor who had been a harpooner in his youth gave a sudden gasp.

"The Tonokomoth Tiger!" he shouted. "It's the old he-devil hisself. Fust time he's been sighted in more'n thirty years."

No need to say more to any group of whalemen; for, strange as it may seem, there are cetacean celebrities as well known and as easily recognized when they appear as any movie star, or shoe manufacturer, or politician who courts the fierce white light of publicity. The Charlie Chaplins and Trotzkys and Jack Dempseys are no monopoly of the human race; whales have their notables with characteristics of much the same sort, humorous, imposing, or malign. In the history of whaling, the names of Timor Tom and New Zealand Jack and Moby Dick stand out as the great figures of successive epochs like those of Xerxes and Cæsar and Napoleon.

But of all the varied famous or fabulous lords of the ocean, there has been none more discussed at "gamming" parties—those visits interchanged between the men of two whalers in neighboring waters—than the Tonokomoth Tiger; none about whom more yarns have been spun or more speculation offered in the long watches of a tropic night, or around the forecastle stove when hemmed in by arctic ice.

He is the example always adduced when the fiercely disputed question of a whale's longevity comes up; for there is a more or less authentic record of him running back to that dim antiquity when the Basque whalers first adven-

tured out across the Bay of Biscay and King Sancho the Wise in A. D. 1150 granted especial whaling privileges to the city of San Sebastian. And since deep-sea whaling was started in 1712, there is hardly a doubt of his recurrent appearances; as it is quite inconceivable that another could share an identity stamped by such singular markings, size, arrogance, cunning, and ferocity.

For twenty decades men had hunted him in vengeance for the lives he had taken, the boats he had wrecked, the cargoes he had sunk; in ambition to bear the name of his victor; in avarice to wrest from him the fortune he carried in oil and blubber. But still he roamed, an unconquered monarch of the seas.

And now his hour had struck. The captain of the *Egersund*, an expert with the harpoon gun, at such a distance and with so fair a target, could not miss. A wiry, weather-beaten New Englander, emotionless as a stick of hickory, he chewed phlegmatically at his quid and waited, no hint of expression on his face, no tremor of his muscles to indicate that anything especial was on hand.

The whale's great head twirled slowly. Its broad side showed, with the little, twinkling eye set far back beyond the gaping, cavernous mouth. The *Egersund* was now not more than thirty feet away.

The captain sighted carefully at a point on the thick, swelling neck. He aimed with one hand. The fingers of the other tightened on the lanyard.

Just then a tall sailor, whose tan and high cheek bones gave him almost the appearance of an Indian, barefooted, clad only in a tattered cotton shirt and trousers, stepped quickly from the group clustered behind the skipper.

"Higher, captain!" His voice snapped across the tense stillness like the crack of a whip. "Higher up!"

Involuntarily, as he fired, the captain elevated the muzzle of the gun a fraction of an inch. But it was enough. The barbed projectile, with its length of line attached, cleared the whale's head by two feet or more, and describing its arc, fell harmless in the ocean.

With the splash of the harpoon, the great, striped head sank like a stone beneath the surface; how whales can submerge so swiftly is another of their mysteries.

There was a single mocking flash of his big flukes in the air, as the monster turned beneath the water to dive. Then the waves flowed on without a ripple to show where he had disappeared. The Tonokomoth Tiger was gone.

White with fury, the skipper turned on the offending seaman. The crew looked ready to lynch him.

"You blasted, beach-combin' swab!" roared the captain. "What'd you holler at me for?"

The man seemed dazed. He passed his hand uncertainly, bewilderedly, across his forehead.

"I don't know myself, sir," he muttered. "Suthin' jest kinder made me interfere."

Even in his rage, the captain noted that with the unmistakable New England twang of his voice there was a singular slurring and softening of the "r's."

He paused and eyed the fellow keenly.

"Nantucket-born, ain't ye?"

The sailor's glance dropped, and a dull, shamed flush swept up over his tanned cheek.

"Aye, sir."

"Ye signed on with me at Bimluka as J. Smith, didn't ye?" the rasping inquiry proceeded.

"Aye, sir."

"Humph! Waal, I'm bettin' that if you was called rightly, your name's Startopp." He pondered a moment, his chagrin and resentment over the loss of the whale seemingly swallowed up in a great wonderment.

Then, as if recalled to his duties, he turned with a sweep of his arm to the crew.

"Git aft there, all o' ye, and be about yer business."

He bent his gaze again to seaward, but the school of killers had also disappeared.

"Gallied o' course, the hull pod of 'em," he muttered. "An' small chance of sightin' ary other spout, s'long as that dam' Tiger is cruisin' around in these waters. Waal, 'tain't no use cryin' over spilt milk; but if I ever git the chanct to p'int at that old, yallerstriped head ag'in, I vum ther won't be no Startopps a-standin' at my elbow."

II.

NANTUCKET is a more or less religious community. It was founded by Quakers fleeing from persecution on the mainland, and throughout its history, even when it was the Mecca for thousands of roistering whalemen, there has always been a marked underlying spirit of piety.

But revered as is the Bible and accepted with a simple faith, there is one chapter in it which is rather avoided in the island's churches—the forty-first of Job.

To ask Nantucket: "Canst thou draw out leviathan with a hook, or his tongue with a cord which thou lettest down; canst thou put a hook into his nose, or bore his jaw through with a thorn?" would be only to provoke a smile of scornful derision.

Even to propound the ironic query: "Will he make a covenant with thee; wilt thou take him for a servant forever?" would be of little avail. There are those in Nantucket who will tell you with solemn conviction that it has been done.

When Thomas Macy, escaping from the officers of the bigoted Massachusetts courts, sailed away with his family in an open boat, and braving the perils of the wintry sea, crossed to the sandy, unexplored island thirty miles off the coast, he found already living there a tribe of about eight hundred Indians known as the Tonokomoths.

To explain their presence they had a legend or tradition, that ages before when the island was uninhabited, a monster eagle had caught up a two-year-old Indian boy over on the mainland, and, flying across the intervening water, had for some reason dropped its burden on this outlying spit of land.

Thrown on his own resources, the child had somehow managed to find sustenance and look out for himself. Having no other playmates, he made friends with the animals and learned to speak their language. He could talk with the birds, the hares that frolicked over the hillsides, the fishes that swam in the waters all about him.

Finally, when he had grown to manhood, he began to yearn for the companionship of his own kind. The birds had told him that there were beings like himself on that land he could dimly make out on a very clear day thirty miles off to the westward, and he was consumed with a desire to go and visit them.

But, consider as he would, he could see no way to accomplish it. He was a strong and expert swimmer, but he realized that so great a distance was beyond his powers; and he knew of no other method. He could not fly like the birds, and the idea of fashioning a boat or canoe was beyond his limited comprehension.

Then one day as he vainly pondered the matter, lying stretched out on S'conset point, watching the big Atlantic rollers come pounding in, he saw out across the water a flotilla of canoes. It was a whaling party of Indians, probably from the eastern tip of Long Island, who had ventured far beyond their usual limits. In the contingent were

included both men and women; and as a big sperm cow spouted close at hand, they waved their spears and shouted.

The islander eagerly plunged in through the breakers and swam out to join them; but they, either misapprehending his purpose or not caring to share their spoil with a stranger, warned him off with threatening gestures and would have nothing to do with him.

Nevertheless, he hung near, like a boy debarred from the sports of his playfellows, and watched them enviously as they closed in upon their prey.

The forward canoe drove in daringly almost to the side of the whale, and a tall Indian, standing in its bow, hurled his flint-tipped harpoon. Then as his companions swept the frail craft back out of danger with their paddles, a light float of logs attached by a short line to the harpoon was flung overboard.

This is the immemorial method of attack of the Indian whalers, being employed by the Eskimos even up to the present day. Its characteristic feature is the use of the float which has never been favored by white men, the latter preferring a long, light line which permits the whale to sound to great depths and tire himself out by his own efforts, whereas the Indians depended upon their floats to impede and disconcert the animal in its attempt to escape.

Of course a single float would not bother a whale to any extent; but, as in the present instance, no sooner had the first harpoon been hurled than another canoe dashed in from the opposite side and a second float was attached. And so the assault was kept up, first on one side and then on the other, until the whale was almost surrounded by the bobbing logs.

Often, before more than one or two floats were fastened, a whale would sound, tearing himself free from harpoon, float, and all by his rapid descent through the water, and thus be lost.

But the sperm cow now attacked made no effort to sound, or to save herself in any way. Her one thought seemed to be to protect the baby whale which swam at her side; for the maternal instinct in these animals is developed almost in proportion to their size.

This calf, although probably only a few days old, was sixteen feet long and of corresponding girth, a perfect replica of the mother on a scale of about one third. When she swam she carried him on the broad flukes of her tail; when she rested on the surface he lay near by, blowing his baby spout two or three feet into the air.

But now at the first intimation of danger, she caught him under her broad fin and held him close to her side, shielding him with her own body, much as a human mother might gather her baby to her breast; while all the time she lashed her great, flexible tail from side to side up as far as her jaws, feeling for her enemies and striving to annihilate them.

Meanwhile, the Indians dashed in and out, planting their spears and harpoons, and pouring in from a safer distance a constant fusillade of arrows until the beleaguered creature bristled from end to end like a porcupine. The water all about was churned into foam by her struggles and streaked with her blood.

But her assailants did not have it all their own way. Canoe after canoe was caught in the flaillike sweep of her ponderous flukes and splintered into matchwood, the occupants of them flung crushed and broken into the sea. Indian tactics require a small army for whaling, and human life is held at a discount.

In the end, though, the she-whale's foes proved too many for her. Weaker and weaker grew her struggles, until at last an expert at the game, choosing a propitious moment, shot his canoe in at close quarters and drove a lance to

her heart. She spouted a great jet of blood into the air and passed into her death flurry; but even then she did not forget to shield her calf, and with almost her last breath she gave a distressful call for help for it.

The man from the island watched the scene in a sort of fascinated horror; it was the first time he had ever seen the taking of life. But, knowing the language of animals, he understood the whale mother's dying appeal.

As the Indians closed in for the easy task of dispatching the calf, he dived under the great cow's floating carcass and, coming up on the other side, clambered to her broad back, snatched out one of the spears planted in it, and, leaping to his feet, defied them all.

These beings, like himself, he had decided, were cruel, murderous. They had rejected his overtures, and showed they wanted nothing to do with him. He would stand by the animals who had always proven his friends.

So into a hot mêlée he plunged. They were twenty against his one; but so great was his agility and strength of arm as he fought back and forth on his slippery support, that in the end he vanquished them all except one squaw, who in admiration of his prowess sprang to join him on the whale's back and battled at his side.

The rescued calf expressed the utmost gratitude to his preserver, but was nevertheless in deep dejection.

"Alas!" it mourned. "I am little and weak and an orphan. What can I do all alone in this wide ocean?"

"So was I little and weak and all alone," returned the man from the island. "But through keeping to myself and depending on my own efforts, I have become able to conquer twenty. That is the answer: keep to yourself. And hereafter so shall I."

"Nay," said the squaw, who had listened to this conversation; "for I am going with you."

"Oh, you?" said the man. "You don't count."

"No," agreed the whale calf; "we will not count a wife in the embargo."

And greatly heartened by the advice he had received, he made a pact with the man of friendship and mutual protection for themselves and their posterity through all the ages.

"Because you saved my life, and have told me how to conduct myself," he said to the man, "I will drive in whales to this island of yours, and you shall kill them and live off them."

"But I might kill you by mistake," objected the man; "for my arm is mighty, and all whales to me look very much alike."

Then the squaw took from her bosom some paints of ocher and she drew two broad streaks of yellow across the whale calf's forehead, so that the man would always know him, and would hold his mighty arm whenever they two should meet.

And, thereupon, the man and the squaw went to the island, there keeping to themselves conformable to his decision; and from them sprang the prosperous tribe of Tonokomoths which always kept to itself and had no communion or intercourse with the Indians of the mainland.

Likewise, the whale calf went out into the ocean, and, abiding by the counsel which had been given him, always kept to himself, thereby waxing great and powerful and supreme among the creatures of the sea.

Yet sedulously through the years and through the centuries he kept his covenant with the descendants of the man who had befriended him. That was the only touch of kindliness or good will in his disposition. Fierce and exclusive, he was known in all the oceans, well deserving the name which had been bestowed upon him, tigerish in strength and cunning, and pitilessness; like the tiger, keeping to himself.

Fierce and exclusive were the Tonokomoths, too, brooking no visitors to their shores and holding no communication with outsiders until that day when Thomas Macy, driven by Puritan intolerance, came to the island, and for some unexplained reason was allowed to remain.

Better it might have been for the Tonokomoths if they had held to their ancient tradition; since the refugee, finding himself hospitably received and permitted to live in peace, conveyed word to several of his friends of the asylum he had discovered, and they promptly joined him.

In 1660 the island passed definitely under the control of a company of white men known as the twenty purchasers, and from that time the Tonokomoths steadily degenerated. They became drunken, lying, shiftless, diseased, and in the course of a few generations were wiped out.

Except for one fact, the legendary covenant with the whale must have lapsed.

Among the early settlers was a rather wild young Quaker named Christopher Startopp, married, but not living any too happily with his wife. There was also a fawnlike Indian princess, who traced direct descent from the more or less mythical founder of the tribe.

It is not the purpose of this chronicle to delve into the details of a three-hundred-year-old scandal. Suffice it to say that dating from the only son of Christopher, a dark, lithe, straight-haired boy with high cheek bones, Nantucket gossip has always ascribed Indian blood to the Startopps. There are also whispers of wifely connivance at a deception for the sake of family reputation and in order to keep her husband from being excluded from the fellowship of the meeting house.

You may hear, too, that each Startopp sire at the birth of a boy takes the baby secretly to an unfrequented spot on the south shore, and there goes through some sort of mystic ceremony which is supposed to be an introduction to the Tonokomoth Tiger. At any rate it is considered a singular coincidence that that great yellow-striped head always makes one of its infrequent appearances at such a time.

The last recorded sighting of the big cachalot was by Captain Ebenezer Snow of the fishing smack *Polly J.*, off Marthas Vineyard, September 12, 1891, a date which it will also be noted was the birthday of Christopher Startopp, twelfth of the name.

Be all this as it may, the Startopps have always been mighty men in the whaling industry. The early Nantucketers were not whalers. They were farmers and sheep raisers. But when they saw the various uses to which the Indians put the whales that stranded on the beach or that they killed offshore, the white men speedily took it up.

It was that first Christopher Startopp who, gazing out over the ocean from one of the low hilltops, pointed to the spouting of the whales—schools of five hundred or more often passed in those days.

"There," he said, "is a pasture that will feed our grandchildren's children."

The islanders divided up the coast into sections and established patrols and lookouts. Any whale that came ashore or appeared within the line of the breakers was instantly reported, and when caught was shared in common. Each householder had a platform on his roof where he spent long hours staring out over the ocean in search of a spout.

So persistently were the whales hunted, that gradually their inshore appearances became less frequent, and the hunters were obliged to put ever farther and farther out to sea.

So an open boat in charge of the third Christopher Startopp, venturing pretty

far from shore, happened to be caught in a storm and blown out of sight of land.

The men did everything in their power to work the boat back, but the wind and the sea proved too heavy for them, and at last, utterly exhaused, they could do no more. Adrift in a leaky cockleshell and exposed to the full fury of a howling winter gale, their situation could not well have been more hazardous.

Then, as the story goes, a monster striped head rose near by, and the Tonokomoth Tiger, swimming around the boat, left a "glip" or wake of exuding oil, so smoothing the waves that the little craft floated in safety.

But not satisfied with merely affording his protection, the Tiger started for a school of sperms about a mile away, and, flinging his broad flukes up, challenged the leader, a mighty bull, to mortal combat. Head on and at express-train speed the two ponderous creatures charged each other. The shock was like that of two dreadnaughts meeting in furious collision. From their savage rushes and the movements of their writhing, twisting bodies great waves rolled up and the air was filled with flying spume. Again and again they charged. The leader of the school battled bravely; the flanks of his antagonist were scored with gashes from his great, pointed teeth. But nothing could withstand the battering-ram of that huge striped head, backed by its tons of dynamic force. The lower jaw of the "schoolmaster" was torn loose. He lay groggy, helpless, blind from pain on the water. The Tiger drew back, carefully measuring the distance for his coup de grâce. Then one last tremendous charge, straight and swift as the flight of an arrow, and the thick, opposing skull shattered and broke under the impact. The schoolmaster floated dead on the surface.

The Tiger swam back to the watching boatmen, circled their little boat again, spouted triumphantly, and then with a wave of his flukes like a benediction sounded for the depths.

The gale passed, Startopp and his companions riding it out safely on the "slick" all about them. Then they lost no time in assuring themselves of the dead whale which their champion had provided for them. That big cachalot was to them like the sight of pay gravel to a gold seeker; for the whales captured inshore were all of the "right" variety and infinitely less valuable.

Bending to their oars they towed their capture to shore, and exultantly exhibited it—the first sperm whale ever brought to Nantucket Island. After that, there was no holding back the eager Nantucketers. Seized with a spirit of emulation, they built sloops capable of going out to sea, for the sperm whale seldom is seen except in deep water, and started hunting those fierce and agile creatures.

So the industry grew. Bigger and bigger vessels were built, longer and longer cruises were taken. By the time of the American Revolution there were between five and six thousand people on the island, all of them engaged in some form or another with the whale fishery.

An account of the time says of them: "From the only harbor on this sterile island, fifteen miles long by three broad, the inhabitants by an astonishing zeal and industry send out annually one hundred and forty vessels engaged in the whale fishery, which by their courage and perseverance they have extended from the frozen regions of the pole to the coasts of Africa, to the Brazils, and even to the Falklands, some of those voyages continuing for two or three years at a stretch."

In this development and extension of the business, be sure the Startopps played a prominent part. Successive Christophers are named as the heroes of many a daring exploit; and there are

dozens of yarns told of hairbreadth escapes and of peculiar favor gained for them by the intervention of their striped ally. Men always clamored for the chance to sail on a vessel commanded by a Startopp, as they were considered lucky ships.

Never was there a commercial enterprise conducted on more democratic lines than whaling as practiced by the men of Nantucket. Every person connected with the undertaking, from the owner of the vessel down, had a share or interest in the takings, proportioned according to the measure of capital, skill or experience he contributed.

The coopers that made the blubber casks, the boat builders, the blacksmiths, the sailmakers, the captain, the harpooners, the mates, the sailors, the cabin boys were all owners or stockholders. Nobody was paid any wages or salary, but received his "lay" or share from the proceeds of the voyage according to what he had supplied.

And this sense of ownership gave an incentive, a willingness to take risks which made the boat's crew of a Nantucket "spouter" about as fearless a set of dare-devils as could be found anywhere on the globe.

Nantucket's prosperity of course induced other ports to take up whaling; but the little spot of land out in the Atlantic continued to be the center and focus of the industry. Nantucket men wore their harpooner's pegs as a distinctive badge. When other places wanted to send out whaling ships, they had to call on Nantucketers to serve as captains and mates of their vessels. The Nantucket girls had a secret society, every member of which was pledged not to marry a man until he had struck his whale.

The Startopps never had any difficulty on this score in securing brides; nor, for that matter, on any other score. They were handsome, vigorous men who did everything well, and, as already said, they were uniformly successful in their voyages.

Among men they were respected, but hardly popular. Of a reserved, almost secretive temperament, they never took any partners in their various ventures. They made excellent captains, but poor companions. Nobody ever denied their courage or ability; but, as Nantucket put it—they kept to themselves.

Succeeding years of ultraprosperous voyages naturally enriched them. Even the slump which came to Nantucket with the opening of the Revolution, when the market for American whale products dropped off altogether, and no whale ship dared poke her nose out of the harbor for fear of capture, did not materially affect their fortunes. The Christopher Startopp of 1776 turned his "spouters" into privateers and reaped a harvest.

Neither did the troublous years which followed the War of Independence bring reverses. The whalers and merchant ships of other men were being constantly gobbled up by that piratical horde of English, French, and Spanish buccaneers which swarmed out of the West Indies; but no Startopp vessel was ever taken. Once, in 1799, when the brig *Pawana*, ninety days out of Nantucket, C. Startopp, master—the son of that Christopher who sailed the Revolutionary privateers—was overhauled by a pirate in the Caribbean Sea, it is related that a great sperm whale rose suddenly out of the ocean, and, as if actuated by a definite purpose, charged the rakish, black ship three separate times, sending her to the bottom with all on board.

The end of the War of 1812 saw a marked resumption of whaling all along the New England coast, and yet curiously enough it sounded the death knell for Nantucket. The reason was, it had been discovered by this time that ships of three hundred tons or more were the most economical for use in the in-

dustry, and vessels of that size when loaded found great difficulty in crossing the shallow bar which extends across Nantucket's lone harbor.

The little community struggled valiantly against the handicap. Her loyal captains by the exercise of great ingenuity still held to the old home port, but do what they would, the lightering charges ate heavily into the profits. Appeals for relief were made to the government, but only to be denied. Then the expedient was tried of using a "camel"—a sort of floating dry dock propelled by steam, which was able to pick up a loaded whale ship and carry it across the bar. Though actually operated for the purpose intended, the "camel" did not prove a practical success, and in time was abandoned.

After that, Nantucket gradually declined through the years, while New Bedford, its greatest competitor, steadily increased in importance. In 1846—called the "boom" year of whaling—sixty-nine whalers cleared from New Bedford, from Nantucket only sixteen. In 1857, four cleared from Nantucket and ninety-five from New Bedford. In 1869, the last ship was sent from Nantucket, and in 1874 her name definitely disappeared from the list of American whaling ports. Thereafter she became known only as a haunt for summer visitors.

But although the early glory of Nantucket departed, that of the Startopps did not fade with her. Back in the twenties of the last century, the ninth Christopher Startopp had been shrewd enough to read the signs of the times and transferred most of his interests to the mainland. He engaged in general shipping, and the packets of the Startopp line were among the swiftest afloat in those days before the Civil War when America held the supremacy of the seas. The tenth Christopher expanded this business, and eventually realized tremendously on it by selling his entire fleet to the government. The eleventh was a yachtsman. He did not engage in active business, but he managed successfully to conserve his fortune, and like his forefathers he held to the family tradition of keeping to themselves. Also he maintained as his home the old unpretentious dwelling on Orange Street in Nantucket.

The Startopps might draw their income from the "coufs" or mainland people; but they wanted no association with them. They kept to themselves.

It was Christopher Startopp, twelfth of the name, born at the old house in Nantucket, September 12, 1891, the date of the last recorded appearance of the Tonokomoth Tiger—it was he who broke the long-established rule. Yearning for the companionship of his kind like that first inhabitant of the island—who may or may not have been his ancestor—he sought it sedulously at Nantucket, at Newport, at New York, London, Paris, Vienna, Monte Carlo.

He did not keep to himself. Perhaps that is why at the age of thirty he found himself awaking from a drunken sleep on the beach at Bimluka, a ragged, penniless, friendless derelict.

III.

CHRISTOPHER STARTOPP awoke from that frowzy slumber on the tropic sands in response to a shake on the shoulder.

He was not surprised. He would not have been surprised if it had been a kick, or a policeman pounding the soles of his feet, instead of a shake of the shoulder. The only thing that was astonishing to him was the gentleness of the touch.

He cast his glance back foggily. Then he sat up staring and rubbed his eyes. Surely that last bottle of native gin must have been more vilely potent than he had dreamed.

Before now he had seen things after a debauch—phantasmagoric, gaudy-

hued serpents and elephants and monkeys engaged in weird stunts—but he had always retained the subconscious knowledge that they were not actually there.

The present hallucination, though, was as real as reality itself. And he would rather have faced the most terrifying dragon that imagination could conjure up.

It made him poignantly conscious of the fact that he had no shoes. The rest of his disreputable state did not seem to matter so much. But those stark, uncovered feet shrieked aloud his degradation. He tried futilely to burrow them in the sand.

"Chris!" The delusion was speaking to him now. He winced at the sound of that voice—and yet how sweet, how painfully sweet, it was.

Could hell itself, he wondered, have sent any more torturing vision to mock him, to remind him of all he had flung away, than this representation of a slender, fair-haired woman in an immaculate, white yachting suit—his life's one sweetheart?

His throat seemed suddenly parching, his brain on fire. He must go somewhere, and either beg, borrow, or steal another quart of that native gin. He staggered unsteadily to his feet.

"Chris!" Again that voice swept across his throbbing senses. Like some soothing magic, it seemed to dispel all this hateful glare of sunlight, this picture-post card white beach and blue sea, and carry him back to gray cliffs and quaint, weather-beaten, old houses, and green Atlantic surges, edged with foam.

He closed his eyes for a moment; then opened them and looked at her steadily. No delusion. Ruth! Ruth Folger! By all the mad coincidences of a crazy world, it was she herself.

"I guess you're mistook, lady; my name's Jim Smith," he muttered gruffly, turning away up the beach.

But she laid a swift, detaining hand on his arm. "You shall not leave me this way, Chris. I have a lot of things to say to you."

He gave up then; he knew her determination of old.

"Better leave me alone, Ruth. I'm hopeless," with a feeble attempt at a swagger. "Sheer time wasted." If only he were able to hide those shameful bare feet.

"I don't believe it," she declared. "A man who could come back as you did during the war—don't think you weren't recognized under that fictitious name in the Foreign Legion—can come back again."

She resolutely opened her sun umbrella, and made him sit down beside her there on the sand, bare feet, tattered garments, and all. Then she talked, heedless of his grouching silence.

First, she explained her presence at Bimluka. As it turned out, their meeting wasn't so much of a coincidence, after all. It's pretty hard to hide anywhere in the world nowadays, and she had heard of him from some one she encountered at Manila.

She made up her mind then that she would look him up, since Bimluka was on their itinerary—her father, a millionaire naturalist with a hobby for ocean currents, was on a two-year cruise of the Pacific in his yacht.

"So when we got here," she went on, "I described you to the consul, and he told me without a moment's hesitation where I could find you."

She did not add that the consul had earnestly advised her not to follow her quixotic impulse, but to give the dissolute Jim Smith a wide berth.

In a natural way she led the talk back to their boy and girl days at Nantucket; for she was a native of the island as well as he. Without any attempt at moralizing, she managed to bring vividly to his mind the clean wholesomeness of the ordered New England life they had known, and by

alluding to familiar characters and events set the softening influences of memory working.

Then with a sudden, unexpected stroke, she shattered the shell of churlish indifference in which he sought to incase himself.

"No use blinking at facts, Chris," she said coolly. "I've always been in love with you."

He groaned and dropped his head in his shaking hands. He could not conceive of anything more tantalizingly desirable than she appeared at that moment, or more utterly beyond his reach.

"Why didn't you marry me then in the old days?" he broke out passionately. "Lord knows, I asked you often enough. Maybe, if you had——"

"No," she cut him short; "it wouldn't have worked. I'll not deny I was on the point of doing it more than once, but some saving Quaker sense of caution held me back. You were never fit for any woman to marry, Chris. I'd be more apt to accept you now than ever before."

He gazed at her open-mouthed.

"For God's sake—why?"

"Oh, because." She laughed, and yet the tears were not far away. "But don't be afraid, Chris. I'm not going to."

She was silent for a spell, poking her finger reflectively around and around in the sand. Then she spoke briskly.

"Chris," she said, "what's always ruined you is civilization, or, rather, the tinsel that civilization wears as a fringe. Life came too easy for you, and it made you soft. But the war showed that the good metal is in you; it only needs tempering. You need to exercise your flabby, disused muscles, and your flabby, disused moral fiber—your courage, your will, your spiritual stamina."

"God, Ruth!" he brushed aside the suggestion impatiently. "Don't you think I know myself? I could come back, yes; any man can do that. But I'd only slip again." He shrugged his shoulders. "What's the use?"

"Our ancestors," she ignored his interruption, "those old whalers, say what you will, were men. They lived so close to the realities, the old sterling virtues were so necessary in their careers, they were so driven by necessity, that they had no time for the quibbles that lead to self-indulgence. Instead of fighting shams and shadows, they fought whales. Right was right with them, and wrong was wrong; a man was either brave or a coward. And that strain is in you, Chris; it simply needs to be developed. The thing that will put you on your feet, set you up morally, mentally, physically, and make a man of you, is to take a dose of their medicine. Go on a whaling cruise."

"A whaling cruise?" he repeated dully. "Whatever put that in your head?"

"Because it's the thing in your head that stands for fortitude and straightness and all that really counts. Those old Nantucket yarns are ingrained in your very being. Whether you recognize it or not, the code of the old-time whalers, 'A dead whale or a sunk boat,' is your code. You haven't killed your whale, and consequently you've come mighty near to sinking your boat."

In spite of himself, his somber eyes began to lighten, his drooping head to lift, as he dwelt upon the suggestion she offered. Long-forgotten memories were thronging back to him, snatches of old sea chanteys, boyhood aspirations roused by the sagas of grizzled, retired harpooners and mates.

"By Jove, Ruth!" His voice took on a ring of decision. "That's the best advice I've ever had. I'm going to take it."

They talked a little longer. Then she arose and extended her hand.

"We sail to-day, Chris, so I shall not see you again. We are going north from here, probably up beyond Bering

Straits. But we will be back again in southern latitudes next year. Suppose we agree to meet at Sydney in October."

She started away, but turned after a step or two.

"And don't forget, Chris, that when I see you again, I want to hear that you have struck your whale."

The old challenge of the Nantucket girls! Could she really mean it? He stood watching her as she walked lightly up the beach until she disappeared from sight. Then he turned and strode toward the docks. That afternoon, he shipped as a forecastle hand on the *Egersund* just starting for the whaling grounds.

Startopp's ideas of whaling were all drawn from the stories of old-time blubber men. He had a very hazy conception, if any at all, of the methods in vogue to-day. But he very speedily discovered that, as with most everything else in the prosaic modern world, the romance, the daring, the excitement of the calling was gone.

Instead of venturing out in an open boat for a hand-to-hand tussle with a big sperm, there were only killers to be encountered, and they were secured by firing at them with a harpoon gun from the perfectly safe vantage ground of the deck. Then, instead of a light line whizzing out fathom after fathom as the whale sounded, dangerous as a live wire, there was a heavy cable and a steam winch to wind it up and drag the harpooned monster alongside. No playing of the whale; no exciting dash at the finish to drive in the lance and find his "life;" no quick backing away of the boat out of the tumultuous "white water" of his final flurry. Only the discharge of a couple of explosive bombs into his carcass from the small guns in the bow on either side of the harpoon gun. It was in a way about the same difference as between fishing for black bass and for flounders.

Neither was there the old expert cutting up, the stripping off the thick coat of blubber from the body as the skin is peeled from an orange, the bailing out of the sperm cavity, the days of trying out with the kettles smoking and bubbling on deck. Instead, the dead whale was simply lashed fast to the side and towed to an evil-smelling try-out works on shore, where with modern factory efficiency every ounce of him —bones, balena, blubber, and flesh— was turned to some commercial utility.

It was a disappointment to Startopp to find what he had let himself in for; nevertheless, the regular work, the sea air, the rough, coarse fare, and above all the feeling that he was actually of some use did wonders for him. As the booze got out of his system, and the lazy, loafing inertia cleared from his mind, he became hard and firm and self-reliant. He did not "pal" much with his mates. He had a different idea from theirs. He was not morose or churlish, but he simply kept to himself.

In time he would probably have been advanced to be mate or even captain of one of these steam whalers, but that did not appeal to him. He had been keeping his ears open and making guarded inquiries, and he had learned that old-time whaling was still practiced to some extent up in Bering Sea. He had made up his mind to quit the *Egersund* and fare north on the chance of getting an opportunity of "striking his whale;" but he was saved the trouble of quitting by that weird affair in connection with the Tonokomoth Tiger. On the return to port he was fired.

So, free to go where he would, and with his slender wages intact in his pocket, Startopp headed for the north. There was no hope in his heart of meeting Ruth there. He would have to travel by devious routes and meet with many delays. By the time he reached Alaskan waters the Folger yacht would be turning south again. The best he

could do was to prove himself, and try to meet her, as she had arranged, at Sydney the following year.

By unexpected good luck he found at Hawaii in August an old-time sailing whaler fitting out for a voyage to Bering Strait, and by his persistence got a berth on her.

Her sailing was without incident, and she reached the fishing grounds in good shape early in September; but the ice closed in exceedingly early that year, and the entire fleet of whalers was caught in a perilous position.

The vessels were all lying close to an east shore, and the west wind blew steadily, piling up a great barrier of ice impossible to break through.

More than that, provisions were short, as only the ship to which Startopp belonged had taken supplies to last over the winter. Various plans for reaching the open water were tried. Dynamite was used to blast a way out, but failed to accomplish the desired result.

Meanwhile, ship after ship was being crushed by the closing in of the pack, the crews sometimes having only time to jump over the side before the destruction came. Thus the accommodations and stores of the remaining vessels were taxed to the utmost, and since it was very probable that these would meet a similar fate, immediate relief became imperative.

In this situation Startopp volunteered to try and reach a salmon-fishing station two hundred miles away, whence supplies could be forwarded. It was pointed out to him that he would almost certainly perish in the blizzards that were coming on, but he insisted.

"I am the one who can be most easily spared," he said, "and it is therefore up to me to take the chance."

So he started out, and after hardship, starvation, suffering, all the usual experiences of a lone explorer in the arctic wilderness, he finally came to an Indian village about fifty miles from his destination. There he sent on runners to bear the message of the whaling fleet's distress to the fishing station, while he himself rested and awaited their return.

But while he remained at the Indian village he learned of a white woman, also the victim of shipwreck through the early closing of the ice, who was said to be at another village about forty miles away.

Startopp started out to get her and bring her back. He could not believe it could possibly be Ruth, although there were certain features in the story told by the Indians that pointed to that conclusion.

But again a wild coincidence, which when explained proved to be the most natural thing in the world. It was Ruth. Her father, drawn by some curious phenomena in the way of currents, had ventured farther into the ice fields than he should. The wind had suddenly veered, and with it the ice had closed in on them like a trap; the frail yacht had been crushed; and she, the sole survivor, had finally managed to reach this refuge.

Yet why waste time on explanations? When destiny settles that a man and a maid are to meet, neither time nor distance nor height nor depth nor any other creature can prevent or interfere.

Startopp made arrangements to start back with her the next day, intending to escort her through to the salmon-fishing station; but during the night, the wind, which all that month had blown so steadily from the west, shifted to the east, and the weather-wise Aleuts with whom they were lodging told him that a passage would probably be opened by which the imprisoned whale ships could break through and reach open water.

They also pointed out to him that by crossing the floe he and Ruth could meet the vessels as they came out, and thus save greatly in time and travel, as

well as being assured of a much quicker return to civilization than if they proceeded to the salmon-fishing station.

The advice seemed good to Startopp, and the two set out with dogs and sledges and accompanied by a party of the Aleuts. But although the theory of his Indian counselors was correct, they had made a miscalculation somewhere; for when they reached the neighborhood where they expected to find the whalers working their way out, there was nothing in sight.

They camped there a week on the edge of the floe, watching, straining their eyes. Then one morning as the sun came up, an Indian gave a sudden cry and pointed. Far off to the southward, beyond possibility of a hail or of being overtaken, tops'ls down against the horizon, were the whalers for which they were so eagerly searching. The ships had passed unseen in the darkness of the long night.

But there was still worse to come. When the disappointed company attempted dolefully to retrace its steps across the ice, they discovered to their dismay that open water intervened. The floe had broken off from the shore field, and with that wind was certain in a very short time to crumble into fragments.

They were just about to give themselves up for lost, when again one of the Aleuts raised a cry, but this time one of gladness. A ship was making its way toward them.

One of the whaling fleet, naturally supposed Startopp, which for some reason had been delayed or held back. Yet as the vessel came nearer, he was forced to admit that it had a strangely unfamiliar appearance. A "spouter;" that was plain from its short topgallants, its narrow hull, the whaling paraphernalia on its decks, and its generally dingy aspect. But he quite failed to identify it as any of the ships he had left back there in the ice.

And then he managed to make out her name. The *Honeymoon* of San Francisco! He gave a gasp. During one of the watches as he came north two or three months before, one of the mates in dilating upon his experiences in the arctic had told him of being in the crew of this ship, and of how, hemmed in by the ice, they had been compelled to abandon her. Yes; Startopp remembered the name perfectly. It was the *Honeymoon*. But, the mate had said, all this happened thirteen years before. Could a vessel remain frozen in arctic ice for thirteen years, exposed to that terrible pounding and squeezing, and still be able to float? Apparently it could; for the *Honeymoon* was coming steadily on through the channel opening ahead of her. And surely somebody must be aboard to steer her? She could not hold to a course in that way, with no one at the helm.

The Aleuts gave a sudden yell of terror and flung themselves on their faces, gibbering in superstitious fright. And when Startopp discovered what it was all about, he felt very much like following their example.

"*Podawe! Podawe!*" they shouted; and, staring at the approaching ship, he saw great black flukes flourishing ahead of it. A monster whale was acting as an ice breaker for the imprisoned vessel, smashing a path for her with his head out through the crumbling floe to open water.

Perhaps he was only forcing his own way out as whales often do, and the *Honeymoon* by coincidence merely followed in his wake. But Startopp was willing to accept the rescue as a miracle of conscious design; the more so, as his job finished, and the ship, floating free, the whale turned before he sounded and showed two broad streaks of yellow across his forehead.

Hastiily boarding the abandoned ship with Ruth and the Aleuts, Startopp found to his surprise not a soul on

board. Apparently no one had set foot on her since the last man of her company left her thirteen years before. Her stores were all intact if somewhat moldy; her equipment complete with plenty of spare canvas to supplant the threadbare sails that fluttered from her yards; and there were eight hundred barrels of oil in her hold. Since her hull seemed undamaged, there was no reason why he should not sail her down to Seattle, collect salvage, and dispose of the cargo.

A bargain was struck with the Aleuts to act as seamen, and the voyage was commenced.

Down below the strait, when there was no longer any danger from the ice, Startopp, leaning over the rail, saw one day in the offing a spot, the great single jet of a sperm whale. With a crew of Aleuts, who are all expert whalemen, the opportunity was too good to be overlooked, and he ordered the boats lowered.

The boat commanded by his Aleut mate reached the quarry first, and succeeded in planting a couple of irons. But the whale proved to be a fighter, and instantly turned with jaws open. The men dived overboard just in time to save their lives; for a moment later the whale bit the boat to pieces.

Undismayed by this exhibition, Startopp shot his boat in while the angry animal was worrying the fragments of the destroyed boat, and skillfully avoiding the lashing flukes, made fast with two more irons. At this, the monster started to run, sounding first to the full length of the line, and then carrying the boat with him on a thrilling two-mile dash where the bow was smothered in foam, and more than once it seemed as if the axman standing over the taut line would have to sever it to save them from being drawn down.

But he came to the surface to blow, and, still full of fight, flung himself toward Startopp's boat. The latter, any idea of fear swallowed up in the enthusiasm of combat, accepted his challenge. Maneuvering his boat with almost perfect seamanship, he swung in under the snapping jaws, timing himself so as to miss the sweep of the great tail, and accurately as a veteran drove his needle-tipped lance to the "life."

The battle was over. Towing the huge prize, he came back to the ship, and, panting but exultant, clambered over the rail—over the rail and right into Ruth's waiting arms.

"Struck like a Nantucketer!" she exclaimed, as she clasped him close, heedless of his drenched state. "When you drove that lance home, Chris, you signed your marriage license. You'll never escape me now."

That afternoon another whale was struck, and the next morning another. So many were sighted, that it almost seemed as if something was driving them toward the ship; and unwilling to lose such a harvest, Startopp decided to heave to.

For two weeks they lay there, catching and trying out, until the hold was so full that not another cask could be squeezed in. Then one sunset, Startopp gave the word, "All hands up anchor for home!" and, standing in the stern with Ruth, joined her in the historic old chantey:

"We're homeward bound to Nantucket town;
Good-by, fare you well;
When we get there, we'll walk around;
Hurrah, we're homeward bound."

Then as they gazed back over the shining golden track of the vessel's wake, they saw a great spout shoot up into the air, and a mighty head, yellow-banded across the forehead, was raised above the waves.

Another spout, and then with a flash of his huge flukes, the Tonokomoth Tiger turned and made off for some far-away lair beneath the arctic ice.

He had done his duty by that generation.

The Boomeringers

by Henry C. Vance

Author of "Galloping Morpheus," "Power in the Blood," etc.

FOR A WHILE IT DIDN'T LOOK LIKE A FOOTBALL GAME AT ALL; INSTEAD, IT RESEMBLED PLAIN MURDER, A GORY SLAUGHTER OF THE INFANTS. BUT BILL STREETER PRIDED HIMSELF ON HIS STRATEGY. . . . . .

BILL STREETER got his bachelor's degree at college, and has been a bachelor ever since. Bill was both a frat man and a fat man, and so much beef put him on the football team. He was the line-buckingest piece of furniture it has ever fell my lot to glim. I never believed that story about the camel going through the eye of a needle until I seen Bill carry the ball. Bill could go through anything, so why not a camel? Yours affectionately never went to college, I and hard knocks being frat brothers in the school of experience. But I've always followed the bone-smashing and ear-husking grid game, having as many red corpuscles to the cubic foot in my gore lines as the next un.

Soon after Bill had got his sheepskin, by virtue of his work with the pigskin, he comes back home to Beresford and hung out his shingle. He had learned all about old Habeas Corpus, Mandammits, Change of Venus, quasi-quagmire, and that little old disease known as Injunctionitis. He absorbed such things between football games at his Alma Motto. Not that he studied anything but football signals, mind you, but a fella with brain cells in his dome will just naturally let stuff soak in at lecture classes.

Bill spent his time in them early days of practicing law in addressing gents of the jury and letters to creditors, explaining why he couldn't pay the installments for the office furniture and his well-equipped library. It's that way with young lawyers, and always will be. They spend their first five years learning how to starve to death, and just about the time they've mastered the art along comes a clientele, and juicy beefsteaks as thick as a dumb-bell's dome.

While Bill is struggling to learn how Kid Blackstone ever got away with it and lived to tell the tale, the football

fever hits Beresford, and Central High students begin decreasing the window acreage around the old knowledge foundry by kicking the daylights out'n the old window lights, with uncontrollable punts of the oval. Marshtown is a much smaller municipality than Beresford, but the high school up there had already hired a coach and bought themself a tackling dummy. Personally I think the coach could of doubled up and appeared in the title rôle of the dummy without incurring the extra expense—but that's just my personal opinion.

Professor Bordenhammer, principal at Central High, was in for sending away for a coach, like some folks join the mail-order-house cult, but I'm a trade-at-home guy, and I got to the board of trustess before the old prof got to their bank rolls See? I knew that Bill Streeter could do more with a football than Daniel J. Cupid can with a bow and arrow. Also, I was hep to the fact that Bill and overdrafts was awful intimate with each other, and that his wallet was running on a flat tire.

As a consequence Bill was chose to coach Central High by the trustees and acclamation. And with his new job, in connection with his law practice, it made for less bodily injuries to bill collectors when they went a-dunning to Bill's office. And, believe me, Bill took a bunch of greenhorns at the little, old school and had 'em playing a perfect tune before the open season on cranberries and gobblers arrived. Central High was made up of a bunch of kids, and Bill kidded 'em along. He told 'em they was the best in the world, and those little fellows believed Bill's statement was authentic. As a matter of fact, it was his skill and his spirit that put Central High in a tie with Marshtown for the State prep championship. The little Central line looked like a bunch of flyweight box-fighters, and they didn't have no business holding like they done. But, Bill made 'em! He could do more with one pound of flesh than Willie Shakespeare's *Sherlock* ever thought about doing. Add such a spirit to a bunch of assorted trick plays and you've got Central High down pat.

So we come to Thanksgiving Day, but Bill ain't got much to be thankful for. His only heavy man, "Froggy" Gish, who has been doing all the line plunging, is out of the game with a bashed-in skull. Froggy thought his dome was harder than a goal post, and had put the thing to a test in the game with Sheltonville. His head was did up in so many various bandages that he looked like a member of the Ku Klux on dress parade. And the game with Marshtown stared Central in the mush.

I'm a traveling salesman—or think I am—and my duties carried me up to the hotbed of our friends the enemy a coupla days before Thanksgiving. Between calls on the trade, I keep my acoustic racks and glims wide open, and do a little spying on my own hook. Ye gods! Without no ironclad rules as to the eligibility of men, the Marshtown bunch has corralled all the ex-college stars in the county, and let out the hems of the uniforms so they'd fit 'em. Ringers! You get the idea? The full back for the opposish was a old college star, and I really think he had to have a Vandyke mowed off, to keep the facial foliage from being a dead give-away. The quarter had a college grid record and the whole town behind him. The left end had borrowed his unie from his youngest son, what was attending school at Marshtown and on the regular team. It was that way all down the list. They had combed the county for ringers, and had even went so far as to put a guy at center, what Uncle Walt Camp had placed on his all-Southern a few years to the rear. Of course Marshtown was keepin' this stuff as subrosie as possible my old daddy always did conten

I was the greatest cross-examiner and question asker in captivity, even as a kid. When I growed up my brain continued to be a regular curiosity shop, and I was always in quest of questions. I learned the whole plot those two days I spent in Marshtown, prior to the game.

About all I could do for my old pal, Bill Streeter, however, was to be sorry for him. Tank-college athletics has always been in a awful muddle, and probably will be for a coupla more eternities. Rules to govern the eligibility of men is what they need, but what they haven't got. Instead of calling Bill on the phone and putting him wise to my discoveries, I elects to wait in Marshtown and meet him at the train and slip him a earful of the awful facts. It couldn't mean but one thing—that Marshtown would be declared champs of the State —when, as a matter of fact, Central had much the better team. Bill was a stickler for honesty, despite having been called to the bar, and he hadn't rang in a new or ineligible face for this great combat. He was playing bona-fido students all the way through.

I guess my mug must of looked like a lien on trouble when Bill and his rah-rah kids, with their little dog-gone-you hats tilted jauntily on the side of their domes, docks in Marshtown. The very first words the grand old man of the grid game said to me was: "Where's the funeral?"

"It takes place this afternoon," I replies with various and sundry sarcasm.

Bill sidles off from his youngsters, and whispers: "If you got any crape to hang, do it on the q. t. These boys of mine think they can't lose."

"They got another think coming. Join me in my room at the hostelry, Bill, in a half hour, and learn what your intelligence department has did."

With that I leaves him and goes up to the sample room to get my stock packed up. I'm hotfooting it back to Beresford that afternoon, through orders from the boss. Kinder glad of it, too. Will get to see part of the game, but won't have to stick until the bloody end. I'd been worrying about them ringers for the past two days, and I could see in my mind's eye, little young kids sprawled out motionless and blanketing the turf of the football field. Outweighing Bill's boys almost two to one, and with college experience to back 'em up, I couldn't see how them ringers could keep from committing kidslaughter in innumerous instances.

At the appointed time Bill strolls into my room, and I ring for some ice water. A little drink from a bottle will help a fella explain many difficulties, and will also convince what would be a otherwise skeptical gazabo that he can surmount 'em.

"You'll probably see some guys you went against in your college days battering your kids into a pitiful pup," I tells him.

"Ringers?"

"You know it, brother. Greatest assortment of ringers I've ever seen!"

Bill don't bat a eye. Looks at me squarely in the glims and says: "My lads must never know what they're going up against. It would destroy their morale."

"Better have a morale beat all to hell than to check up short on several collar bones, teeth, skulls, and the like," I counsels.

"It's the psychology of the thing," remarks Bill. "In other words, what you don't know don't hurt you none. If these kids of mine think they're going against players of their own class they'll fight 'em from the first whistle like a bunch of highly peeved wild cats."

"Yes," I breaks in, "but what they don't know this time is just naturally going to jar 'em loose from their Adam's apples. Send that grand aggregation of beef and experience again' a

gang of young fuzz-facers, and watch the undertakers throw a smile."

"Leonard Wise once gimme a tip," continues Bill, "and I've put it into application several times since. Leonard is the guy what is property man for pills down at Rankin's pharmaceutical foundry, and ordinarily he's as harmless as aspirin. Lee McCullough—you know him—is a pool shark down at Beresford, and has convinced the juries that nine men he bumped off was croaked in self-defense. He's starting in on his tenth jury in the January term of court. They ain't a man in the whole county that would call Lee a liar, except maybe over long-distance phone.

"But Leonard don't know Lee, except by reputation, and while Mr. Wise and a coupla lady friends is setting in at a chop-suey party down at Long Choo's place one night this McCullough bully comes in, using a mongrel breed of profanity. The janes Leonard is with is pretty refined in a way, and Leonard marches over to Mr. McCullough and tells him to emulate a deaf and dummy and to be quick about it.

"McCullough is stewed, and he tries to tell Leonard where to head in. And Mr. Wise, not knowing that he's talking to a guy what has bumped off ten well-nourished human beings, doubles up his knuckle rack and knocks Lee for a row of narcotics.

"See? Leonard didn't know the class he was going up against. Next day, when he found out who he had hit, he started on a trembling spree which lasted for a week and which looked like it would develop into permanent palsy.

"When Leonard tells me that yarn it gimme a hunch, and I've tried it out several times. As long as a man, or a bunch of men think they're the best in the world, and don't realize that they're entering competition under a handicap, they can hold out for a long while over a faction that obviously has 'em outclassed. My men shall never know they're battling a bunch of old college stars this afternoon—until maybe after the game is over."

Having got this line of bunk out'n his system, Bill looks over at me like he might be Mr. Solomon in person, but his stare don't hypnotize me a iota's worth. I've always had a mind of my own.

"Theoretically your logic is as sound as Long Island," I tells him, "but you can take several carloads of theory, and it won't win no football games. I've got a perfectly good hunch that your high-schoolers is going to be knocked into a mangled mass this p. m., and that after the slaughter you'll never be able to tell which is which, unless you have presence of mind enough to put identification tags around their necks before the massacre gets going."

"That's neither here nor elsewhere," allows Mr. Streeter. "All I ask of you is that you add *'mum'* to your vocabulary and use it extensively. Don't say nothing to my boys about these ringers, and leave the rest to me."

So that was that. And in the afternoon I goes out to the alleged stadium to suffer through three quarters of agony before I catches the rattler for Beresford.

I wish you could of lamped that crowd! They was gathered there from the four corners of the county. The little, old, rickety stand couldn't begin to hold 'em, and they swarmed down to the side lines and surrounded the huge, rectangular plot of turf, with its whitewashed lines and goal posts. Many of hoodlum persuasion was beating tin pans, rattling cow bells, and raising a general twin bedlam and hullabaloo in their rooting for their beloved Marshtown. Farmers had flivvered in, got next to Marshtown's added strength and hired help, and was waving bills in the air and begging for bets.

silo citizen usually has to

like this before he'll turn any of the long green loose in town. Yet a lightning-rod agent can invade the soil tiller of the species in his own home and walk away with everything he's got, including the red plush upholstery on the parlor sofa.

When Streeter's midget Central High squad trotted on the field and begin some fancy-formation stuff for warming-up exercises, and was followed by the Herculean Marshtown ringers, it looked like a bunch of Lilliputians against a army of Gullivers.

Then the game got going, with everybody crowding around the field and making a reverberant noise like a candy-striped silk shirt or something. Central kicked off, and Marshtown returned only a few yards. Them little Central bantams didn't seem to fear 'em. They was tackling low and hard, and in spite of their give-away in weight they was downing whoever happened to be carrying the ball. Them little fellas did have brains, and Bill had coached 'em mighty well in fathoming plays of the opposish. Almost before I or any one else knew what was happening, the Marshtown yeggs had been held for downs and the ball went over. I rubbed my eyes and pinched myself to ascertain whether I was dreaming or not.

But right here came a pitiful part of the fray. Instead of using some passes to get goalward, the Central quarter seemed to miss Bill's signal. I got it like a flash, but the little quarter booted it. He elected the ramrodian style, and called for a plunge formation. Imagine a set of little guys like that trying to line buck their way for downs. It was just like J. Kilbane taking a swing for Jack the Demp's jaw. They used up a coupla downs on the bucking process before Bill's tip come through. The battering-ram process had muddled up their brain cells, so the trick-pass plays failed to carry, and again the ball went over.

I could see little streams of crimson starting on the features of several of Bill's boys, and I knew right then that those game little guys would never be able to weather four quarters of that fierce stuff. By this time the Marshtown bunch had got risky, and was offering big odds on their favorites to cop, with few—if any—takers in sight.

That little, old line looked like they dogs had been nailed into the turf, though, and they started holding again. The Marshtown yellow streak was quite prominent when the full dropped back for a kick.

And so it was for the remainder of the first quarter—a exchange of punts. At that style of play the smaller faction could at least hold its own for a while. They wasn't getting as much distance with their boots, but the difference didn't hurt. To me it looked like the Marshtown ringers had elected to fight it out the easiest way. They would weary the featherweights down before they started their bone-crushing drives for the enemy's goal.

At the end of the first quarter the score stood naughty-naughty in neither's favor, and while the teams was exchanging goals I moved around the field until I could get a squint at Bill Streeter.

He's setting there by the water bucket, grinning fiendishly. The old boy knows he's fighting against odds, but that's the very thing that throws a thrill through a fella of Bill's type. Them kind of guys ain't never looking for nothing easy. If Bill had of been looking for something soft he wouldn't never of tried to dig out a living at practicing law in Beresford.

Bill sees me edging toward him, and he broadens his grin and sends a wink my way. When I'm in whispering distance he leans over and says: "Best little team of fighters in the world. If I told 'em to put Jim Thorpe out'n the way, they'd at least make a stab at it!"

"But, Bill," I remonstrates, "the

grand jury will probably indict you as a accomplish in this series of murders."

"Murder my eye!" he exclaims. "You don't see no subs reporting to the referee, do you? Well, that's the spirit. 'Stubby' Logan is in there playing end with one eye closed. They got to his glim with a short-arm foul, but it makes him fight all the harder. 'Lefty' Macklin was cuckoo through the rear part of that first quarter. Some guy gave him the rabbit punch with the heel of his shoe. Referee didn't see it. In fact this here bum official can't see anything. But watch 'em! Watch 'em fight!"

The whistle blowed, and I watched 'em.

Say, there's something to Bill's logic, at that. Them youngsters, ignorant of the way the cards had been stacked against 'em, was fighting doggedly for every inch of ground. It was a glim for a glim, a tooth for a tooth, a deflected knee cap for a busted rib, and so on down the line. When Marshtown started roughing it the kids had something in rebuttal, you can betcha. But I knew it was only a question of time until something would crack. The odds was too heavy again' 'em. Bill Streeter was asking too much of the dice. The day of miracles passed in the good year of Our Lord nineteen-fourteen, after Geo. Stallings had went through the National League gaspers to a pennant.

The crowd, what had expected them illegitimates to ride roughshod over the young innocents, was getting the surprise of their lives. Everything had been cut and dried for a Marshtown walk-away. Knowing in advance what was almost sure to come off, the student body had planned for a big pajama pageant. They had gave orders with the sign painters before the game commenced for sarcastic placards with which to humiliate the Centralites. And, now that the walk-away wouldn't jell as quickly as they had counted on, many of 'em was getting cold feet. On some, where the vein of yellow stood out more prominently, they jammed into the side lines and hurled epithets at the Central midgets—the gamest little body of blokes what ever wore cleats.

Wow! Here comes George Archer, what had win his spurs as a end runner on one of the biggest college teams in Dixie. He was a-coming round right end with all the fury of a cyclone behind schedule. Speed enough, momentum enough, and brute strength enough to crush Central's little end, but he had seen it tried several times already during the hectic struggle, with little success, and he elected a side-step instead, and got away with it. On he went with only Sammy Marks in his path. He ducked Sammy, too, but was the latter downhearted? I should say not! Sammy wheeled like a lightning flash and begin chasing one of the best grid runners of the past decade, but Sammy didn't know the caliber of man he was chasing. That's what give little Mr. Marks wings and courage. He cranked up his dogs, and soon had 'em in high. And then—with one mighty, supreme effort, he flang himself forward, pulled a jackknife dive for the speeding Archer, and brought him to old Ma Earth with as pretty a tackle as you would see on a blackboard diagram.

The measly clan of Central rooters went wild following this heroic stunt. I marveled at the tackle myself, but, seeing the run had carried the ringers within twenty yards of Central's goal, I knew it was all over but the pouting. This, in my mind, was the turning point of the game. Class, experience, and brute strength had asserted itself at last.

Even the most perfect criminal is going to pull some bone that will spill the beans, though. The ringers had got overconfident again. Instead of plunging through for downs, as they could undoubtedly have did, they decided to

try a forward pass. Central eats passes as a breakfast serial every morning. They grabbed off the play before it got under way, and "Little Lucy" Hairston —non de plumed that way by virtue of his frailties—climbed up into the ozone and intercepted her. Ye gods! That Marshtown bunch was as silent as the "p" in psychology, except for a occasional groan.

Lucy dug his cleats in the turf. He was away like a tropical twister. Bam! A big hulk planted his fist right in Lucy's frontispiece, but the officials apparently turned their backs and looked the other way. I guess Lucy had more dukes and elbows in his poor features in that brief run than he'd ever seen before. It wasn't a tackle that brought him to earth. It was sheer exhaustion. He had cleared the enemy, but those blows to vulnerable spots on his chin, cheeks, and nose had put the minus mark on further navigation. He crumpled to the ground, as inanimate as the Dead Sea on a calm day. But in spite of his loss of consciousness, intuition made him cling to the oval with all the tenacity that Brother Hammerstein clung to that high silk kelly.

Murder! Manslaughter! Homicide! Them Marshtown bullies piled on the lifeless little form of Lucy, showing no mercy whatever. Looked to me like they was going to be forced to page a steam shovel to get the fragments of that gritty little morsel out of the ground. Funny part about it—he didn't want to quit when Bill rushed a sub to the rescue. His structure may of been fragile, but that boy's heart was built of the finest-tempered steel.

It was imperative that he come out of there, though, for he had the general appearance of being run through a concrete mixer going full tilt, and then flattened out by an asphalt-surfacing steam roller to complete the job of mutilation.

That bit of misfortune necessitated another punt. Central was still not out of danger, but she kicked out, and a few minutes later the half come to a close. Pity that such a supersanguinary football battle like that was being wasted on a hick audience, where real sportsmen are as scarce as spring freshets in Arizona.

Bill got his clan of bleeding tribesmen together. He patted 'em on the back; he hugged 'em; he told 'em they were the best in the world; he spilled the info that the opposish was nothing but a set of dirty dogs, what should be placed in the public pound. He made 'em forget aching ears, lob-sided tonsils, warped ribs, addled Adam's apples, dishraggy noses, frazzled features, and even torn ligaments. Believe me, that Bill Streeter was the greatest hand to have around when a crissis arrived that I've ever seen. He was old Kid Pep in person. I believe he could of instilled that fighting spirit into the mummified corpse of a Portugeese soldier.

The Marshtown ancients was a wee bit winded. The pace had been pretty swift for a bunch of old-timers which had just had a couple of weeks to whip themself in shape and put the minus mark on flabbiness and torsos. They spent the rest period between the second and third quarter lying flat on their backs and attempting to drink in enough ozone to carry them through to the finish.

At the start of the second half those Centralites zipped into action in a way that made their eyeballs click. They had sponged off the gore and bound up the wounds, having more adhesive tape on their anatomy than one finds on a carload shipment of baseball bats. They were begging for more punishment, it looked like—and they got it. Two or three new men started the second half for Marshtown. They was brawnier and fiercer looking than their predecessors had been.

I stuck through the third period, and couldn't hardly tear myself away from the scene at the start of the fourth and last. I looked at my old watch and chain and noted that I didn't have but a little while to catch that train for Beresford. And, gee, how I hated to reneg on a conflict like that! But business is business, and bread and meat is sustenance. I knew the district sales superintendent would be waiting for me at Beresford. Before I left, however, I realized that my worst fears was coming true. The battering-ram of weight against the more delicate machinery of the Central eleven was telling, and telling fast. The little fellas was just as game as ever, but tattered, torn, bleeding, breathing heavily, and almost completely exhausted; they would not be able to stand that final period's onslaught. They had stuck it out to the beginning of the fourth quarter, however, with the score on a fifty-fifty, nothing-nothing basis. I saw the beginning of the grand finale, and the onward march of Marshtown to Central's goal. With the little boys wavering, I was glad that the call of duty was pulling me away. I wouldn't 'a' had the heart to set there with my arms folded and watched them big bullies batter the defenseless little cusses into the earth.

I grabbed my grip and a jitney, and beat it for the train.

This here home-office man from the factory I work for is nothing in the world but a walking price list. Statistics at their best ain't the most interesting things in the world, and you can imagine how I felt, closeted in a room with this guy at Beresford, as he blabbed away about price reductions, with my mind, heart, and soul on the football game I had deserted.

My boss's emissary pumped information into me until after dark, and I didn't have a chance to sneak out to a phone and grab off the final score. When I left him I just had time to make the train and welcome Bill and the boys back home. I didn't see no ambulances at the main entrance of the station, though I was sure they should of been some—or maybe Bill's kids had been treated so murderously that it was too late for ambulances to do any good?

The rattler pulled in, and I begin to look for the sad features of Bill's face. Instead, he greets me with a smile as wide as Texas.

I was a animated interrogation point as I jumped at him. "Bill, what was the score?"

The grin epidemic on his mush becomes more pronounced. Even his eyes is laughing. "Nothing-nothing!" He shouted them two words into my astonished cauliflowers.

"But, Bill," I gasped, "when I left that battle them ringers was overpowering your men, and I figured a sweep down the field was inevitable."

"It would of been but for some highly tempered strategy and one of the greatest breaks in luck a team ever got."

"Suffering Moses!" I ejaculates. "Tell me about it?"

Bill sidles off, and begins: "Well, old-timer, when they starts that hell-raising rush down the field in the final few minutes of play I sends a sub in to relieve one of my boys. The new man, under the strain of excitement, failed to report to the referee, and on the following play I had twelve men in the line-up.

"The referee hadn't seen nothing all afternoon, and his glims was still out of focus. The crowd was gathered around the side lines and raising hell. In all this pandemonium nobody knew his own mind.

"A dozen little fellas can do more to stop a squad of huskies than eleven." Bill grinned here, and just to prod my curiosity along he stopped talking long

enough to detach a chew from his plug of natural leaf. He spat, and continued: "Thirteen little folks can do more than twelve, and I figured if the ref had booted one so flagrantly there was no reason why he might not duplicate. I sent the thirteenth man in, and that helped stop 'em some more."

My tummy was shaking like it had the palsy. Bread baskets have a habit of acting like that when a fella goes on a laughing spree.

"So much howling and excitement that nobody got hep," says Bill. "Pretty soon I have fourteen men again' 'em, and I was getting ready to shoot my fifteenth in when the whistle blows and the old contest dies right there. Say, I've heard that old Scripture's passage, 'None is so blind as them what will not see,' but I didn't have an inkling of an idea as to what it meant until I saw the rotten work of that referee today."

I could consume the season's entire crop of laughing gas at one setting and not get no more hilarity than I spilled right there. Funny part about it is that them Marshtown wise guys ain't woke up yet to the fact that foxy old Bill Streeter had fourteen gridironists battling eleven of their ringers.

THE TRAIL TO HOME

By James Edward Hungerford

I HAVE followed trails through the snow and sleet,
Where the blizzards wild rampage,
And I've followed trails through the tropic heat,
Where the blinding sandstorms rage;
I have followed trails that were strewn with thorns,
And wound through a world of gloom,
And I've followed trails upon sunlit morns,
When the wild flowers were in bloom.

I have followed trails through the cañons deep,
And trails on the mountains high,
And I've held my breath upon ascents steep,
When a slip would have meant *good-by*.
I have taken trails with a dreary start,
That banished my every care,
And I've picked up trails with a happy heart
That ended in black despair.

I have followed trails that have seemed to hold
A promise of what I sought—
The rainbow trails to the pot-o'-gold
That beckoned—and led to naught.
But there's one old trail I can always take
When I've wearied and ceased to roam—
A dear old trail where there's no heartache—
And the end of the trail is *home*.

The Phantom Clew

A Jimmie Dale Series

By Frank L. Packard

Author of "The Miracle Man," "The Lodestone," etc.

VI.—THE CAT'S-PAW

JIMMIE DALE AND MARIE LA SALLE, WHO ASSUME VARIOUS RÔLES IN THE UNDERWORLD FOR THE PURPOSE OF TRACKING DOWN CRIMINALS, ARE SEEKING THE "PHANTOM," THE MYSTERIOUS AND ELUSIVE MASTER CROOK. . . . .

THE room was heavy with drifting layers of smoke, as it always was in this back, upstairs room of "Wally" Kerrigan's "club," that was the hang-out of "Gentleman" Laroque's, alias the Phantom's, gang. Four men sat at the table playing stud. Jimmie Dale, as Smarlinghue the drug-wrecked artist, seated a little apart, watched them as he fumbled with the dirty, frayed sleeves and wristbands of his coat and shirt, and, fumbling then in his pocket, drew out a hypodermic syringe, its nickel plating worn and brassy, its general appearance as disreputable looking as himself.

How many nights had he come to this room, as he had come to-night, playing a game that was not a game of cards, with "Bunty" Myers here, and the Kitten, and Muller, and "Spud" MacGuire! How many nights? He had almost lost track of time. The wound in his cheek had healed. He had even resumed, in so far as an occasional appearance at the St. James Club, and here and there a social function went, his normal life as Jimmie Dale. He must have been coming here for many nights!

Through half-closed, apparently drug-drowsed eyes, he watched the players at the table. Yes, it must have been for many nights. It was over a week since —his fingers tightened involuntarily in a fierce, spasmodic grip upon the hypodermic—since that night when he had held the Tocsin once again in his arms in old "Miser" Scroff's room, and had lost her again. Since then he had continued to cultivate these men. They were only pawns, they moved only at the will of that unseen, ever-present spirit of evil, the Phantom; but to be one of them opened the Avenue of a Thousand Chances that might lead to the Phantom himself.

But so far nothing had come of it. They did not distrust him—who in the underworld would distrust Smarlinghue, who had the entrée everywhere?—but they had made no advances toward offering him full membership in that un-

hallowed fraternity to which he knew they belonged. At times he had believed they had been on the verge of doing so, and that applied especially to Bunty Myers, who was the Phantom's apparent chief of staff; but there had been nothing definite, nothing concrete, nothing tangible.

And yet, even in a negative sense, the nights he had spent here of late had not been futile. He was in possession of the fact that there had been *inactivity*. And that meant that the Phantom, whatever might be germinating in that master mind of crime, had for the time being been quiescent; and, as a corollary to that, the almost certain deduction that no further blow had been struck at the Tocsin—that she was still safe. And this had been borne out by Mother Margot, who, so far, had always been the Phantom's mouthpiece. As the Gray Seal, and through the hold that, as the Gray Seal, he had had upon her ever since that night when he had caught her dipping too greedily into the spoils at the expense of her own confederates, he had called her daily from her pushcart to the telephone in a near-by store, and had questioned her. She had protested vehemently each time that she had had no further word of any move, and he was satisfied that she was telling the truth for the simple reason that he did not believe she would dare do anything else.

But, even so, unknown to her, he had still maintained, in so far as he could, a personal surveillance over her movements, and there had been nothing to disprove her statements. She still tended her pushcart in Thompson Street; she still lived in those rooms from which the Phantom, in the dual guise of Shiftel, the fence, and Gentleman Laroque, who once had openly led this very gang here, had so mysteriously disappeared.

Smarlinghue's face was vapid, but into the dark eyes behind the drooping eyelids there came a troubled gleam. Those rooms where the Voice, as Mother Margot called the Phantom, had installed the old hag! What was the secret that they held? He was certain that Mother Margot did not know. And twice again, of late, in Mother Margot's absence, and despite the Tocsin's warning that they were a trap for himself, he had explored them, searched them—and found nothing.

And now the men around the table, the room itself, his immediate surroundings, existed only in a subconscious way in Jimmie Dale's mind. That was the negative side of the week just past. There was equally the positive side.

Shiftel had returned to the underworld.

Not openly. Not to his old quarters. At first the rumor had flown from mouth to mouth through the underground exchanges of the Bad Lands that Shiftel was back; that he had been seen a dozen times in the hidden places, the lairs, the hang-outs, the breeding dens of vice; that crooks of his old, exclusive clientele had talked with him, done business with him. And at first, he, Jimmie Dale, had not believed it; and then he had seen the man himself. He was sure of it. Shiftel! Isaac Shiftel, alias Gentleman Laroque, alias "Limpy" Mack, alias Graybeard, alias the Gentleman with the Gold Spectacles —the Phantom! The man that the Tocsin had so truly said possessed a score of domiciles and, yes, entities—there was no better word, for in each of his disguises the man seemed to have established himself as a known and breathing entity in the life and surroundings of the peculiar character which for the moment he might have assumed. As witness Shiftel, the fence, known far and wide in the underworld; as witness Gentleman Laroque, long the leader of this band here, long the most notorious gangster in the Bad Lands.

He had seen Shiftel three nights ago

in the Green Dragon, a dance hall of unsavory repute. And Shiftel, the man who was the cause of his, Jimmie Dale's, return to the life of Smarlinghue and the squalor of the Sanctuary, the man who sought the Tocsin's life, the one man that he, Jimmie Dale, would gladly have sacrificed his all to bring to a final reckoning and account, had escaped him that night in the Green Dragon.

He shook his head, mumbling to himself, almost mechanically continuing to play his part in the presence of these underlings around the table even while his mind was far away. It was not his fault that Shiftel, once seen, had got away. He could not in any fairness hold himself to blame. He had caught but a glimpse of the man far across the hall, as in the swirl of the bunny-hug the dancers on the polished center of the floor had opened for a moment and closed again. When he had reached the other end of the room Shiftel had disappeared. That was all.

It was strange! What was the game? What was the meaning of this reappearance? The man was running a tremendous risk, and the motive must certainly be commensurate with the danger. What was that motive? Shiftel was wanted, and wanted badly, by the police for his connection with the diamonds stolen from Jathan Lane, the murdered banker. There was no such person, of course, as Shiftel—it was the Phantom. Shiftel was only one of the Phantom's disguises to be put on or off at will. But it was the known character of Shiftel that the police sought. Why had the man shown himself in that character, lived it again? He need only have discarded it utterly, never returned to it, and as far as Shiftel was concerned he could have laughed at the police until the day he died.

What was it? What was at the back of that crafty brain whose evil genius had prompted this move? No little thing! Had the Tocsin's note that he, Jimmie Dale, had found among the mail Jason had handed him when he had appeared at home for his lunch yesterday, any bearing on the Phantom's motive? He did not think so; rather, out of the ruck of explanations that had suggested themselves, and which were for the most part hopelessly untenable, there had finally come one that he was almost ready to accept.

Smarlinghue's lips twisted in a grin —apparently one inspired by Spud MacGuire as the man scooped a pot on a barefaced bluff. Well, why not? Even if it was a back-handed compliment to himself! The Phantom was shy of funds. Time after time of late, he, Jimmie Dale, as the Gray Seal, had forestalled the other, and snatched away the fruits of the man's criminal schemes. Where, in the past few weeks, the Phantom had counted upon thousands, many of them, and had even spent lavishly to pave the unhallowed way to the expected profits, he had received instead not a single penny. The Phantom, therefore, unless he possessed the reserve wealth of a Crœsus, was certainly shy of funds.

Yes, that was it. It *must* be it. And as almost irrefutable evidence of this was the fact that the Phantom, as Shiftel, was said to be in communication again with some of those who composed that carefully selected circle of crooks who had been his tried and successful business associates in the past; and that was why, too, it was as Shiftel, and not as Limpy Mack, not as Gentleman Laroque, or any one of his other aliases, that the Phantom had ventured, cautiously it was true, but nevertheless had ventured out into the underworld again.

The Tocsin's note! It came uppermost into his mind now. It was the first sign of existence she had given since that night at old Miser Scroff's.

His lips were still twisted in a smile, but there was something cold, forbid-

ding, far removed from smiles, that seemed suddenly now to weigh upon his spirits. She had written; but it had only been to accentuate, as it were, her decision that night when he had been so sure of taking his place again beside her. Alone! That was it—alone! It was her love of course, her great unselfish love, that prompted her to try to keep him out of the shadows, out of *her* dangers. The note reiterated it; he knew it word for word:

DEAR PHILANTHROPIC CROOK: I see that you are incorrigible. If I thought that it would do any good I would implore you again—— Oh, Jimmie, I *do* implore you to leave all this to me, and to go back at once to your own life. I am half mad with fear for you. There is something, some trap being laid, and I cannot find out what it is. I only know that the Phantom has become suspicious that behind the Gray Seal's repeated blows there is more than a mere desire to reap where the Phantom has sown. I only know that the Phantom is convinced that he himself is the Gray Seal's one and only object; and, in turn, the Phantom means to move heaven and earth now to get the Gray Seal—first. Oh, I know you won't do as I ask you! I know you too well. I know that, if anything, this hint of danger will perhaps even urge you on. But I *had* to write. I had to warn you because I am afraid, and because I know that in some way, with all his hideous cunning behind it, the Phantom is laying a trap for you that——

Bunty Myers swung around in his chair, and made a grimace at the hypodermic syringe with whose needle Jimmie Dale was now pricking the skin of his forearm.

"Say, can dat, Smarly!" he complained. "Youse gives me nerves. Youse have been monkeyin' wid dat squirt gun for de last half hour. If it won't work, for Gawd's sake go down to de chink's, or somewhere else, and hit a pipe."

The door opened.

Mechanically Jimmie Dale restored the hypodermic to his pocket. He was staring at the doorway. It was not the sudden appearance of that haglike, black-shawled figure that set his brains at work in swift, lightning flashes, and brought every faculty he possessed into play to preserve the indifference, even apathy, that became the supposedly drug-dulled Smarlinghue, for Mother Margot, he knew, was a frequent visitor here. It was not Mother Margot who caused his pulse to stir now; it was the man who had stepped into the room behind her—Little Sweeney.

It seemed somehow to dovetail and fit most curiously into his thoughts of Shiftel of a few moments gone. His hand, inside his pocket, as it released the hypodermic closed instead upon his automatic. He kept staring at the door—behind Little Sweeney. Was there still *some one* else? The last time these two had been together there had been another with them. That night at Mrs. Kinsey's, when they had tried to rob the old deaf woman of her savings! There had been another with them then—Limpy Mack. But Limpy Mack was also Shiftel, also Gentleman Laroque; in a word, the Phantom. Was Shiftel, or the Phantom in whatever guise he chose to assume, there behind these two to-night? Little Sweeney had not been heard of or seen since that night. This was Little Sweeney's first appearance, and——

The door closed.

Little Sweeney, with a nod that embraced everybody, leaned nonchalantly back against the door and lighted a cigarette. Mother Margot stared around the room, and then her eyes fixed on Jimmie Dale. He saw her glance swiftly then, interrogatively, at Bunty Myers.

Bunty Myers waved his hand.

"Smarly, meet Mother Margot," he said offhandedly. "Mabbe youse knows Little Sweeney."

Meet Mother Margot! There was something exquisitely ironical in this, wasn't there? If Mother Margot but

knew how many times and under what circumstances they had met before!

Mother Margot loosened her shawl, and slumped down in a chair.

"Everybody knows Smarlinghue," she said.

"Sure," said Little Sweeney from the door.

"Glad to meet you both," said Smarlinghue cordially.

There was silence for a moment. Mother Margot folded her hands patiently in her lap. The silence, prolonged, grew embarrassed. Bunty Myers broke it.

"Beat it!" he suggested uncompromisingly to Jimmie Dale.

Jimmie Dale, as Smarlinghue, vacant eyed as he looked around the room, rose from his chair. It was a little awkward—a little awkward to carry it off as though it were quite a matter of course. He grinned around the circle.

"See you all again," said Smarlinghue pleasantly.

Little Sweeney opened the door.

"Damned thick in here, this smoke," said Little Sweeney, as Smarlingue shuffled through. "I'll leave it open till the room clears out a bit. 'Night, Smarly!"

"Good night!" said Jimmie Dale still pleasantly; but out in the hall, and as he turned and went down the stairs, his lips tightened into a straight line.

Little Sweeney was no fool! The fire escape, just within reach, just outside the window of the room where the broken pane, mended with cardboard, had once before supplied him, Jimmie Dale, with a vantage point from which he could both see and hear all that went on within, was barred to him now by the open door; also the open door, with Little Sweeney standing there, offered no alternative to a prompt and unhesitating exit via the stairs from even the building itself!

Jimmie Dale's lips drew still tighter together as he went on down the stairs. In spite of Smarlinghue's high station in the underworld, he had been treated with scant ceremony! But it was not the hurt of pride in that, as one of the élite of gangland, the honor and deference that was his due had been withheld from him, that brought the grim, set expression to his face now; it was the consciousness of defeat where he had foreseen victory. He had counted too much on the intimacy that he had first cultivated and then believed he had established with Bunty Myers and his fellow gangsters. He had believed and hoped that he was not far from the verge of being initiated into their unholy fold, of being invited, in plain words, to become one of them.

He shrugged his shoulders as he stepped out on the street. Well, he had lost on that score for the time being, at least. He was wrong, that was all. But he had burned no bridges behind him. To-morrow night Smarlinghue could still go back there, and be welcome. And as for to-night—well, he was not yet through with to-night! There was something undoubtedly afoot again. What was it? He crossed to the other side of the street, and just opposite the side door of Wally Kerrigan's club, where he could watch that door unseen, he slipped, unnoticed, into the shadows of a high flight of dwelling-house steps.

What was it? He could not, as Smarlinghue, accost Mother Margot when she came out; and by the time he had gone to the Sanctuary and become the man in the evening clothes that she knew as the Gray Seal, she would as likely as not have left Kerrigan's and have disappeared. Queer! Somehow, he was not interested in *what* was afoot to-night in so far as its specific nature was an essential feature. He was more interested in this sudden appearance of Little Sweeney in conjunction with the fact that Shiftel, too, had broken cover. It was the Phantom

that interested him—and Shiftel was the Phantom.

Was there any connection between this return of both Little Sweeney and Isaac Shiftel to activity? He meant to see! The two had been very closely allied that night at Mrs. Kinsey's, and particularly later on that same night—the Phantom had been in the guise of Limpy Mack on that occasion—in Limpy Mack's hang-out under Sen Yat's "tea shop."

And so, somehow—he smiled grimly—he was more concerned with Little Sweeney than with Mother Margot tonight. Little Sweeney *might* lead him to Shiftel; Mother Margot he had already tried too often to have any hopeful expectations raised on that score. Perhaps luck was breaking at last. To reach the Phantom, in the guise of Shiftel or any other, was the one thing in life that he sought; to meet the man once again face to face was why he was here now, why night after night, and day after day, he still risked his life playing this precarious rôle of Smarlinghue here in the underworld. Even a *chance* was worth while. It was rather curious that Little Sweeney and Shiftel, both of whom had dropped completely out of sight for so long a time, should both now have made their appearance again! And so, at the present moment, he was exceedingly interested in Little Sweeney.

Jimmie Dale crouched there in the shadows. Pedestrians passed up and down. Perhaps a quarter of an hour went by. Then the side door of Kerrigan's opened, and a shawled figure stepped out and scurried away. Mother Margot! And then presently the door opened again, and Little Sweeney and Bunty Myers came out together.

Jimmie Dale slipped out on the street, and, on the opposite side, followed the two men as they went down the block. At the corner they separated, and Jimmie Dale took up Little Sweeney's trail.

Block after block the man traversed. Jimmie Dale, hugging the shadows of the buildings, kept a position as nearly opposite the man across the street as he dared, wary always of a corner around which the man might turn, and, with too great a distance separating them, disappear into some place—should that be his objective—before he, Jimmie Dale, could round the corner and pick up the trail again.

Little Sweeney walked fast, obviously unconscious of pursuit, and obviously with some set and fixed destination in view. The chase headed down toward the water front. The quarter now was one of small stores and dwellings, dark for the most part, save for the saloons. Jimmie Dale's face set grimly. It was not an overinviting neighborhood!

And then suddenly Little Sweeney swung around a corner. Jimmie Dale quickened his step, and reached the corner himself in time to see the other, after skirting a fence that inclosed either a vacant lot or a store yard of some sort, turn abruptly at the end of the fence and disappear. In an instant, Jimmie Dale, quick, silent in his movements, though he was running now, crossed the street, and in turn was skirting the fence. There was a lane beyond, of course—that was it! Little Sweeney had not entered any house; he had just turned around the far corner of the fence, and—— Jimmie Dale stood suddenly stock-still. Out from the corner of the fence, flooding the sidewalk, came streaming a powerful ray of light.

And then Little Sweeney's voice, rasping:

"Of course, it's me! Shut off them damned lights!"

The light disappeared as quickly as it had come. Footsteps crunched faintly in the lane, receding. Jimmie Dale edged quickly forward to the corner of the fence, and peered cautiously around it.

It was quite clear now; there was nothing mysterious about the light that had flung its beams across the sidewalk; it was even commonplace. From a rickety-looking metal garage, which was perhaps twenty-five yards back from the street and in which there stood an automobile, some one had sent the headlights playing along the lane.

For a moment Jimmie Dale stood there watching. There was a single incandescent light burning in the garage which illuminated the place dimly, and, aside from Little Sweeney who was just stepping inside, he could make out the forms of two men standing beside the car. He dared not enter the lane, of course. It would be the act of a fool! A chance sound, those headlights switched upon him, and——

The slouching, bent, almost decrepit figure of Smarlinghue drew back; and the next instant, after a swift glance around him to make sure that he was unobserved, with a spring, lithe and agile as a cat, he had swung himself over the fence from the sidewalk, and had dropped without a sound to the yard on the other side. He began to move noiselessly along that section of the fence which flanked the lane. It ran straight to the edge of the garage, he had observed from the street, and —yes, it ended there! He was in luck! He was crouched now against the wall of the garage itself, which obviously, though it was too dark to see, served to complete the inclosure, in lieu of fence, at this corner of the yard.

He could hear them talking now as plainly as though he were inside, for he was separated from them only by the thin metal sheeting of the garage; and, furthermore, just above his head, shoulder high, where a faint light seeped out, the window was open.

"This is a hell of a place for a meeting!" Little Sweeney's voice grumbled.

"Wot's de matter wid it?" another voice demanded, with a hint of truculence. "It's as good as anywhere else, I guess, an' a damned sight better'n most. I told youse I had to make a trip first with some swag for a friend of mine."

"Oh, all right, Goldie!" said Little Sweeney placatingly. "All right! I know you did. Forget it!"

Jimmie Dale raised himself cautiously, and, back at an angle from the window sash that precluded the possibility of being seen, looked inside. His lips tightened suddenly. The other two were no strangers, either to any one in the underworld or to the police. Goldie Kline and the Weasel! Goldie Kline was one of the cleverest box-workers in the business; the Weasel, a shriveled little runt, was without a peer as a second-story man.

It was the Weasel now who spoke.

"Me," he said, "I wouldn't touch dem stones on a bet if any one but old Shiftel was goin' to fence dem, 'cause dere ain't no one else could get away wid dem. De Melville-Dane emerald necklace! Swipe me! Dere ain't a stone in de bunch dat ain't known all over de lot, an' it'll take *some* shovin', even by Shiftel, to cash in on 'em. De lady wid de name parted in de middle'll be——"

"Close your face!" said Little Sweeney politely. "You've seen Shiftel, haven't you, and he's settled that to your satisfaction? All you fellows have to do is get the stones to-night, and leave the rest to him."

"Sure!" said the Weasel blithely. "I ain't kickin'! I'm only sayin' dat I wouldn't go in on de deal wid nobody else but Shiftel. Well, spill de rest of it! We're to slip him de stones as soon as we pinches dem. Dat's understood. An' youse have come down here to tell us where he's layin' low to-night, an' where we're goin' to find him; so let's have it."

Jimmie Dale leaned forward a little in strained attention. Shiftel! The one

man he would risk, that he *had* risked, limb and life and liberty to reach! He had made no mistake in following Little Sweeney!

And then a blank look, that changed swiftly to one of bitter dismay, settled on Jimmie Dale's face. The roar of the engine starting up had suddenly drowned out all other sound. No—it was subsiding a little now. He caught Goldie Kline's voice:

"Aw, we can talk in de car. I gotta get dat job I was tellin' youse about done before ten o'clock. Dat's de only thing dere's any hurry about. De necklace job don't come off till de early mornin' when de dame's gone by-by. Jump in, Sweeney; we'll drop youse anywhere youse like."

They were gone—the car, Little Sweeney, the Weasel, Goldie Kline. Jimmie Dale stood there alone in the blackness of the yard. He could not follow them. They were gone. It had seemed that success at last had been actually within his grasp. It numbed him now somehow that it had been so swiftly and unexpectedly snatched away. He had little or no chance of finding Little Sweeney again to-night; he *might,* with luck, pick up the trail of Goldie Kline or the Weasel somewhere in the underworld, but—— He had turned away from the garage, making his way back toward the street, and now he halted abruptly, staring into the darkness.

Had he lost his wits? What was this that his subconscious mind had kept whispering over and over to him as the keynote of everything from the moment the name had been mentioned? Melville-Dane! Melville-Dane! That was in his *own* world, wasn't it? They were his own friends. Strange! Curious! Yes, he remembered now. Soon after he ventured home again after his "absence" from the city, he had found an invitation to some affair, a reception, if he were not mistaken, at the Melville-Danes' for to-night. He had sent his regrets, it was true; but he was on too intimate a footing with them to have that make any difference.

And now Jimmie Dale moved on again, reached the fence, and gained the sidewalk on the other side. He was also well acquainted with that emerald necklace—a priceless thing that seldom left the shelter of its safe-deposit vault. Mrs. Melville-Dane was evidently wearing it to-night at the reception!

He started on along the street. A word of warning, then, to the Melville-Danes—or the police? He shook his head. By the time Goldie Kline and the Weasel attempted the proposed robbery in the Melville-Dane home, they would be in possession of something far more valuable to him, Jimmie Dale, than all the emeralds in existence—*they would know where Shiftel could be found to-night.*

"And I think," said Jimmie Dale softly to himself, as he quickened his pace, "I think, Smarlinghue, that we'll leave you at the Sanctuary for the rest of the night!"

II.

FROM somewhere in the darkness there came a faint musical pur, as of metal whirring swiftly upon metal. It stopped; began again; and stopped again. Then utter silence reigned; then there came a low, deep-breathed exclamation, and simultaneously the ray of a flash light cut through the black, flooded the interior of a small safe, and reflected back upon a masked figure in evening dress.

"One of the X-38 type," murmured Jimmie Dale to himself; "and, as per catalogue, especially adapted for private residences. Tough little nuts to crack! I haven't seen one since the old days at the plant when dad used to turn them out by the gross!"

He reached inside the safe, lifted out a morocco-leather jewel case, and

opened it. For an instant he held it under the light, staring at a magnificent emerald necklace of flawless, matched stones. The Weasel had been quite right! Stones such as these must have been garnered and selected from the markets of more than one continent. They would be, through the usual underworld channels, extremely hard to "fence;" for a small and ordinary emerald was not of any great value, and to "cut" one of these and so disguise it, would instantly rob it of the greater part of its worth. It was certainly a job for Shiftel!

Jimmie Dale laid the jewel case, still open, on the top of the safe, and from the leather girdle hidden beneath his vest drew out the thin metal box that, between sheets of oiled paper, was stocked with its little gray, adhesive, diamond-shaped seals. He moistened one of these, lifting it with a tiny pair of tweezers, and stuck it on the inside of the jewel case; then he replaced the metal box in his girdle, and slipped the morocco-leather jewel case into his pocket.

And now the light bored into the safe again. There was nothing else there of value from a thief's standpoint. It contained what were evidently some of Mr. Melville-Dane's private papers; it had only been a temporary refuge for the emerald necklace, in lieu of the safe-deposit vault from which it had been removed to grace the evening's reception. Satisfied on this point, Jimmie Dale closed and locked the safe again.

He drew back now across the room, and, smiling curiously, arranged two low-backed chairs side by side before the library table. Then his flash light played for a moment on the wall, locating precisely the electric-light switch just beside a little alcove that was hung with heavy portières; and then the room was in darkness, and Jimmie Dale sat stretched at ease in a lounging chair in the alcove behind the hangings.

His lips twitched grimly now. It was quite a transition from Smarling-hue and the back room of Wally Kerrigan's club! It was somewhat different, too, in another way. At Wally Kerrigan's, night after night, he had waited and watched for something, anything, that would open the road to the goal he had set himself—the Phantom; to-night he waited and watched here, but with no idea as to the exact nature of what would happen, and no misgivings any longer but that his goal was in sight! In an hour, two hours, at any rate some time before dawn, he would have run Shiftel, alias the Phantom, to earth. It was the end in sight at last; life, happiness, for the Tocsin and himself.

It was very dark, very still in the library of the Melville-Dane mansion here. Again the twisted smile crossed his lips. Here too was quite a transition from the brilliant assembly of but an hour before when he had been one of the guests at a social function that had been, from a society point of view, one of the events of the season. His smile became a little whimsical. Mrs. Melville-Dane had been superb in that emerald necklace. He had paid her almost marked attention throughout the entire evening! Not once had she been out of his sight, even up to the time when she had taken off the necklace and had handed it to her husband to be placed in the safe here in the library. It had been quite simple. He had bidden his host and hostess good night—and in the confusion of the departing guests, instead of departing himself, had secreted himself in the house.

He shrugged his shoulders. His attentions had been quite wholly unnecessary perhaps. He had not expected the Weasel and Goldie Kline to make any attempt upon the necklace until, say—*now*. It was highly improbable that they would have attempted to stage anything with the house full of people;

and yet, if the Phantom's brain was behind the scheme, such an attempt had always remained a possibility. And since he, Jimmie Dale, for his own ends, to pick up the final clew that would bring him face to face with the Phantom, had elected to give no warning either to the Melville-Danes or to the police, then, of necessity, the moral responsibility for the safety of the necklace was his alone—and so he had taken no chances.

The minutes, the quarter hours dragged by. A clock struck through the silence with a clashing, resonant sound. That would be half past two. It was time now, surely, for the Weasel and Goldie Kline, for they had already allowed ample leeway for the household to retire and settle down for the night.

He stared into the dark. His brain seemed strangely, abnormally active to-night. It was due, wasn't it, to a sort of exhilaration, an uplift, that was upon him? The promise of the end! The Tocsin might be quite right, and probably was, in her belief that the Phantom was planning a trap for him, Jimmie Dale, for the Gray Seal. But her fears now were groundless. It was a plot that, however cunning, however clever it might be, would never come to maturity. It would not be the Phantom now who struck the *first* blow. After to-night she need never fear the Phantom again.

A faint sound, the sound of a cautious, guarded footstep, caught his ear. He stood up silently, his automatic in his hand. The door at the far end of the library creaked slightly; and then, through the parting of the hangings in front of him, Jimmie Dale saw the white gleam of an electric torch flash around the room.

Low whisperings reached him now. He parted the hangings another half inch. The flash light was playing on the safe; two dark forms were moving quickly toward it; and now one of the two knelt before the safe and began to manipulate the dial, while the other held the light over the kneeling man's shoulder.

Jimmie Dale stepped noiselessly from behind the portières. His hand reached upward, there was a faint *click* as his fingers closed on the electric-light switch, and the room was flooded with light. A smothered oath came from the kneeling man as he sprang to his feet; the other, startled, dropped his electric torch to the floor. And then silence, an absence of all movement, save that, in obedience to an eloquent gesture from the muzzle of Jimmie Dale's automatic into which they stared, the two men slowly raised their hands above their heads.

"Hello, Goldie! Hello, Weasel!" said Jimmie Dale softly from behind his mask. "I was almost beginning to think you weren't coming." He waved his hand toward the two chairs by the table. "I've been waiting for you, you see. Sit down, won't you?"

The Weasel, licking at his lips, his shriveled little face working, swore under his breath.

"Who—who are youse?" he demanded shakily.

"We'll talk about that presently, Weasel," Jimmie Dale answered coolly. "In the meantime"—his voice hardened suddenly, rasping, cold—"go over there and sit down!"

Truculently, hesitatingly, their hands still above their heads, the two men moved forward and sat down in the chairs.

"Now"—Jimmie Dale was biting off his words, as he stepped swiftly behind them—"one at a time. You first, Goldie. Put your hands around the back of the chair, palms together." And then as the man obeyed, Jimmie Dale thrust his left hand into the tail pocket of his evening coat, produced a small coil of stout cord, and shook it out to its full length. It had two loops near the

center in the form of slipknots. He whipped one of the knots over Goldie Kline's wrists, and tightened it. "Now you, Weasel!"

The other knot closed upon the Weasel's wrists. A moment more, and the respective ends of the cord were lashed to the respective chairs, and Jimmie Dale stepped around to the other side of the table to face the two men.

He smiled at them for a moment speculatively.

Goldie Kline burst suddenly into a torrent of blasphemy.

Jimmie Dale's smile became plaintive.

"That's rather foolish of you, Goldie," he said. "You are making quite a little noise, and from your standpoint I should say that was the one thing to avoid."

The Weasel squirmed in his chair.

"Who are youse?" he demanded hoarsely again. "Wot's de lay? Youse're no dick wid dat mask on yer map."

"You are quite right," said Jimmie Dale calmly. "As a matter of fact, I am afraid I am in the same category as yourselves to-night. Shall we say—fellow thieves? The only difference being that I have got what I came for, and you haven't."

The Weasel's ratlike little eyes narrowed. He leaned forward.

"Wot do youse mean?" he snarled.

Jimmie Dale took the morocco-leather jewel case from his pocket, opened it, and laid it down on the table in front of the two men.

"This!" he said tersely.

The men bent forward, staring. It was a minute before either spoke. Goldie Kline raised his eyes and cast a furtive, fear-startled glance at Jimmie Dale. The Weasel licked his lips again.

"My Gawd!" whispered the Weasel thickly. "It's de Gray Seal!"

Jimmie Dale made no answer.

It was Goldie Kline who spoke now. The man seemed to have pulled himself together, and in his tones was a sort of blustering bravado.

"So youse're de Gray Seal, are youse? Well, den, I don't get youse! Youse've beat us to it an' pinched de goods, damn youse! I can see dat! But wot's de big idea in hangin' around after youse've got de swag, an' stickin' up de Weasel an' me?"

Jimmie Dale closed the jewel case, and returned it to his pocket.

"That's a fair question, Goldie," he said pleasantly; "and I'll answer it. It's no cinch to shove that necklace. There's only one man who would have much chance—and that's old Isaac Shiftel." He smiled at them engagingly. "I'm sure you'll agree with me, because—the source of my information is really of no consequence at the moment—I happen to know that it was mainly, if not wholly, because Shiftel agreed to dispose of the stones, that you figured the job of getting them would pay. Well, I am in exactly the same position." Jimmie Dale's smile broadened a little. "Without Shiftel the stones wouldn't pay me. I think this answers your question. I have the necklace, and you haven't; but you know where Shiftel, who seems to be extremely difficult of late to locate, can be found to-night, and I don't. And so I waited for you, because I was sure you would be kind enough to give me his address."

Goldie Kline's jaw had dropped. He shut it now with a snap.

"Well, by Gawd!" he burst out furiously. "Can youse beat dat! Say, youse've got yer nerve! Youse grabs de stuff from under our noses, an' den youse has de gall to ask us to wise youse up so's youse can get rid of it! Say, we'll see youse in hell first, won't we, Weasel?"

"Youse have said something, Goldie!" agreed the Weasel earnestly. "We sure will!"

"I'm so sorry," said Jimmie Dale patiently. "I really thought you would

help me out. In fact, I actually counted on it."

"Youse don't say!" The Weasel was quite at his ease now, sneering broadly.

And then Jimmie Dale leaned suddenly across the table. All trace of facetiousness was gone from both voice and manner now. He drew his watch from his pocket.

"Listen, you two—and listen *hard!*" he said evenly. "I'm going to give you two minutes to come across. It might be compounding a felony to let you get away from here, but you didn't steal anything—though that's not your fault—and I'm thinking of the long terms you would get, even for 'breaking and entering,' with your records behind you. Am I making myself clear? A little noise down here will bring the family and servants about your ears in short order—while I go out the way you came in. If they find you here, even trussed up as you are, I imagine you will find it rather difficult to explain to the police how you came to visit Mr. Melville-Dane at half past two o'clock in the morning. On the other hand, an earnest half-hour's work—the time I should like to feel I was guaranteed against any interference on your part—will free you from that cord, and once free you can walk out of here. I still hope I am making myself clear." He glanced at his watch. "One minute has already gone. Where were you to meet Shiftel?"

A whitish tinge had crept into Goldie Kline's face.

"Damn youse!" he whispered fervently.

The Weasel squirmed again in his chair. He looked at Goldie Kline.

"I ain't for goin' up for nothing!" There was a sudden, nerveless whine in his voice. "He's got de goods anyhow. We ain't goin' to *lose* nothing by tellin'. Wot—wot d'youse say, Goldie?"

Goldie Kline gnawed at his lips.

"All right," he muttered after a moment. "Spill it. I guess dere ain't nothing else to do."

"Just a minute," said Jimmie Dale coolly. He replaced his watch in his pocket. "It would be unfortunate if there were a *mistake* in the address. I am sure your memories are good enough to recall certain instances in the underworld that will reassure you on the point that the Gray Seal always pays his *debts*. I mention this simply in passing. And now—where is Shiftel waiting for you?"

It was the Weasel who answered.

"He's in de room off de back yard, down at Morley's dope joint," he said sullenly.

"Thank you!" said Jimmie Dale grimly. "I know where that is." He moved away from the table and toward the door. Here he paused for a moment. The two men were already tugging and struggling with their bonds. "I forgot to say," he said quietly, "that there is nothing of any value left in the safe! Good night!"

And then Jimmie Dale was gone.

Two minutes later, he was climbing into the light runabout that, prior to the reception, he had unobtrusively parked in an alleyway a block from the Melville-Dane residence. He replaced his silk hat with a peaked cap which he drew out from under the seat—and the car shot forward into the street.

He drove fast now. He had no thought of speed laws. Shiftel—the Phantom—the end in sight! He had no thought for anything but that; he asked for nothing more than just this, which was at last to be granted him, of playing out the final hand with this inhuman fiend to whom murder was a trade, and crime of the basest sort a pastime. There was room now for only one of them—the Phantom or himself—in this world. The debt that lay between them was too abysmal to be plumbed or spanned in any other way.

And yet the man should have his

chance; a chance to fight for his life. He was not entitled to it; he, the Phantom, under the same conditions would have struck as quickly and murderously as he could. In fact, if the Tocsin was right, as no doubt she was, the Phantom even now was preparing a trap which, to-morrow, the next day, or the day after, was intended to be sprung in the hope of snaring him, Jimmie Dale, the Gray Seal; and that trap once sprung successfully, he, Jimmie Dale, would go out with no more chance for life than the flame of a candle flung to the storm! But there would be no to-morrow, or the next day, or the day after, for the Phantom and his trap; to-night, now, within the next few minutes, there would be no longer need for the Phantom to cudgel his brain for tricks and devices to lure the Gray Seal into his web!

The streets were deserted. A strange, queer silence seemed to reign over the city. Somehow it seemed sinister, premonitive—aptly so. Still Jimmie Dale drove fast. And then finally, far over on the East Side, deep in a neighborhood as vicious and abandoned as New York had to offer, he parked his car again in a lane, sprang out, and started at a brisk walk along the block.

There was a grim, set look on his face now, as his hand, slipping into his pocket for his automatic, encountered the morocco-leather jewel case. Shiftel was waiting for the necklace! Well, Shiftel should have it—for a moment. But, at that, its safety was nowhere nearly so greatly imperiled as if it had been left as a temptation for Goldie Kline and the Weasel! To-morrow, in some way, it would be back in the Melville-Danes' possession again.

Jimmie Dale swerved sharply into a cross street, and from there into an alleyway. His pace slackened, became guarded, cautious. He knew Morley's opium den by more than hearsay. As Smarlinghue, he had been a supposed client more than once. Yes, here it was—the back of it anyway, over this fence here, and across the yard. Well, it was the back of it he sought, wasn't it? That was what the Weasel had said—the room off the back yard.

He drew himself up to the top of the fence, dropped silently to the other side, and suddenly his pulse beat fast. Across the yard was an open, lighted window, almost on a level with the ground. Unbridled now, almost overwhelming, that sense of exhilaration was upon him again. The end of the chase! What did it not mean—for the Tocsin—for himself!

Jimmie Dale moved forward quietly, noiselessly—ten yards—another ten. He was not far from the window now, not more than another five yards. And now he could see inside. Shiftel! And now he knew another emotion—something cold, merciless, primitive in its naked thirst for retribution. The Weasel had made no "mistake!" Shiftel was there! He could see the bent form in its greasy black coat; he could see the bearded face of the old "fence" bending over a table, as he had seen it once before on a night when he had thought he had run the man to earth in the rooms old Mother Margot lived in now.

A yard more! Yes, the window was not more than a couple of feet above the ground. His automatic was in his hand now, his face masked again. Another yard—and then Jimmie Dale whirled sharply around, his face drawn suddenly in hard, tense lines. Out of the darkness, out of the nowhere, came a voice, ugly in its menace, a voice he recognized—Bunty Myers':

"There he is! Get him! The Gray Seal!"

Out of the darkness, out of the nowhere, a circle of flying shadows seemed to arise and converge upon him.

The trap!

Like lightning his brain worked; like

lightning he moved now. The trap! In a flash, out of a strange bewilderment, he grasped the fact that somehow the trap of which the Tocsin had so earnestly warned him, the trap that he had so self-confidently thought he would nip in the making was even now being sprung upon him; that his own confident plan of reaching Shiftel was in fact the very trap that had been laid for him.

The trap! And the jaws of it were that open window! And there was no other way to turn. Those onrushing shadows, that were snarling, cursing men now, were almost upon him, blocking his retreat.

Retreat! He had no mind to retreat. It would be the end without a doubt to-night now; he had at least been right in that. But it would not be his end alone. Inside there, in through the jaws of the trap—was Shiftel!

The brain works fast. In the winking of an eye Jimmie Dale had leaped forward, and had sprung for the window sill. It was intuition perhaps that prompted him. The figure at the table, at a slight angle away from the direct line of the window, had risen, revolver leveled. Jimmie Dale plunged forward, as a man plunges in a long, low dive, over the sill and to the floor. And as he plunged, like a machine gun in action behind him, came the roar and flash of what seemed a myriad revolver shots.

It happened quick—quicker almost than the brain could grasp. The bearded, greasy old figure, intent evidently upon his victim alone, had overstepped the zone of safety, stepped a little forward into the line of the window; and now, with a wild cry, with suddenly upflung arms, as the hail of lead swept in, he pitched face forward to the floor.

And something in Jimmie Dale's soul, amidst the turmoil that was raging physically about him, gave quiet, fervent thanks. Not for a man's death—but that the burden and guilt, if it should be termed guilt to destroy such a one as this, one that, to save the life of the woman he loved, he *must* have destroyed if he could before his own end came, had been lifted from his shoulders. Shiftel was dead!

Jimmie Dale had wriggled around on the floor. He was facing the window now, firing in turn with his automatic. The low sill afforded a measure of protection. He fired from the floor over it. Shouts, yells, curses answered him; but the rush was checked, though the shots still poured in from without.

And now pandemonium seemed loosed! He glanced around him quickly. The door of the room was locked. That was obvious because they were pounding upon it now, trying to burst it in; and it had been locked, quite obviously and quite logically, in preparation for his entry into the trap, and against the possibility of any escape through what was the only means of exit he could see—except the window with its hail of bullets!

It was the end! He slipped a fresh clip of cartridges into his automatic. But now he fired with more restraint. True, it was the end, but he must be careful of his ammunition now; he would need all he could save when that door gave!

It was an even break. Himself for Shiftel! It was worth it; it had been worth it—for her sake. Shiftel, the Phantom, was——

Was he mad? Had this scene from the pit of the inferno, that bursting door, those shots that hummed with hell's venom above his head, this smoke-filled, acrid-stinking room, turned his brain? Shiftel! Great God, that was not Shiftel there! He was staring now for the first time at the still, motionless figure on the floor. The beard on the upturned face hung awry. He reached for it, and snatched it off. A thousand noises, a thousand sounds pounded at

his eardrums and made mockery of the crashing blows upon the door, the vicious *spat* of bullets, the hideous yowling of those human wolves who had the Gray Seal trapped at last. This man on the floor here dead was not Shiftel, nor the Phantom in the guise of Shiftel, nor the Phantom in any other guise. *It was Little Sweeney!*

The door was yielding now. And somehow—he did not understand for his brain seemed stunned—the noise and the shouts without seemed to increase in intensity. He wriggled back a little way across the room where he could best command both window and door. He had still one clip of cartridges left. He had only one hope now—that he could use them to the last one. In another minute the door would give, and——

"Jimmie!"

Yes, he was mad! Reason at the last had fled from him. That was her voice, the Tocsin's voice. As those shadows outside the window had suddenly closed in upon him out of the nowhere, so this voice, the voice he loved, came suddenly to him now out of the nowhere.

"Jimmie!"

His eyes strained over in the direction of the desk. He could see nothing. There was nothing there, unless—yes, yes, the floor seemed to have risen up a few inches above the surrounding level. A trapdoor!

"You!" he cried.

"Yes! Quick! Quick, Jimmie, quick!" her voice answered from below.

He flung himself forward, and wrenched the trapdoor wide open. It was pitch black below; he could see nothing.

"Drop, Jimmie; it's only a few feet," she called up to him. "Bolt the trap door behind you. And, oh, hurry, Jimmie, hurry!"

He swung himself through the opening, and dropped; then reached upward behind him and closed the trapdoor. His fingers searched for the bolt, found it, and shot it home. He could not stand upright, he had to stoop, the opening was so low. And it was so dark he could not see his hand before his face.

"Where are you?" he cried out. "Marie, thank God for you! Marie, where are you?"

"Here," her voice replied. "Follow me; come this way."

"I can't see you—I can't see anything," he said; then, quickly: "Wait! I've got a flash light."

"No!" Her voice came back instantly. "You mustn't show a light here under any circumstances. Keep your head down, and feel your way. You can touch the walls on each side of you."

"All right!" he answered.

He could hear her moving ahead of him. Half bent over, he began to make his way along. Soft earth was underfoot. It was a low, narrow tunnel of some sort, that was evident. An underground passage, of course. Morley's drug-den was well equipped!

His brain was in chaos. Shiftel, Bunty Myers, the emerald necklace, Little Sweeney! And the Tocsin here!

"Marie, I don't understand!" he burst out.

"It was the trap I warned you about," she answered back.

"Yes; I know that now," he said. "But Shiftel! That wasn't Shiftel up there. It was Little Sweeney."

"He was the cat's-paw," she said.

He stumbled on. Where did this passage lead to? Was there no end to it?

"Hold on a minute, Marie! Stop!" he pleaded suddenly. "You——"

"There is no time; there is not an instant to lose," she broke in swiftly. "I—I—but never mind that. I can tell you in a few words what you do not understand as we go on. Are you listening, Jimmie?"

Listening! Listening to *her*, to her voice!

"Yes," he said; "since you will not wait."

"Well, then," she said rapidly, "the Phantom was not fool enough to close his eyes to the fact that there was a leak somewhere on the inside. The Gray Seal had put in an appearance with too great *regularity*. He thought, too, at last, as I wrote you, that you were after him in a personal way. Therefore he meant to strike first. And so for to-night's work he sent out his orders and his plans through the *usual* channels. Is that clear?"

"Yes," said Jimmie Dale, as he groped his way along.

"If then, there was a leak," she went on, "the plan for the night's work would reach the Gray Seal also as usual. But though the Phantom inclined strongly to the belief that *he* was the one you were after, and that the spoils of the various affairs in which you had intervened were a secondary matter, he was still not absolutely sure of it—and therefore, whether he was right or wrong, and while he hoped to get you by offering what you would believe to be himself as a bait, he did not intend to take any chances with that emerald necklace to-night, and——" She broke off suddenly. "I don't see how you found that out!"

Jimmie Dale brought up abruptly against a sharp turning in the tunnel. He bit his lips in chagrin. In the utter darkness, in spite of the cramped posture he was forced to assume, he had tried to catch up with her, reach her.

"I followed Little Sweeney from Kerigan's," he said. "He met Goldie Kline and the Weasel, and I overheard enough to know what was going on before I lost Little Sweeney again. They got away in an automobile."

"I see." Her voice floated back. "Well, that part of the plan was *not* passed out through the usual channels. All that was given out to the gang was that Shiftel would be here at Morley's to-night to receive some swag; but it was not until the last minute, not until an hour ago that the gang themselves were ordered to be on hand to get you if you came. After that they were kept *together* so that a leak then, when a leak would no longer be a lure but a warning, was impossible. If you were only after spoils, you would know nothing about the necklace, and so wouldn't get it; but if you were after *him* you would come here, and he would get *you!* Do you still understand, Jimmie?"

"Yes," he answered; "all but Little Sweeney's part."

"It was risky business playing the part of Shiftel—something might go wrong," she said bitterly. "And the Phantom takes no risks—when he can let some one else assume them! That is why he had some one play the part of Shiftel. Little Sweeney got his orders through Limpy Mack with whom, as you know, he had worked before, not knowing that Limpy Mack and Shiftel and the unknown 'Chief' were one; and Little Sweeney of course thought it was a clever way to induce two crooks to steal the jewels, for Little Sweeney was made to believe that Shiftel had left the country for good. Limpy Mack supplied the disguise, which was actually, of course, the one worn by himself when he masqueraded as Shiftel."

"Good God!" gasped Jimmie Dale. "I see now!"

"Yes!" she said. "There is not much more. Little Sweeney was chosen because he had been away during your later appearances, and was therefore free from suspicion that any leak had come through him; and Goldie Kline and the Weasel were chosen for the same reason—they were wholly *outsiders*. That's all—except my share. *I* had sent you no word, no note. I didn't think you could possibly know anything

about to-night; and so I didn't expect you would come here, and in that respect I thought the Phantom would fail. But I knew that Shiftel was to be here at this hour—for I believed then that it was actually Shiftel himself—and so I notified the police. If they got Shiftel, then that was the end of our troubles. They—they are there now. They came just as I reached the trapdoor—but"—her voice seemed to dull a little—"they haven't got the Phantom."

Jimmie Dale made no answer. His lips were tight and grimly set. The Phantom was still alive, still at liberty, still free to carry on his fiendish machinations! But—Jimmie Dale's face relaxed a little the next instant—it was not all utter failure and defeat. *She* was here! The Tocsin was here with him. And he, Jimmie Dale, was alive, where but a few minutes before he had seen no chance of life. They were together—Marie and himself. In a moment more now the tunnel must end, and she——

Her voice, suddenly low and guarded, reached him.

"Wait!" she whispered. "Stay where you are. I'll see if the way is clear."

He stood still.

A minute passed, and then she called again:

"It's all right. Come on!"

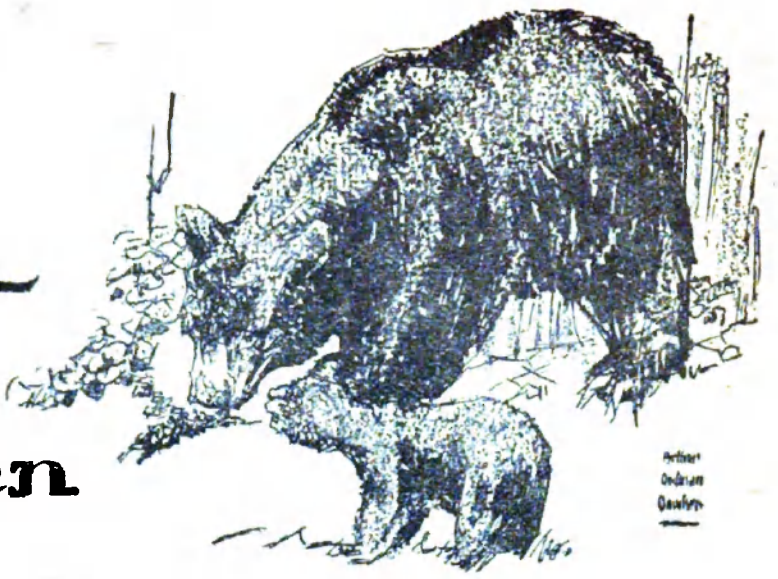
His hands still groped out before him as he moved forward again, and, groping, discovered that the tunnel here took an abrupt right-angled bend. And then as he turned the corner, and a cool, fresh current of air fanned his face, he found himself on a flight of steps, and he could straighten up and there was head room as he mounted them.

And then he was standing outside a doorway on a dark and deserted street. He could hear the sound of shouts, of revolver shots, but the sounds came faintly from the distance. They were safe now, quite safe, the Tocsin and himself. He called her softly.

But there was no answer—and of the Tocsin there was no sign.

Who is the Phantom? Read the next Jimmie Dale story in PEOPLE'S for November 25th.

Fur Foot—Fire Warden



by Charles V. Brereton

Author of "Purple Juice," "Some Dog," etc.

THE INDIAN HAD KILLED THE OLD BEAR'S MATE, AND, AMONG OTHER TROUBLES, THE OLD FELLOW HAD TO TAKE CARE OF HIS INFANT SON, TUBBY. . . . .

THE sun's last dim rays gleamed dully just over the black top of Orleans Mountain. Already the cañon lay in deep shadow, through which the sound of the unseen river came only as a musical murmur to the silent watcher on the ridge. The more venturesome—or possibly the more hungry—of the little night travelers were astir. The leaves rustled under the patter of small paws. From the top of the tallest fir tree on the ridge, a robin, chief chorister of the mountain vespers, shrilled his cheery solo. With the coming of the shadows, the scents and sounds of the day intensified, spreading through the leafy coverts as ripples spread in a sheltered pool.

Fur-Foot, standing motionless in the narrow trail, his dark-brown summer coat blending with the shadows, paid no heed to the wood noises around him. The smells that floated up from the murky cañon intrigued him peculiarly. An indefinable feeling of dread, an unexplained sense of danger oppressed him. Returning now from a day's aimless wandering over the ranges north of the Klamath, he was close to the den in the granite rocks that he and his mate knew as home. He sniffed at the lazy air currents, his delicate nostrils expanded with their effort to locate the danger that his uncanny instinct told him was somewhere near.

The scent of the den came clearly to the old bear, but with it was another, too faint to classify. Fur-Foot growled softly, then padded down the dim trail with an astonishing lack of noise for so heavy an animal. He came to the tumbled pile of rocks above the den and slid, in a shower of decomposed granite, to the little flat in front of the cave.

The crumpled heap that sprawled in the center of the little clearing explained at once the warning his instinct had given him back there on the ridge. His

mate lay dead, her head in a dark, fast-drying pool. The round hole just back of the ear told how she had died.

And if this were not enough, Fur-Foot's nose soon gave him the story. Tracked here by dogs, the old she bear had turned at bay at the den's mouth. In defense of her home and what it contained, she had put up a terrific fight against the snarling pack until the man had come. The evidence was all too clear. Fur-Foot sniffed at the man's tracks, and his piggish little eyes glittered evilly. The scent was faint, hours old, but Fur-Foot would never forget that track.

Fur-Foot had crossed that man's scent before. Had even, from a hidden vantage point, once watched curiously while the man, an unkempt, swarthy Indian, scraped up a little pile of sticks and leaves, bending over his work until a curl of smoke arose. The man had hurried away then, Fur-Foot remembered, and afterward the mountains had been swept by a fire that burned for days and forced the little woods people to flee for their lives. Many other men had come then—white-faced, loud-talking fellows who scurried around the edge of the fire like a nest of excited ants. These men did not injure any of the woods people. Fur-Foot soon found that out. Even now he licked his lips at the memory of the delectable morsels of food he and his mate had picked up around the camps the rangers had made.

But now his mate was dead. Pure reason told the old bear he must leave the vicinity of the den. The dogs might come again at any time. He started off down the hill, grumbling uneasily as he pushed his way through whipping thickets of plum and wild rose. At a sound behind him, Fur-Foot turned his broad head with snakelike quickness. He stared for a moment, uncomprehending. A cub, scarcely larger than a half-grown dog, peered at him from the shelter of a clump of hazel. The old mother bear had paid with her life, that her baby might live, and Fur-Foot had not thought to investigate the recesses of the den.

The cub did not appear to be afraid of Fur-Foot's crusty growl. There was no mistaking his appeal for companionship and protection as he whimpered complainingly. Small ears pinned back, one fore foot upraised in readiness for a quick dash, twinkling eyes expectant, the youngster waited the result of his elder's sharp survey.

Fur-Foot had never paid much attention to the cub, except to cuff him when he got in the way. The care of the children was a prerogative, jealously guarded, of the mother bear. But now, Fur-Foot was lonesome. His mate of many seasons was no more, and this baby was of his own blood. He made a funny, chuckling sound in his throat and turned away. It was enough for the cub. In two bounds he was at the old bear's heels, frisking gleefully in the exuberance of his joy.

Fur-Foot plodded on in dignified silence. He wanted to put a lot of distance between that pitiful heap at the mouth of the den and his own resting place for the night. If the cub wanted to follow, he could. Fur-Foot crashed his way through the thickets of the steep mountainside, slid into the cañon of the Salmon, and, unmindful of the querulous whimpering of the baby who panted at his heels, clambered up the shelving slopes of Orleans Mountain.

Under a spreading fir almost at the summit, Fur-Foot raked up his bed of needles and oak leaves and curled up for the night. He made no disturbance when his forlorn little son, shivering with cold and nervousness, crawled between his great paws and snuggled up against him.

By daylight, Fur-Foot was up, foraging for breakfast. He turned over rocks and sticks, greedily licking up the

half-chilled insects he found under them, while the cub, after an interested inspection of this process, began hunting for his own rations. A time or two, the little fellow attempted to stick an inquisitive nose under a log that Fur-Foot turned over only to dodge back, cowed, at his parent's threatening growl. Fur-Foot made it clear that his offspring must hunt for himself.

Fur-Foot waddled along beside an ancient fir log, his nose prospecting it carefully for signs of breakfast. Satisfied that the indications were good, he stood up on his hind legs and hooked his powerful claws into the moss-grown bark of the top, working his prehensile fingers until the curved hooks gripped deep in a jagged fissure. He tested his hold tentatively once or twice, then, assured that his grip would not slip, hurled his weight backward. Now, when a six-hundred-pound bear jerks his best at any particular thing, that thing is pretty apt to come loose. The bark of the old fir did just that. It tore loose in a long strip and slid to the fern-covered ground in a cloud of flying punk.

Fur-Foot threw himself clear of the avalanche, although he would have merely grunted disgustedly had it hit him. Not so the cub. An interested spectator of this operation, he had been sitting too close to the log. A flying piece of bark hit him squarely on top of his inquiring little nose and bowled him over like a ninepin. He scrambled to his feet and fled, howling lustily.

Fur-Foot looked around sharply at another sound that blended with the wails of the cub. The laugh of a man. The old bear had not noticed, nor would he have cared, that his foraging expedition had carried him so close to the trail that led over Orleans. As he looked he saw a horse standing in the trail, watching the cub's antics with nervous eyes. Astride the horse was the man who had laughed. Fur-Foot's first impulse was to run, then as his nostrils identified the scent of man and horse, his fears subsided. This man was one of those white-faced fellows who had manifested such an interest in the big fire.

Each morning the bay horse carried his rider to the top of the mountain. Each evening at dusk they returned to the camp at the foot of the peak. Many times had Fur-Foot warily circled that camp until he was satisfied that no danger existed from its occupant. Why this man did not hunt the woods people, as the Indian did, Fur-Foot did not know. His only interest now in this strange fellow was one of curiosity. He sat up on his haunches with a guttural caution to the cub.

As the youngster sighted the horse standing in the trail he brought his wild flight to such an abrupt end that the man laughed again. The cub sat down and, between intervals of whimpering and rubbing his sore nose with his little paws, surveyed this strange animal in astonishment. He was not afraid. The dreaded man scent meant nothing to him as yet. The man fumbled in a bag on his saddle and produced a round, red object, tossing it to the ground in front of the cub.

"Here, you tubby little cuss," he chuckled, "have an apple. Maybe that'll soothe your wounded feelings."

The cub jumped back like a scared cat as the apple struck the ground in front of him. Then he stuck out a tentative paw, timidly pulling this queer object toward him. He sniffed at it. One sniff was enough! In an instant his sharp little teeth were crushing the juicy pulp. He gulped down the last morsel and looked up inquiringly. The man grinned and shook his head.

"Can't spare any more of my lunch to-day, Tubby," he said. He loosened the tightly held reins, and the horse, anxious to get away, scrambled up the rough trail. At the first movement, Tubby whirled and ran back to Fur-

Foot. The old bear's curiosity, too, was satiated, and he lumbered off down the hill, "whoofing" much as a man laughs over some huge joke. Tubby waddled along after his father, inquisitive little eyes and nose examining everything he passed.

Fur-Foot had stopped to explore a prosperous-looking ground-squirrel den and Tubby, warned away from his father's quarrying operations by the parental growl, scouted off by himself. A curious-looking hole under a tuft of bunch grass attracted his attention, and he went up to it, sniffing. A delicious smell came from the hole. There was something in there that was good to eat. Tubby stuck his nose down close to the hole, and the next instant went over backward as though propelled by a steel spring. The agonizing pain that shot up his little nose made him yell with astonishment and rage. Tubby had been presented with a lot of surprises this morning. This time he got mad.

Tubby charged that buzzing hole in the ground like a mad wild cat, his arms swinging in a scientific one—two, that sent the leaves and pebbles flying in all directions. And as he scratched the dirt and slapped the buzzing yellow jackets, he expressed his feelings by a queer sort of noise from deep in his throat. He did not yell now. He was too mad for that. Had there been a human listener, he would have said that Tubby was swearing. And that is just what he was doing. Tubby, young as he was, was swearing fluently in bear talk.

So busy was the youngster that he did not notice the approach of the old bear until he was picked up bodily from the middle of his little private cyclone and dumped ignominiously to one side. Here he sat, slapping and scratching at the angry insects that still darted at him while father calmly proceeded to dig up the nest full of fat larvæ and eat it. Tubby was disconsolate. He had discovered that nest and by all right it should have been his.

He reached around suddenly after a persistent antagonist who had lodged in the thick fur of his back. To do this he sat down, unwittingly pressing another willing worker against the ground just hard enough to make him good and mad. The yellow jacket made the most of his opportunity.

This was too much! Tubby's cup of woe was full. He rolled over and over, slapping and scratching. His wails woke the echoes until the old bear growled in disgust at the noise the youngster was making. No one knew better than Fur-Foot of the need for quiet on his daily foraging expeditions. He felt that Tubby's racket would surely attract undesirable attention. He was right. As he looked up to admonish the youngster, the man scent struck his nostrils again. The Indian was somewhere near. Had Fur-Foot been alone, he would have fled instantly, running for perhaps a mile before pausing to look over his back track.

But now, something made Fur-Foot pause. Some impulse he could not fathom caused him to gather up the squalling cub, cuff him into scared silence, and herd him ahead along a narrow deer track that led around the wooded side hill to the roughs beyond. Fur-Foot did this swiftly, but with all his hurry, precious time was wasted.

A searing pain, as of a flash of fire, shot through one of Fur-Foot's ears, and a spurt of dust from the side hill beyond, told him that his premonition of danger had been only too true, even before his ears were assailed by the jarring crash of the rifle. The old bear did not look back. When a brown bear runs from danger, real or fancied, he errs always on the side of safety. Fur-Foot merely spanked the terrified cub again as he raced after the fleeing youngster. Once again the rifle cracked. The impact of the bullet in the dirt be-

neath his feet only stung Fur-Foot to greater speed.

Tubby led the race along the narrow track until it left the timbered slope and emerged on a bare cliff that dropped, verdureless, down to the roaring Salmon. Here the little fellow slowed in his wild flight, scrambled a little way farther, then stopped, whining in fear of the illimitable depths below him. The old bear stopped also and turned in his tracks, sharp ears cocked forward for sounds from down the cañon. For a moment he listened, and his bristles rose into a serried mane. The bay of a dog reached him plainly. The Indian had put his hound on the track. Alone, Fur-Foot would have scrambled agilely around the barren rocks and whoofed in derision as the hound whined and howled over the lost trail.

But now he felt keenly the responsibility of fatherhood. If he sought safety around that rough alone, Tubby would certainly fall an easy prey to the vicious hound that bawled along the trail behind them. Fur-Foot set himself squarely in the narrow path, and at the sound that issued from his throat Tubby sank behind the protection of a bowlder. The old bear was not long in waiting. A lop-eared, half-starved hound, his pendulous lips slavering as he sniffed the trail, rounded a jutting shoulder of rock. He saw Fur-Foot standing there silent—saw the menace that awaited him and stopped, his deep-throated voice proclaiming to the echoing hills that he had sighted his quarry. The dog had no intention of closing in. He was too old a veteran of the hunting trail to make any mistake about Fur-Foot's attitude, but before he could turn on the narrow trail, the old bear charged.

Fur-Foot hated that slavering, bawling hound equally as he hated the hound's slinking master. If he would gain time to pilot the scared cub around that sheer cliff he must get this affair over quickly. As the hound yelled in terror, Fur-Foot was upon him. One stroke of that terrible right paw and a mangled black-and-white ball flew off the ledge into space. The dog's end was merciful. Fur-Foot had used every bit of his terrible strength. Scarcely pausing, he charged the remaining dog, a shepherd, but that canny animal had been carefully keeping some distance in the rear. He was in noisy flight before the hound's last wail had done echoing. Fur-Foot stopped with a snort of contempt and turned again toward the cub. Tubby peered, round-eyed, from behind his sheltering bowlder. At the old bear's grumbled insistence he began to meekly pick his way along the thread-like track that ran around the cliff.

Fur-Foot directed his son on his way over the dangerous ledges and into the timber beyond the bluffs. Here, on a bench formed by an ancient slip of the mountain and backed by overhanging cliffs, nestled a willow-rimmed lake. This was Fur-Foot's sanctum sanctorum. It was his last place of refuge, to which he always turned when he wished to be alone, or when he wanted to throw a pack of bawling pursuers off his trail. Never yet had dogs succeeded in tracking him to this place.

The marshy borders of the miniature lake made wonderful wallow holes, soothing during the blistering heat of the summer days. Lush clover and mountain peavine, ungrazed by any save a few wandering deer, grew on the gentle slope that touched the cliff; the rocky points that reached out toward the river were covered with pin oaks, their boughs bending under their load of sweet acorns. A limpid brook rippled its way over a gravelly bottom to the edge of the little mountain cove and fell, in toylike cascades, to the river far below.

Fur-Foot waded knee-deep in the crystal water, lapping it up greedily, and Tubby thirstily imitated him. Then

the old bear threw himself down in the lush grass. A long time he slept, confident of his security. The shadows of old Orleans' granite cap began to creep out across the lake.

Crash! What was that? Fur-Foot sat up with a jerk.

Twigs were snapping under heavy, blundering footsteps. The man scent—the scent of the Indian—the man he hated beyond all others was wafted to his twitching, expanded nostrils. The last scent he ever expected to note in this secluded spot. Fur-Foot did not, could not, realize the depths of the deadly vindictiveness that had been aroused in the hunter's savage breast as he stood on the well-nigh impassable ledge that morning and saw, far down on the slide rock, the black-and-white blur where the hound's body had landed. His trail dog dead and the shepherd a helpless imbecile from terror, the Indian had followed around the cliff alone. Holding by the tiny roots of the sparse vegetation that grew on the rock, he had trailed the fleeing bear to his refuge. Now, he was using man's most ruthless weapon against the woods people in an attempt to drive Fur-Foot from concealment.

Noiselessly Fur-Foot arose to his full height, balancing on his powerful hind legs. Eyes, ears, nose; all were put to their keenest use. Before he made any move that might cause noise, he wanted to be sure of the exact position of his hated enemy. With a deep-chested sound that would not have carried ten feet, he checked a movement of the cub, and Tubby cowered in the grass, twinkling eyes watching his father's every movement.

The footsteps crunched in a wide semicircle below the lake, getting fainter and finally dying away in the distance. The rank mixture of odors from unwashed clothes, human sweat, and cheap tobacco also grew fainter, wafted upward by the gently stirring breeze. This scent had been so strong that Fur-Foot had failed to notice another odor that was insidiously spreading through the tree trunks, beating on his absorbed consciousness until with a snort of surprise and fear he recognized it for what it was.

Fire! The acrid tang of resinous wood smoke! Fur-Foot's roach bristled. He dropped to all fours, his head swaying uneasily. Fur-Foot hated fire and feared it. Feared it because experience had told him he could not combat it; hated it because wherever it occurred, it changed the whole aspect of the country, destroying the food supplies as well as the hiding places of the woods people and compelling them to wander forlornly over wide expanses of barren, smoke-grimed hillsides.

Fur-Foot stood for a time, sniffing the tainted air intently, while Tubby, unnoticed, crept cautiously up beside him. The odor grew in strength, the air became heated, swirls of smoke drifted in through the alders and the coarse sedge grew gray under the constant rain of powdery flakes.

Fur-Foot dropped silently down beside the shivering cub and watched, all his keen senses alert. The woods people, after the first few minutes of surprised silence, had broken into voluble protest. The thickets rustled with the scurrying of the little gnawers. A kangaroo rat, crazed with fear, hopped by almost under Fur-Foot's nose. Old Quah, the mallard, with many harsh commands, gathered his wives about him and, with a great whir of wings, left the lake for the safety of the down-river pools. There came a great crashing in the brush, and Blacktail, who made his bed at the head of the lake, under the towering bluffs, plunged into view, passing the old bear and his son without notice.

Blacktail was an old-timer in this country, as his wide antlers bore witness. His habitual caution during the

daylight hours was well known to Fur-Foot. The bear knew that only the gravest danger could make the wary old buck forget this caution and go plunging off down the rocky side hill at this time of day. If Blacktail, with his great speed and canny judgment, was getting out of the cove, so must every one else who would save himself.

Fur-Foot could not go up over the bluffs. He knew that. He had tried it often. Much as he hated to go down hill against that acrid, stinging smell, he must do it. He turned, snarling, the cub at his heels, and loped off in the direction the buck had taken.

As Fur-Foot crashed through the tangling brambles and whipping thickets the smoke became thicker, the smell of fire stronger. He came out into the chemisal, where the brush was low, and stopped, growling. The whole slope below him was aflame. In summer time, chemisal burns on the slightest pretext, with the completeness and intensity of a well-ripened wheat field. So it was burning now.

Great waves of flame rolled skyward, throwing volumes of black smoke that were rapidly obscuring the sun. Now and then a larger bush would catch and flame fiercely, the resulting roar making the bear cower in dread of this awful enemy he could not combat. As he stood uncertain, a laurel bush caught, its glossy, oily leaves exploding in a crackling roar that drove every grain of sense out of Fur-Foot's head. He turned and ran blindly. Back and forth along the line of the advancing fire he raged, searching everywhere for a loophole of unburned brush that he might get through.

It was no use. He had waited too long after Blacktail had given the warning. The cove was rimmed with fire. Once he attempted to break through a place where the fire had died down a little. He slapped and snarled at the burning brush, tearing out whole bushes with his powerful jaws. The pain whipped him out. He crawled wearily back toward the lake and the solace of the cool mud. Once there he drank in great gulps and wallowed, plastering his singed fur.

He felt better after that. It cooled off his senseless fear, and he could think more clearly. It was getting along in the afternoon now, and the fire did not seem to be coming any closer. He lay quiet.

He heard the dim murmur of men's voices and by the scent that floated to him identified them as the same friendly rangers who always came when a fire occurred. For himself, he did not care. He knew these men would not trouble him—might not even discover his hiding place if he kept quiet. But Tubby was an added responsibility. Fur-Foot felt a surge of anger at the thought of any possible harm to the cub.

The roar of the fire had ceased. The voices became more distinct, the man scent stronger, as the evening air cooled and the night breeze cleared away the tang of burning wood. There was an occasional metallic clink of steel against stone as the tired rangers pushed their protective line around the burned area. The closer approach of the men made Fur-Foot nervous for Tubby's safety. He got up and walked around the little glade, undecided.

A sudden rank odor, distinct from the other human scents, assailed his nostrils. It was the scent of the man who had passed through the cove earlier in the day—the same scent that had always meant danger to Fur-Foot. Why the Indian had now appeared near the rangers, Fur-Foot did not know, nor did he give it any thought. He could not know that the incendiary, caught on an inaccessible bluff by the backlash of the fire, and balked of his revenge, had been obliged to wait until nightfall before attempting to slip, unobserved, past the watchful rangers.

The old bear discarded all caution in the red rage that flamed through his brain. He connected the scent of the Indian with all his recent fright and trouble and blamed it as the cause.

With an explosive "Whar-o-oof," he plunged off through the matted brambles, scarcely conscious that Tubby, his little eyes rolling in fright, raced at his heels. Fur-Foot heard a surprised yell from out of the darkness directly ahead of him. A couple of shovels made an unearthly clatter as their scared owners dropped them in a wild scramble for safety from the charging bear.

The unexpected locating of the rangers so close to him only served to further increase Fur-Foot's madness. He swerved to the right and slid, with a tremendous crash of breaking boughs, over a six-foot bank into the gully the brook made in its fall from the cove. Down this he charged with the momentum of a runaway locomotive and with the same regard for what might be in front of him.

In the dim light of the narrow, steep cut, he blindly sensed a moving figure frantically trying to climb the crumbling bank. His nostrils told him it was the Indian. He did not hesitate. His shoulder struck a soft body and hurled it to one side. He snarled and slapped savagely. A choking cry, the crunch of breaking bone, told him that his blow had struck home. Fur-Foot knew that the death of his mate had been avenged. He snorted loudly now. Not in derision, but in fear and anger. Dislodged bowlers clattered behind him as he plunged down the gully. He took the last ten-foot drop into the river in one mighty leap. The splash of Tubby's arrival blended with that of his own.

Fur-Foot came to the surface halfway across the pool, the water boiling into phosphorescent foam under his frenzied strokes. His hurry did not cease until, he topped the opposite bank. Here he stopped, drawing a breath of relief and shaking the water from his coat in a glistening shower. Across the cañon, twinkling lights dimly outlined the dying fire. A faint murmur of voices, like the drone of distant bees, reached his listening ears. With a final "whoof" of disgust, Fur-Foot herded his small son ahead of him and began the long climb up the hill to the fastnesses of Hell Hole.

The Gas Route

by Robert Graydon

Author of "Seventy Seconds."

APPARENTLY THERE WERE NO FACTS TO JUSTIFY THE GIRL'S IDEA, BUT NEWTON WENT AHEAD, FOR THERE WAS JUST A CHANCE THAT HER THEORY WAS RIGHT. . . . . .

NEWTON looked again from his visitor to the emphatic headlines. He wished there was something he could say—do—to fall in with her thought. But——

For the third time he read the story. He shook his head as he glanced up at her.

"It appears to be very conclusive, Miss Marshall," he said gently. "I understand your feelings, of course, but——" His brows rose sympathetically.

Her parasol tapped on the floor impatiently; or perhaps because she trembled. She spoke brusquely, under strain.

"My feelings don't matter. I only want—— Oh, won't you listen to what I say? Can't you understand?" Her eyes, red with recent weeping, flashed angrily, vengefully. "My uncle did not commit suicide," she reiterated vehemently. "He did not. He had no reason to kill himself."

"The facts, Miss Marshall." Newton laid an expressive hand on the newspaper. "You admit——"

"The facts are not there," she said quickly. "The one fact that he is dead—yes; that he was found dead in his room. The statement that he killed himself is not a fact."

Newton was silent, facing the difficulty of arguing with an overwrought girl, of attempting to dissuade her from an illogical insistence that her dearest kin had been murdered. She eyed him tensely, her face set, with a challenge.

"The circumstances," he resumed.

"Are what I want you to uncover." Her lips compressed on a sob, her dark eyes implored. "I have come to you, Mr. Newton, because only a few nights ago my uncle spoke of you, of a case you had just completed—the Thermometer Case, he called it. I thought—I hoped that you would be able to find out how he was killed, to find the person who killed him and remove the stigma of suicide. I'm sorry. I—I shall have to get some one else."

She was rising when he motioned her to remain. He had the natural backwardness of the detective toward undertaking an investigation which promised nothing. Any inquiry which proved unproductive must rank as a failure. The expenditure of effort indicated an expectation of reaching another than the evident conclusion. In this case there was nothing to suggest that the death of Judge Marshall was not suicide.

Yet Newton found himself reluctant to turn Annette Marshall away. Against his will, his judgment, she impressed him with her unswerving statement that her uncle was murdered. He had tried to discount it as due to her excitement and shock following the tragedy. Her earnestness had penetrated his common-sense conclusions, based on the evidence which had brought the official verdict of suicide. She had him warning himself against the frequent fallacy of seeming common sense, the misleading nature of evidence.

"Let us go over the story again," he said, taking up the paper, "and check it point by point as it is told here." She already had allowed that the account was true as the case appeared on the surface.

A faint flush of anticipation came to her pale face; she had scored in making him consent to a further review. Nodding, she waited attentively for him to go on.

"The judge was found dead in bed," recited Newton, "asphyxiated in his own room by illuminating gas. There is no question of that? No dispute about the cause of death?"

"No. The family physician, who arrived first, said that was the cause. The ambulance doctor agreed, and the coroner's physician. I called the ambulance," she explained, and Newton noted her presence of mind in the emergency, "because that was the fastest way of getting a pulmotor."

"The windows of the room were shut," recounted the detective, "although it was customary for Judge Marshall to sleep with them open, and the weather was mild. Isn't that so?"

"Yes. They were shut—but not bolted. Nor," she pointed out, "was the door locked."

Newton countered on that reminder: "There was no key in it. Had that been removed recently?"

"N-no; I don't think so. I don't remember ever having seen a key in it. But"—her hesitation ceased as she found an argument—"don't you think that if he had been—committing suicide—he would have wedged the door somehow, and stuffed the crevice under it with a rug or something to keep the gas in the room?"

Newton smiled, but the smile only increased the habitual gloom of his expression. He decided anew that she was giving rein to hysterical imaginings. It was impossible to figure how complete the preparations for suicide would be. That depended entirely upon the mental state of the person taking his own life. At the last moment he might forget something, or consider it unnecessary; such as the filling up of the space beneath the door before turning on the gas.

"It doesn't follow that he would have done so," objected Newton. "The house is old, isn't it? The doors probably are solid, with little space below. Are they?"

"Ye-es." She looked at him resentfully; he seemed so determined to break down her reasonless contention that murder had been done.

He raised another point: "You said the judge was a light sleeper. Wouldn't he have been likely to hear any one entering his room?"

She clung to her position, though feebly: "He might not."

Nothing could be gained by arguing over that. The lightest sleeper some-

times could not be aroused with a bomb; the heaviest sleeper may be awakened by a rustling.

Regarding her thoughtfully, Newton went on over the ground:

"Granting that he failed to hear an intruder who shut the windows and turned on the gas, was any one in the house who might have had reason to commit such an act? Miss Marshall," he asked sharply, "do you suspect somebody?"

"There is no one I suspect." The answer came without delay. "None but my uncle, myself, and the servants were in the house. Some one could have entered from the outside," she persisted, hastening to bolster her claim of murder.

"There is no trace of burglars," he met her. "No other room was entered. The outer doors were fast, the lower windows. Weren't they?"

She nodded, but did not yield completely.

"Can't a door or a window be opened without leaving marks?" she demanded.

"Yes"—defensively.

"The ivy could be climbed—it reaches past uncle's windows," she advanced tenaciously. "Or a man could climb to the cornice over the front door and pull himself up to these windows. Isn't that a possibility? Twelfth Street is quiet during the night."

Quizzically frowning, Newton leaned back, studying her. He began to doubt whether her mental poise was as upset as he had supposed. She held so firmly to her purpose of compelling his interest. What she said was of course true —that entrance might have been made to the house without leaving any trace —but to entertain the proposition at all meant the discarding of the quite circumstantial evidence of suicide. And——

"Any one desperate enough to break into a house solely to commit murder surely would adopt some more certain means of achieving his object than simply turning on the gas and leaving his victim to asphyxiate," demurred Newton. "A blackjack, a knife, a cord, are quick and silent. Gas fumes usually suffocate without awakening, that's true, but not always. The murderer—had this this been murder—could not have been——"

Her clenched hand stretched across the desk in arresting gesture. Her eyes widened, glowing.

"By not killing outright, the murderer would be protecting himself," she exclaimed amazingly. "He would be giving himself a chance to get away. Don't you see—don't you see?" she fluttered breathlessly. "If he were caught leaving the house he would be guilty only of burglary! He could deny having been in the room where the gas was turned on. Though that were proved against him, he still would escape the chair. For murder would not yet have been done! Had the alarm been raised with his capture, there would have been time—time to save my uncle!"

Startled, half dazed by the staggering conception, Newton snapped upright. It was too wildly drawn, bizarre, absurd. Too dazzlingly thought out, ingenious. Either the girl was inspired or she was crazy.

Inspired! The word brought him up abruptly. A woman's divination! He stared at her as she sat leaning eagerly toward him, her parted lips quivering, her wide eyes alight, obviously herself startled by the astonishing picture she had projected, but by her whole posture beseeching him to seize upon it.

As they gazed at one another in bewildered silence, Newton finally revised his estimate of her. She might be overwrought, but that assuredly had not dulled her wit. Rather had it given her vision, fantastic and unbelievable though that might be. Unless——

"Miss Marshall," he said softly, "however did you get that idea?"

A moment she seemed not to hear him. Her breath caught and she gave a queer little sound like a nervous, strangled laugh.

"I don't know—just now." She bit her lip, and the parasol bent in her grip. "It was your opposition to me that—that conjured it," she said more steadily. "You have fought me so to destroy my conviction that my uncle was murdered. You made me reach out, grasp at, invent—oh, anything that would make you pay heed to me. Your antagonism made me angry. I had looked so much to you when the police wouldn't listen; when the doctor wanted to give me a sleeping powder. I—won't you—don't you think——"

She stammered, and the gulping in her throat advised him that she was on the verge of breaking down, that disappointment over her inability to enlist aid was proving too great for her on top of her grief, until now so well controlled.

Newton put his hand on hers as she in her agitation twisted the parasol with such violence that it tore. He administered the best possible tonic.

"I'm going to take up the case, Miss Marshall. Come now," he pitched his voice higher to a commanding note as she sobbed, "I can't do anything unless you help me. Did you say anything to the police like the theory you just gave me?"

Her head shook. She brushed a hand across her moist lashes, composing herself.

"You made me think of it," she repeated. The sparkle returned to her eyes, the color came and went in her cheeks. "You mean that you believe me now?" she queried anxiously.

He answered frankly, with a sidewise smile:

"I won't admit that; but you offer such an astonishing idea that I'd be worried forever if I didn't try to find something to it. It's so remarkable as to seem ridiculous, mad, but if it could come to you like a flash as it did, I have to concede that a man planning murder might have schemed it out. At any rate, the possibility is sufficient to warrant suspension of the verdict of suicide for a while. Now don't thank me," he cut short her words of gratitude. "Tell me about the finding of the judge. You discovered him, didn't you?"

"When I awoke about six o'clock," she related somberly, but evenly. "My room is next to his. I smelled the gas. The hall was filled with it, and some had seeped into my room."

"None of the servants up?"

"No. They must have been stirring, though. They came quickly when I called."

"Who went into the room first?"

"Dahl—the houseman. He and I, that is, went in together."

"What then?" prompted Newton as she paused, her brows ruffling.

"Dahl volunteered to go in," she said slowly. "He said he would open the windows and advised us—myself, the butler, the cook, and the maid—to get out of the hall when he opened the door. The others went. I stayed."

She paused again, thinking. Newton gave her time.

"I was standing behind Dahl," she went on suddenly, "when the others went into a room. I don't think he knew that I was there."

Something in her tone attracted Newton.

"Why do you say that—in that way?"

"I—don't know," she returned candidly. "He says he did not know that I had remained beside him."

Newton passed that by for the time being, although he could see that she was struggling to get something straight in her mind.

"Go on," he urged. "Dahl entered the room——"

"He crooked an arm over his nose

and mouth, threw open the door, and ran in. I had a handkerchief over my face. I went right after him. And that"—her face became puzzled—"is the point at which I got mixed up. I seem for a moment to have lost track of things—according to Dahl."

"Lost track—how?" Newton's interest was growing.

"I'll have to tell you first about the room. The house is old, you know. There are chandeliers in the bedrooms, which were there before the house was wired. They are not combination fixtures; the electric fixtures are separate, on the walls. You see what I mean?"

The question, Newton perceived, was put not with any doubt as to his understanding, but because the girl still was striving to make clear her recollection. She did not wait for a reply.

"The gas, therefore, could come only from the middle of the room," she continued. "As I remember it, Dahl went straight to the windows. Seeing him do that, I stopped under the chandelier to shut off the jets. But Dahl says I didn't—that I opened one of the windows. After opening the other, he says, he turned off the gas. He says I went to do so afterward."

Newton regarded her curiously as she once more broke her narrative.

"Do you want to say that Dahl is lying?"

"I can't do that. I was affected by the fumes, of course. My head felt light. I was excited. No. I can't say that Dahl isn't telling the truth."

Newton did not quite follow her. He sought elucidation.

"What difference does it make who turned off the gas?"

She startled him as she had with her murder theory.

"If my memory is right," she asserted, "the gas was not turned on!"

"Uh!" gasped Newton. This time he got to his feet to stand gaping down at her. "Say that again!"

"There are three jets on the chandelier," she said levelly. "I tried the taps on all of them. They were closed."

The detective's doubt came back. He had committed himself to waste time on a case that was already settled. He had let himself be rushed into it on the crest of a crazy notion advanced by a grief-stricken girl, who immediately proceeded to draw a conflicting picture. In effect she was accusing Dahl of—something! Doing so, she was puncturing that weird theory about the murderer who killed by slow process so that should he be captured on the get-away he would not yet have done murder.

"Where else could the gas have come from, Miss Marshall?"

Her hand tossed in a helpless gesture.

"Nowhere."

"Then," he shrugged, "you must be mistaken in thinking you preceded Dahl to the chandelier."

Recurrence of his opposition made her stiffen. She saw him withdrawing his promised assistance. Her chin set.

"I'm not mistaken," she said stubbornly. "Dahl is. I went directly to the chandelier while he opened the windows. The gas did not come from there."

"Where, then?" Newton smiled. He understood that she was making the positive statement in hope of retaining him.

"If you are sure of that," he said, "you dissipate your theory that the gas was turned on with murderous intent. How could it have been when you now say it wasn't on at all?"

She gave a cry of dismay.

"I didn't mean to say that," she protested. "I—I must be wrong. Dahl shut it off—of course. Why should he say that he did if it weren't the truth? Please, Mr. Newton——" She pleaded, willing to recant on anything to bring investigation of her uncle's death.

Perplexed, he looked at her while she begged. Only a few minutes ago he

had conceded that she perhaps was inspired. Now—what?

"He did not kill himself," she intoned brokenly. "If you could come to believe that, as I do, you would——"

Newton took up his hat, lifted his camera with the loaded plate-holder and flash-light "gun," which always were ready on his desk.

"Let's go to the house," he said.

Judge Marshall had earned his title by service on the bench of the county court. Five years ago he had returned to private practice, commanding fees which endowed him as more than comfortably well off. His purported suicide could not be attributed to affairs financial, for these appeared to be in good order. Nor could illness be given as the cause; he was in rugged health, and, as his niece and servants affirmed, he had retired that night in the best of spirits.

Absence of visible motive, however, did not alter the situation in the eyes of the police. Every suicide was not explained. The self-destroyer frequently failed to leave any hint to the whyfor of his act. The judge was not the first prominent man to step out in mystery.

Having read the case as suicide—and they had good ground to do so on the face of things—the police sat back to see whether search of the judge's papers or settlement of his estate would reveal a motive. They were not even momentarily impressed by the charge of murder made by his niece, who had been his ward since being orphaned ten years back. They had listened patiently enough to the excited girl in the hours immediately following discovery of the body, then had blandly ignored her intuitive contention. To them the case was closed; they had murder mysteries enough without manufacturing one.

Seven hours had passed when Newton accompanied Annette Marshall to the house. As he went up the steps at his slouching gait, trailing the camera in a limp way, he had every sympathy with the police attitude. Also, because, like the police, he was accustomed to looking at things purely in the light of reason, that feeling almost overshadowed the sympathy for the girl which, as much as her astounding theory, had drawn him into the case.

On the threshold he halted her. The doubt she had cast upon the servant Dahl had been revolving in his mind. Before seeing the man he wished her to be more outright in her statement.

"When you intimated that Dahl had lied, Miss Marshall, just what were you thinking?"

"There was no clear thought behind it. I could not imagine why he should have—contradicted me. Except," slowly, "that my discovery that the gas did not come from the chandelier had been—unfortunate."

"Then you do believe that you reached the chandelier before he did?"

She looked at him warily, as if afraid that she would lose his services even now that she had persuaded him to the scene.

"The impression that I am right grows stronger," she said gravely. "However, let us forget that. I was naturally excited at the time, and may be—in error."

Her sincerity brought a word of advice from Newton which encouraged her:

"Don't try to convince yourself that you are wrong, Miss Marshall. If you tell yourself often enough that you are, you'll come to believe it. Retain your original impression always, right or wrong, until what it concerns has been established absolutely one way or the other. And now, a last, straightforward word: Have you the slightest reason to suspect that Dahl might have wished your uncle harm? You told me he has been employed for two years. Can you

think of anything that has happened in that time which might cause him to hold a grudge?"

"No. He is a quiet man; almost too quiet at times, it seems. He came well recommended, though I forget by whom. The other servants have been with us longer—the butler since long before I came to uncle's house ten years ago."

Newton moved on up the last few steps.

"I was wondering——" He smiled gloomily, and did not finish the remark.

"What?" she asked.

"Nothing," said Newton as the door opened and he saw a man he took to be Dahl standing obsequiously aside.

A city detective was lounging in the hall, waiting to see if anything resembling a motive would show up. He nodded casually to Miss Marshall and winked on the side to Newton.

"You're too late, Newton," he grinned. "You can't get any pictures now—not of the gas. It's all gone."

Newton grunted good-naturedly at the weighty humor. Miss Marshall shrank away from the ill-timed comment.

"Let me talk to him a minute," said Newton to her. "I'll come right along."

He watched her disappear upstairs, then turned to the jocular sleuth.

"How does it look now, Kilroy?"

"Nothing to it." Kilroy pursed his lips, looked for a place to spit, and was disgusted when he found none. "Nothing to it. What you fussing about?"

"To please the girl, I guess," said Newton. "Servants all O. K.?"

"Say!" Kilroy spread his feet and cocked a contemptuous eye. "On the level, Newton, did you ever hear of a guy killing another by the gas route? Huh?"

Newton listlessly swung the camera, which he maintained—and demonstrated on occasion—was more than the peer of the ablest in crime detection. He gave the other as good a start as he had himself.

"It could be done," he said mildly.

"Yeh! And pigs might fly," jeered Kilroy brightly. He winked again. "You private guys get the gravy. Easy money. Nothing to do but stall on this job and collect."

"It is soft, isn't it?" said Newton. "I'll take a look round."

The house was typical of the brownstone era in New York. Three stories and basement, the latter, however, being only a scant two feet below the street. In the basement were the dining room, kitchen, pantry, laundry, and furnace room. The first floor embraced reception hall, library, living room, which ran the depth of the house, and the den. On the second floor were three bedrooms—the judge's and his niece's at the front of the house—and Miss Marshall's dressing room. Three servants' bedrooms were on the top floor—the cook and the maid being housed together—and a storeroom.

Miss Marshall met Newton at the head of the stairs and led him to the judge's room. It was a big, square chamber, furnished with rich old walnut, the four-poster standing between the narrow, old-fashioned casements.

Newton stopped under the chandelier. His hand was upraised when he asked:

"Was this examined for finger prints when you and Dahl disputed over which of you shut off the gas?"

The girl smiled wryly. "They didn't pay much attention to me, Mr. Newton. In any event, it was too late when that point came up. The first policeman to get here opened and closed the taps several times. I don't know why—I don't think he knew. Others—amused themselves in the same way. That's about all they did," bitterly, "aside from accusing me of knowing why my uncle should have killed himself."

Newton squinted at her while he

turned the three taps. Probably she thought he also was doing it for amusement.

The taps moved easily. His glance went to the electric fixtures on two sides of the room. Another on the bedside table practically made his question superfluous, but he voiced it:

"Did the judge prefer gaslight to electric?"

"Why, no." She looked at him for explanation of the strange query. "The gas hasn't been used since—oh, since before I came to the house, except once or twice when a fuse blew out."

"How long since that happened?"

"A long time—years, I'm sure. Why?"

"Just a question," said Newton abstractedly.

Pulling over a chair, he stood on it and examined the chandelier. Close around the taps he ran a finger; opened them and did it again.

More thoughtful, he descended and held out the finger for the girl's inspection.

"Oil," he said.

She stared, uncomprehending. "Oil? What—why should——"

"We'll look at those in the other rooms," he interrupted. His manner was brisker. Here at least was one rather curious circumstance. Why should the taps of a chandelier that was not in use be freshly oiled?

His curiosity was manfestly increased when the chandeliers in the three other rooms on that floor were found to be dry and stiff from disuse. Some of the taps were so tightly "frozen" that he could not budge them.

Back in the judge's room, he expressed himself briefly:

"I'm glad you kept after me, Miss Marshall, and made me come here."

Her hand went out to his arm as her hope bounded.

"You think—you begin to believe he didn't kill himself?"

"I think your hunch may produce—something. Let's look at the windows."

The windows were open. Newton pulled one down. It moved noiselessly, easily—so noiselessly, so easily that the thought struck him that it, as well as the gas taps, might have been lubricated. It had; and its companion.

There was fine grease, probably vaseline, in the sash channels. The sash cords were oily, showing that the pulleys on which they ran also had been treated. In the other rooms there was no sign of lubrication on the windows. They grated slightly and the cords squeaked on the pulleys.

Annette Marshall's breath quickened as these revelations came about. She had not anticipated any such rapid progress, had been without any adequate notion of what she expected the detective to discover. In silence she watched him, not daring to speak lest she interrupt some train of thought, but in her glance was a flicker of triumph. His intent manner told her he now was fully agreed that the case was not all on the surface.

Newton looked out. As the girl had said, a man might reach the judge's room by standing on the projecting stonework over the front door, or by climbing the ivy. But there was no indication that any one had done so. The ivy was unbroken; the accumulation of sooty dirt on the cornice was undisturbed.

His gaze turned upward.

"Who has the room overhead?"

"Dahl!" Annette Marshall looked at him with rounded eyes. Dahl again! "The butler has the other room to the front. The woman servants are to the rear. Dahl!" she said again, half whispering.

"Dahl keeps to the front," said Newton dryly. "I'll look over his room. You stay on this floor. If he comes up, send him down again on some errand."

Leaving her on the stair landing, he mounted to the servants' quarters. Dahl's door was unlocked. His room, void of ornament as that of an ascetic and scrupulously clean and tidy, presented a barren aspect. The furnishings were of the sparsest—a dresser, one plain chair, a cot against the wall—though the room was of fair size. It was depressing, cheerless, and the drab gray of the wall paper increased that influence.

Vaguely its bareness reminded Newton of something. It was like a naked place, chilling. He searched.

There were no letters or photographs; no books except a few magazines, orderly arranged on a corner of the dresser. In the drawers the man's clothing was neatly folded away; the garments in the closet were hung carefully. Neatness and precise placing of things seemed to be a passion with him. The single chair even had been set down squarely with the cot and dresser.

Newton was about to depart when he caught sight of an incongruous article. On the floor, close against the baseboard, was a long, heavy, bamboo fishing pole. One end of it was behind the radiator. When he pulled it out he saw a notch cut an inch from that end—and a light began to break upon him.

From Dahl's room the windows of that below, the judge's room, could be closed with that pole. The lower sashes could be pushed down by a straight thrust. The notch in the pole could be hooked under the upper sashes to lift them. A simple operation with the windows in their present easy-running state.

Newton's eyes glinted, but he realized that a long road lay ahead—realized, too, that it might never be traveled.

The fact that Dahl possessed the means of closing the windows of the room in which a man had been asphyxiated could not convict him. Neither could the lubrication of these windows to make their movement soundless, although it might be shown that he had done that. Taken together, the two items linked circumstantially, but they were not enough.

With no more than that to go on, it could be argued only that Dahl, after making sure that the closing of the windows had not awakened his victim, had gone into the room and opened the oiled gas cocks. But no more could be said for that than that it was a likely theory. Without some strongly corroborative detail—or a witness—it could not stand. All Dahl need do would be to deny, say that he had slept throughout the night.

Newton replaced the pole as he had found it. Again he felt that quiver of recollection set in motion by the picture of the room. What was it? He wondered whether it was the rule in this house that the servants should live in such frugal quarters—almost cloister-like? A visit to the butler's room and that of the women servants showed that this was not so. These were cozy and homelike, with rugs on the floors and pictures on the walls; with bright wall paper instead of the gray which sombered Dahl's room; with regular beds in place of the narrow cot which he had jammed so close to the wall.

Standing again in Dahl's room, Newton gave further play to his thoughts. Suppose he were to find a plausible reason why Dahl might have been tempted to kill his master? What would that avail? What could be offered to support it? Only a far-fetched and fanciful hypothesis, totally lacking in direct evidence. Granting a motive, the existence of the notched pole was still negligible. It represented no more than presumptive evidence, of value only in conjunction with more potent facts. So with the greased window sashes.

There was but one way: It must be proved that Dahl had introduced into the room the gas which had caused death.

Suddenly Newton's characteristic,

gloomy smile came to life. Had Dahl himself not indicated that there was such a way when he had stated that he and not Miss Marshall had turned off the gas? Why had he made that claim? —actually raised doubt in her mind regarding what she had done when her uncle had been found dead? What if, as the girl said, the gas had not come from the chandelier? What if Dahl had considered the risk of entering the judge's room too great—feared that his victim, whom he knew to be a light sleeper, would be awakened by a strange presence? The murderous endeavor—and Newton thought of it now as murder—so far successful in the closing of the windows, then would have been checked.

Contemplating this, Newton confessed that he was allowing his imagination to range far. How could the room downstairs have been filled with gas if not from the jets within it? By a hose, a tube, inserted through a window and carrying a flow from a jet in Dahl's room? That was feasible.

Newton looked up. There were two arms on this chandelier. The taps seemed dusty, but it was impossible to tell whether they had been moved recently. They were stiff like those in all the rooms he had examined, save only the judge's room; strength was required to turn them. That, however, meant little or nothing.

He searched the room again for a hose which he did not expect to find. Dahl would have got rid of that promptly. It could have been thrown into the garbage can and so got out of the house unnoticed. Similarly, Dahl's retention of the fishing pole was understandable. Here was an unwieldy object which had to be disposed of secretly.

And yet—somehow the hose idea did not appeal. Even a small tube would have kept a window open an appreciable space, sufficient to create a draft in the room. The least current of air would have slowed the fatal effect of the gas; it might well have prolonged the judge's life until the household was astir, when of course his life in all probability could have been saved. A man working out such an ingenious method of murder as this appeared to be would have considered that.

But while the idea did not impress him convincingly, Newton did not utterly discard it. To do that would fling him back upon the issue of veracity between Dahl and Annette Marshall. He wanted, felt an imperative need of, some lead that would take him beyond that stressful minute of the discovery of the tragedy—take him somewhere out of the room itself for the solution.

Annette Marshall was on the stair landing, where he had left her when Newton descended to the second floor.

"Dahl came up," she whispered.

Newton nodded satisfaction. Dahl apparently was curious.

They went into the judge's room.

"What did he want?"

"Something from his room, he said. I sent him back down," she smiled, "to watch that detective in the hall."

Newton also smiled. "Good!" he approved. "You couldn't have done better. He couldn't but realize that that was a phony assignment. It won't do any harm to let him know that he is being deliberately shunted out of the way."

She interpreted his speech: "You have found something more?"

"A little," he said conservatively, and told her about the fishing pole and its probable significance.

"I still can't get it straight in my head, though," he added. "The puzzling feature is his claim that he turned off the gas. We're up against it until we figure out why he did that. Which means that we're helpless until we can establish beyond dispute where the gas

came from. Will you call the servants up here to this room, please, Miss Marshall, one at a time—Dahl last?"

His interrogation of the butler and the two women was perfunctory, but he talked with each for about ten minutes. The length of time was for the benefit of Dahl. He did not wish Dahl to think that he was being singled out for more exhaustive examination.

Taking his first good look at Dahl, he recalled what Annette Marshall had said of him; that at times he seemed almost too quiet. The man's manner fitted perfectly with the atmosphere of his bare room. He was reserved, solemn almost to the point of sullenness, quiet of movement and voice to the degree of furtiveness.

When he came to a stop in front of Newton he became rigid, at attention. But his eyes flickered quickly to right and left comprehensively from under the lowered lids, before coming to rest on the detective.

The erect pose brought an irrelevant opening question from Newton:

"Were you ever in the army, Dahl?"

"No, sir." Dahl's lips tightened on the crisp words. He changed his position, relaxing, as if the query had reminded him of something. "I couldn't get in," he said, "during the war."

"No; we couldn't all go," said Newton genially. "Forgive the question—some of us are tender on the subject. What I want to ask you about is last night." He regarded the man pleasantly.

"Yes, sir." The low voice came from between lips which hardly moved.

"I'm a detective," said Newton with confidential air. "We're wondering whether Judge Marshall did commit suicide. He might have been murdered."

Newton nodded weightily on top of that statement.

"Yes, sir," said Dahl passively. His thin face remained fixed, expressionless, but his eyes leaped for a second to the girl.

"We're wondering, Dahl," proceeded Newton softly, "whether it isn't possible that some one got into the house. Some one with a grudge against Judge Marshall. You, I understand, see that the house is locked up nights. Was everything secure last night? The doors and lower windows?"

"Yes, sir."

"What time did you look them over?"

"About eleven; after Judge Marshall retired."

Newton's brows gathered. Meditatively he asked an opinion: "Do you think any one could have got in?"

Just perceptibly, Dahl hesitated. "No, sir."

"Then you believe the judge killed himself?"

"The police say so, sir."

In Newton's brain there was a sudden grouping. Dahl's paucity of words, the scarce-moving lips when he spoke, this stiff attitude, the inhospitable room he inhabited, all became related.

Newton grinned. But his inquiry was a shock alike to Dahl and Annette Marshall.

"Were you ever in jail, Dahl?"

Exclaiming as she caught the inference, the girl took a quick step forward, staring at Dahl with horror.

Momentarily Dahl's imperturbability was shaken, but only to the extent that his eyes twitched wide, while the corners of his mouth drew in, hardening. For the second time he hesitated. Then, his gaze defiant, glowing, he answered shortly:

"Yes!"

The admission brought another ejaculation from the girl, but it did not surprise Newton. Dahl's best policy was to tell the truth; had he denied, his record could have been found in the rogues' gallery. Doubt then would have been cast upon his credibility—a reflection which every one who comes before a court of justice must at all hazards avoid. By admitting that he had served

time, immediately the question was raised, he gave himself an appearance of honesty which was backed by at least two years of unimpeachable behavior in the Marshall household.

Considering that, Newton realized also that the admission was an evidence of how sure Dahl felt of himself. If he were guilty of killing the judge, he was vastly confident that the crime could not be put upon him. Otherwise he would have played now for time in which to get away.

Sizing up the situation, Newton perceived that this was an occasion to move with caution. With Dahl so cocksure and cool, it was altogether improbable that he could be bulldozed. Newton's tone therefore did not change.

"Where were you sent away?" he asked.

"Here." Dahl no longer used the servile "sir." He did not withhold the desired information, but it had to be dragged from him bit by bit in staccato fashion.

"What for?"

"Larceny."

"What did you steal? Where?"

"Silverware. House I worked in."

"How long?"

The thin lips curled back and his eyes flamed.

"Ten years!" There was poison in the words. "I did—eight!"

"How long have you been out?"

"Four years."

"What name were you sentenced under?"

"Cormant."

"And"—the answer was very obvious—"who sentenced you?"

"I don't remem——" Dahl's teeth snapped. His hands clenched, pressed into his sides as though he were holding himself. He took back the reply he had begun.

"He did," he snarled.

Newton motioned curtly in dismissal.

"That's all, Dahl. Don't leave the house."

Dahl, however, had something to say.

"If you think you can put this on me," he said, "go to it. You've got one hell of a job. You can't frame me on a suicide. Aw!" He flung out a hand as Annette Marshall gave a cry of protest; his gaze went balefully to her. "You say he hadn't any reason to kill himself. I say he had. His conscience bothered him. I know. I used to hear him nights—praying," he jeered; "praying for the men like me that he'd sent away. Get that—and think it over."

He whirled and walked quietly as ever from the room.

Annette Marshall stared at Newton. Why didn't he arrest Dahl? She started after him.

"Let him go," said Newton. "There's no hurry. We'll give him the run of the house and see what happens. Wait here a minute. I'll have Kilroy keep an eye on him."

Dahl was in the hall, talking with the city detective, when Newton came down. He stepped aside.

"How's tricks, Newton?" grinned Kilroy. "Getting some good pictures?"

"Fair," said Newton. He addressed Dahl: "Are you willing to stay in the house?"

"Yes, sir," mocked Dahl.

"Then you don't mind sitting round with Kilroy?"

"Eh?" Kilroy blinked. "I'm going to shove off——"

"Better stay and be in on things," advised Newton. "Dahl wants you to keep him company. Dahl, you see, has done time—and Judge Marshall sent him away. I might want him later."

"The hell you say!" Kilroy glared at the servant. "Whyn't you tell us that before?" he bullied. "What you hold out for? When the's an ex-con around we wanta know it, see? You——"

Dahl looked at him placidly, unmoving.

"Lay off, Kilroy," interrupted Newton. "There's nothing on Dahl except that he's done time. You won't get anywhere jumping on him. Report in that a motive is showing up. And have headquarters look up Cormant—first name, Dahl? John Cormant, sentenced by Judge Marshall for larceny fourteen years ago—what date, Dahl? July 18th. Then sit down and rest your feet, Kilroy."

He remained with Dahl while Kilroy telephoned.

"Where you going?" Kilroy didn't want to be made use of to further Newton's game without getting a share of the glory.

"I'll be in the house," said Newton. "All right with you, Dahl?"

Kilroy answered: "I'll say it is." He still believed that the judge had committed suicide, but his inbred prejudice against an ex-convict took predominance. With an ex-convict on the premises, most anything might have happened or might happen.

Nevertheless Kilroy hated to go it blind. He begged Newton for a crumb, asking ingratiatingly what he was after.

"Wait a while," returned Newton. "And meantime be gentle with Dahl. He's not under arrest, but"—he squinted at the man, who understood that he was virtually a prisoner—"if he tries to go out arrest him for me."

Dahl laughed.

"Shut up!" barked Kilroy. "Get in the corner there and sit down."

Newton went upstairs to get his best eye into action—his camera. If it couldn't see more than he could, Dahl's laughter would be justified.

While taking pictures of the room in which Judge Marshall had died, Newton responded to the wondering looks of Annette Marshall by expanding on his oft-proved contention that the camera is more efficient than the human eye.

"Because," he told her, "the camera records indelibly all that it sees, while the eye records only what the brain retains of its impressions. The camera is eye and brain in one, operating in complete harmony. From a group of objects seen through the eye the brain will fasten on one or two. It can be said, therefore, that the eye saw no more than that—for what is the use of seeing if no permanent record is made? The camera, on the other hand, being a machine, sees and registers every detail. Nothing within its focus can escape it. The camera is impartial, whereas the eye, because of the limitations of the brain behind it, is distinctly partial."

He changed the plates in his camera and touched off another flash light.

"Another thing," he said. "You know how often a photograph will emphasize some object that you hardly noticed in the actual scene. A touch of high light or shadow may cause that effect. Or if you have several pictures of the same scene, shot from different angles, you're likely to find something outstanding that the eye had passed up because the brain at the moment was distracted by something else. The angle of vision has a lot to do with it sometimes. The camera will get a slant that you couldn't get unless you put yourself into some queer postures."

The dull *phut* of a flash sounded.

"This powder's going to smoke things up some," he apologized, "but that can't be helped. Now I'll take a shot at Dahl's room."

"The smoke doesn't matter, of course." Annette Marshall followed him rather dazedly upstairs. This business of taking photographs bewildered her, although when her uncle had spoken of Newton a few nights previously he had referred to the detective's use of the camera.

"This is what made me think first that he had done time," said Newton, waving over Dahl's room. "There's so little in

it, and everything, his clothes and all, is laid out just so. He got the habit, I guess, of being without furniture, and of neatness to get good-conduct marks."

"I almost discharged him when he asked, soon after he came, that most of the furniture be removed," said the girl. "I thought he was—well, queer. But he is a good servant, so we had the room made over as he wanted it."

"He wanted to keep it cell-like as possible to feed his gall, maybe," said Newton shrewdly as he packed his camera. He brought out the fishing pole. "If we make out," he added thoughtfully, "I'll have use for this, I think."

The question that had trembled on her tongue for the last forty minutes, since he had started with his camera, came out:

"What do you expect to find in the photographs, Mr. Newton?"

He smiled his gloomy smile.

"I don't know," he said.

"Then——" She stopped, her face betraying frank disappointment.

"If I knew what they may impress upon me," he said reasonably, "I wouldn't have taken them. They're a gamble, Miss Marshall, always. But more often than not they will center your attention on some item which the eye has passed over as commonplace. They suggest things to me, at any rate, the physical presence of which conveyed nothing."

She let it go at that, though it seemed a strange way of detecting crime. Her hope of seeing the case solved with a murder charge, instead of the verdict of suicide, was ebbing. It was dispiriting, this apparently futile dependence upon photographs of what lay clear before their eyes, after the progress made in the direction of Dahl.

"Do you mean," she asked slowly, "that if the pictures suggest nothing the case must come to a standstill?"

"Practically—unless we can pick up more evidence."

She flushed angrily. "And Dahl will go free?"

"It's early to say that," said Newton seriously, "but that is the probability. Be patient, Miss Marshall," he soothed as she made a violent gesture. "I have a lot of—call it luck, when I get to picture gazing. I'm going now. Kilroy will look after Dahl."

Kilroy grumbled over being left in the dark, but agreed to continue on watch. Dahl laughed, but said nothing as Newton departed.

From the doorstep Annette Marshall watched a cab bear Newton out of sight. Like others to whose aid he had come with his camera, she was without faith. She was even resentful toward him. Hadn't he raised her hope only to shatter it?

Darkness was settling as Newton reentered the Marshall house.

"Time you showed up," grunted Kilroy. "What you got?"

"Dahl!" said Newton.

That was too much for Kilroy. "What of him?"

The servant sat masklike in the corner to which Kilroy had consigned him. Newton spoke to him:

"I'm going to charge you, Dahl, with the murder of Judge Marshall!"

Annette Marshall, coming downstairs, heard the words. Breathless, she halted, waiting to see their effect.

But Dahl only sneered. "Go ahead," he said.

"I'm going." Observing Annette Marshall, Newton went to meet her. Kilroy gaped after him, at a loss under this abrupt development.

Newton took the girl aside. He gave her no time for questions.

"You'll see what I'm about as we go along," he said. "We have to visit every room in the house as a starter. After that——" His melancholy smile bloomed.

After twenty minutes they returned to

Dahl and Kilroy. Newton was chuckling. Annette Marshall was grave, silent with an enforced calm.

Kilroy grumbled again for information. Newton salved him.

"I'll declare you in on this, Kilroy. It's a foxy job. Don't worry me now. I have to stage a little play for Dahl. Eh, Dahl?"

Dahl refused to be drawn into any comment. His nerve was iron. He stayed aloof, his darting eyes alone revealing interest.

"Put the cuffs on him," said Newton, "and bring him upstairs."

An instant Dahl balked; backing up a step. The skin tightened on his thin face. His eyes slitted, keen on Newton. With a shrug he put out his hands and let Kilroy manacle him.

Dahl submitted then because he believed Newton was bluffing. He was ready for the third degree. As he saw it, they were trying to scare him into some betraying move. They did not know—could not know——

"We'll go through the whole act, Dahl," said Newton as they reached the judge's room. "Watch me close the windows—as you closed them."

Going up to Dahl's room, he used the fishing pole.

The prisoner breathed hard when the sashes moved soundlessly with no hands upon them. Kilroy muttered something about being damned, and wreathed his fingers into Dahl's coat sleeve. The other servants, in the doorway, whispered in awed amazement, even after they became aware of the pole on the outside. Annette Marshall shrank farther away from Dahl, her uncle's murderer, who was about to be confounded.

Newton came back briskly, bringing the pole.

"That's exhibit A, Kilroy. Do you give up, Dahl?"

Dahl glared. They heard his teeth gritting.

"All right," said Newton wearily. "I'll show you some more."

"Say——" Kilroy shuffled uneasily. "What's coming off?"

"A duplication of Dahl's original way of committing murder. We ought to give him a sample of his own medicine," grimly, "but that unfortunately would be duress. You'll have to get out of the room, everybody. It's going to fill with gas. Isn't it, Dahl?"

At the taunt Dahl jerked out of Kilroy's grasp. His manacled hands swung upward to strike Newton. Cursing and snarling, he checked the motion. Newton was bluffing, he told himself again. All he had to do was keep his nerve. It wasn't possible——

Kilroy had him by the collar, yanking him backward and menacing him with a billy.

"Fight won't do you any good," said Newton quietly. "Neither now nor in court. You're going to the chair, Dahl, sure."

When all had left the room, Newton sent Kilroy back to note that the gas jets were closed.

"All tight," reported Kilroy.

Newton shut the door.

"Wait here."

He went downstairs, his footsteps echoing in the pregnant silence, on down into the basement.

Ten minutes, fifteen, they waited, only Dahl and Annette Marshall knowing what was taking place. And as the time dragged, each succeeding second rasped deeper into Dahl's nerves. His breath shortened wheezily, he ground his teeth and gnawed his lips, and cursed. For he realized at last that he was beaten, that Newton was making good.

Newton came among them quietly.

"Say——" boomed Kilroy, nervously digging his fingers deeper into Dahl's arm and collar.

Newton brushed past them and

opened the door. The room was heavy with gas!

"That makes it, doesn't it, Dahl?" he said impersonally, without triumph. "We can show how you closed the windows, how you got the gas into the room. The motive—that ten-year sentence. Miss Marshall was first to reach the chandelier when the body was found. You said you were first, because she was right in saying that the gas was not turned on in the room. How about making a statement?"

Dahl's face contorted bitterly. He was sullenly silent.

"If you think I'm tricking you," said Newton, "come and I'll show how you did it. Kilroy wants to know, anyhow."

Dahl made no resistance, but as they trooped into the basement his feet lagged.

A light was burning in the furnace room. From a gas bracket a rubber tube fed into a hand pump. From the pump another tube was connected to a pipe which disappeared through the ceiling.

Newton worked the pump, explaining:

"The gas went through the radiator, of course. The pipe I'm pumping into is the main feed to the heating system. You see, Kilroy, how he disconnected it at that sleeve joint to hook up the tube."

Having failed himself on the case, Kilroy was loath to admit what was being proved before his eyes.

"He'd 've croaked everybody in the house," he scoffed.

"If he'd been crazy," said Newton. "He shut down the radiators in the other rooms. I found them that way. In the judge's room he removed the valve. It's still missing."

He turned to Dahl, who had settled back dully against the wall.

"There are four things you shouldn't have done, Dahl. Oiling the gas taps was one. That wasn't really necessary, was it? Not replacing the radiator valve was another. Didn't get a chance to do that with the police and undertakers around? You shouldn't have left that rusty patch on the floor there"—he pointed—"when you let the water drain out of the pipe. And you shouldn't have been so careful in replacing the joint. The fresh red lead on it was a give-away. And certainly you should have got rid of the fishing pole."

Kilroy laughed.

"You got it pat, Newton," he said. "But how the hell did you get it?"

"The pictures were good," Newton gave back for the earlier slur. "Those I took in Dahl's room showed a bright splash at the end of the radiator. That was the flash reflected from the nickel valve. Those I took in the judge's room hadn't anything like that; no such high light. Looking for it, I found the valve was missing entirely. Want to say anything, Dahl?"

The prisoner squared himself.

"Yes." His voice was level, low, as he learned to make it in prison. "Yes. He gave me ten years for stealing two hundred dollars' worth of silverware. Said that employers must be protected against servants. The same day he gave an embezzler of fifty thousand dollars four years. Said he was a man who would take the lesson to heart—and that restitution had been made by a relative. He didn't give me credit for recovery of the lousy silver——" He snarled again. "They got it on me!"

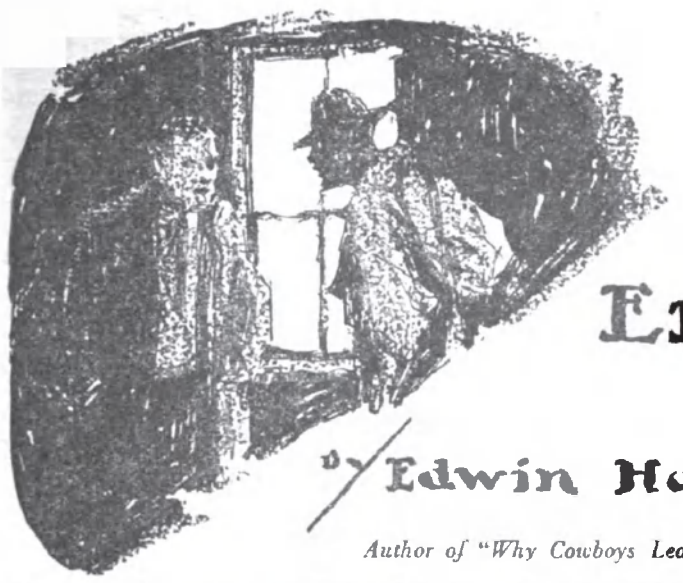
"Let's go," said Kilroy. "Tell it to the judge."

Annette Marshall swayed, gripped Newton's arm.

"Will he——" she whispered affrightedly, "will he——"

"Sure," said Kilroy, "he'll get the juice——"

Newton whirled on him angrily. Annette Marshall, though, had heard only the first word. She had fainted.



Big Enough

By Edwin Hunt Hoover

Author of "Why Cowboys Leave Home," "At Rodeo Time," etc.

COWBOYS KNOW A GREAT MANY THINGS, AND THEY CAN HANDLE MANY DIFFICULT SITUATIONS, BUT WHEN IT COMES TO MANAGING A BABY—WELL, READ WHAT "DUTCH" DID. . . . . .

FROM what I've heard an' read about ladies an' gents that got t' be top hands in their special line, they've mostly started trainin' theirselves young.

This bein' th' case, I judge that if I'd begun t' ride a rockin'-chair when I was a little shaver, 'stead o' sittin' a pony, I might 'a' made a plum' wampus as a nursemaid; not that I ever had any special hankerin's along that line, but a person's called on, occasional, t' do somethin' which sets him thinkin' —wonderin' if he mightn't 'a' done better work if he'd had a different kind o' learnin'.

Same way with "Shorty" Long, my pardner. If he'd had different trainin' when he was little he might 'a' knowed better how t' conduct hisself when he got t' be a daddy. Havin' punched cows all his life, it wasn't reasonable t' expect that he'd know how t' ride herd on a Little Stranger, th' likes o' which Shorty hadn't ever seen before. He didn't have no precedent t' work on an' therefore was plum' helpless.

Madge, Shorty's wife, had some considerable influence over this young broncho which proves that she had early trainin', qualifyin' her as wagon boss to th' home herd. Havin' had a brother an' sister, both younger than she was, had given her a chance t' get in practice so that when she had a young un of her own it wasn't so much like travelin' on a strange range where there's no familiar landmarks t' guide y'u. Bein' brought up in a regular home is a considerable help, too, I reckon.

This little rooster o' Shorty's an' Madge's 'peared t' have his plans all made t' be a grand uproar singer an' seemed t' know all about its bein' necessary t' begin early—only I couldn't see any call for him t' begin so early in th' mornin's. Th' days was plenty long for' him t' practice after Shorty an' me had gone t' work, but he'd tune up about crack-o'-day an' then lay off durin' th' best workin' hours. Whether practicin' before sunup is supposed t' be better for th' voice or whether th' baby was just showin' some contrary-

mindedness—which was bound t' be inherited from Shorty—is questions that I've milled over a lot in my mind with tolerable indifferent success.

Anyhow, this early mornin' voice culture brought Shorty out o' th' hay at most ungodly hours an', bein' a generous-hearted cuss who wanted t' share all th' good things o' life, he'd rout me out from my bunk room—which was a lean-to, built on th' west side o' th' main house—urgin' it was time t' get up.

It bein' late July when crops, which we planted for winter feed, didn't need much attention, an' our stock required less, I augured with him several mornin's:

"We ain't got nothin' that's so wild that it needs t' be slipped up on in th' dark," I complained. We run our cattle in th' bosky an' had tame things like corn an' Milo maize planted in th' cleared ground.

"We might's well do somethin'," Shorty'd come back. "It ain't feasible t' sleep with th' kid makin' all this noise."

"I was doin' somethin'," I'd tell him. "I was restin' my face, feet, an' hands, though I can't say my ears was bein' charmed none."

It was a losin' battle. Shorty wanted company an', knowin' he was plum' useless in th' house, elected me for th' goat.

I offered t' trade him my bed for a tolerable good oil lantern, but even that didn't shame him.

"Maybe," says I one mornin' as we was ridin' off before breakfast t' fix some fence that didn't need no repairs, "Lorenzo is protestin' that his name sets crooked." They'd named their new boss "Lorenzo Fullerton Long"—th' last part bein' unavoidable, though havin' th' merit o' shortness; Lorenzo had been selected because Shorty's rich uncle in Kalamazoo—or some such seaport—bore such a moniker, an' Fullerton was Madge's name before she married Shorty.

I thought maybe I could make him so mad he'd leave me alone for a while, thus lettin' me stay in my bunk later, whether I slept or not.

"'Lorenzo' does sound kinda peculiar when applied t' such a little bit of a baby," Shorty concedes, disappointin' me as usual, "but he'll grow up to it."

"An' be called 'Lo, th' poor Indian,' for a nickname," I rawhide him some more. "If he grows up t' be as red as he is now, th' name'll fit him great."

"Huh," Shorty grunts at me, "that shows y'ur ignorance. They come out o' that an' get white after a while."

"Who—Indians?" I ask, innocent. "All th' redskins ever I saw was inclined t' get darker as they got old; an' if Lorenzo follows their complexion habits——"

Shorty give my pony, Salvador, a cut with his quirt, an' Salvador bucked 'round considerable, tearin' up several yards o' tasselin' corn, thus changin' th' subject.

Another mornin' Blue Danube, who'd spent th' night with me after makin' a special trip from his ranch back in th' hills t' inspect young Lorenzo, cut down on Shorty:

"I thought y'u was tryin' t' build up a herd o' whitefaces."

Blue had been th' victim, along with me, o' Shorty's early mornin' visit an' he wasn't charmed none in particular t' be routed out that time o' day. Consequently, when we was mounted up an' on our way to th' bosky for purposes o' doctorin' calves which had been doctored th' day before, he was still a bit ringy.

"Dutch an' I," Shorty says, noddin' at me, "have culled out practically all th' off-colored stock. Herefords do better on this range. Besides they're easier t' sell—y' get a roan or somethin' like that, an' a buyer wants it cut from th' herd."

"How about all-red stock?" Blue persists.

"What—Durhams?" Shorty snorts. "None a-tall. They make good beef cattle if grass is green an' easy t' find, but they can't make th' grade if y'u have t' turn 'em out on th' open range an' make 'em rustle for feed."

"Then what's th' idea o' y'u takin' on this young all-red 'stray.' He looks like plum' Durham stock t' me." Blue smiled a trifle.

"What? Aw, say, Blue," Shorty speaks reproachful 'stead o' blowin' up as Blue expected. "I'll gamble that Dutch put y'u up t' raggin' me about th' little feller," he give me a sorrowful look. "I'll tell y'u as I told Dutch, that babies bleach out when they get older. Y'u ought t' know that."

"Maybeso," Blue throws in with him doubtful, "but I've never seen a all-red calf that turned white. I've heard about 'em, but there's never been one hereabouts."

"My child ain't no calf, I'll have y'u know," Shorty declares, indignant but worried.

When we got back to th' house Shorty wrote a note before he'd taken on any o' th' food which Missus Fullerton, Madge's mother, who'd been stayin' with us since th' baby come, had cooked. He asked me t' hand it t' Doc Swank in Ringolade when I rode in after th' mail, sayin' a answer was expected.

Blue, bein' headed for his home range again, rode t' town with me an' we stopped at Doc Swank's house.

"Well, I'll tell half a county this is a good one," doc laughs after readin' what Shorty'd wrote. Doc is a husky young city chap an' full o' fun, but lackin' in discretion. "Your friend Long wants to know if his baby will 'bleach out to be a regular white man.' Tell him that, within a couple weeks, the child will be more blond than his father ever was."

Now wouldn't that make a cowboy weep! We'd got Shorty all stirred up over Lorenzo's color, an' he'd tried, private, t' get some comfort from doc without no one findin' out he was worried —least of all Blue an' me—an' here this doctor blats it out in broad daylight!

Blue gives Swank a nasty look, but didn't say nothin' except: "I reckon Shorty wrote y'u that letter personal an' is lookin' for a similar reply."

I slipped in my oar, for fear Blue's hint mightn't sink in deep enough: "If Shorty'd wanted any one t' know what he was writin' about he'd 'a' mentioned it."

Doc flushed up considerable: "Excuse me," he says. "Thoughtless on my part. I'll scribble an answer if you'll take it back with you."

Lonesome Cove—which we called our layout in th' bosky—hadn't had so many visitors since th' celebrated Hec was a pup as it did after Lorenzo throwed in with us.

We was cut off from th' world, in a way, because th' Rio Grande circled us on three sides—with no bridges—while to th' east sandhills made travelin' tolerable difficult. Our frame house—which had been built as one room, but later divided into four by partitions—with my lean-to, was on th' only cleared land for miles up an' down th' river, except twenty acres Shorty an' me had grubbed out so's t' raise winter feed for our stock. Th' Vegas, several miles west across th' Rio, was free o' trees an', similar, th' Flats to th' east where th' sandhills end; but th' bosky, in th' river bottom, was populated, dense, with tornillas an' cottonwoods. Also, we had green salt grass when both Vegas an' Flats was yellow from heat an' no rain.

Lorenzo's grandpa Fullerton an' his Uncle Ted an' Aunt Trix, both just kids, made it across th' river in a sort o' aërial boat that run on pulleys attached to a steel cable that Shorty an'

me had strung up; "Baldy" Parker an' th' rest o' that roughneck bunch from th' Flats, come ridin' down th' sand-hills t' give Shorty's son th' double O; vaqueros, Mex an' white, swum th' river horseback, comin' from th' Vegas an' th' south, for th' same purpose.

Shorty sure was proud. His eyes, which was a natural gray, got almost as blue as Madge's when he looked at Lorenzo with every one crowded 'round sayin' nice things; an' his bald head swelled till I sent away to buy a new Stetson for him—a quarter size bigger'n he'd ever wore before. It graveled Shorty t' refer to th' sparse vegetation on his dome because, though he was only seven years older'n Madge—who was nineteen—he thought it made him look ancient enough t' be her dad.

"Baldy" Parker was th' first one that saw any resemblance between Lorenzo an' his father. This excited considerable comment.

"How's he look like me?" Shorty inquires hopeful.

Every one else had said he looked like Madge when he got t' be a month old, which augured for him growin' up handsome since his mother was th' keenest looker in th' country—havin' quantities o' chestnut-colored hair an' skin like pictures that come with cold-cream ads—while Shorty's face was just a shade lighter'n his leather leggin's.

"Look at his laigs," Baldy insists, blushin'.

Sure enough! Lorenzo's legs was revealed on account o' his kickin' an' squirmin', an' they had curves as prominent as a bend in th' Rio!

Madge smiled amiable: "They'll straighten out," puckerin' her lips at Baldy when she said "out" so that Baldy blushed some more an' didn't look for no further resemblances to Shorty.

Lorenzo growed up t' be two months old an' I'd shied ever' time Shorty or Madge tried t' crowd me into holdin' him. He was a sturdy little chunk, but bein' so small I was afraid I'd break him, or somethin'. And yet I was crazy about him. He'd smile, just a trifle, when I'd crow for him, whereat he'd open his mouth an' darn near laugh out loud. Then he'd grab my fingers an' hold on while I lifted him till he was sittin' up—which is some strong for a little rooster that age—an' Madge'd look on, shiny eyed, sayin': "Laugh for your Uncle Dutch, baby." She never called him "Lorenzo," figurin', I reckon, that such a name was too much weight for a pee-wee t' pack.

I called him "Big Enough," an' he sure got under my hide with his cunnin' ways, stretchin' out his little arms an' legs—which Madge said he did t' help hisself grow—but I thought he was performin' for my benefit—an' sayin' "Ick" an' "Gub" an' other words which sounded a heap like th' language used by some grand uproar singers I'd heard in El Paso one night before I went t' sleep. From his handlin' th' words that way, I 'lowed Big Enough had plum' certain talent along grand uproar lines since he knowed th' language without no teachin', an' practicin' with his voice come natural.

Th' evenin' of his second birthday Big Enough was asleep, an' Shorty an' me was fixin' t' ride into th' bosky. That is, Big Enough was two months old, an' we'd celebrated just like he had come two *year* old. Shorty'd kissed Madge good-by—which he did whenever he had a chance, includin' times when he come back after havin' been gone only a few minutes—an' I could see her lookin' wistful at our horses. It occurred t' me that she'd enjoy sittin' on a pony after not havin' been on one for five or six months, so I suggest that she ride Shorty's horse an' Shorty could have mine.

I was mounted up on Coyote, a big brown that Bill McFall had first loaned

me thinkin' he'd pile me all over th' lot, an' then sold t' me. Coyote'd never done any business at pitchin' since I'd had him, an' I'd made him into a work animal, usin' him occasional under th' saddle. On account o' Coyote bein' tolerable rough gaited an' havin' a rep as a bad actor—though he'd always been gentle as a dog with me—I thought Madge'd enjoy herself more on Redman, Shorty's pony.

This made a hit with Madge, but she looked doubtful.

"And leave you here alone with baby?" she asks dubious.

"Big Enough's asleep," I ease her mind, "an' prob'ly won't wake up 'fore you get back. I'll take th' chance if y'u're willin'. Anyhow, him an' me is great pals, an' we'll have a big time if he don't stay unconscious."

That sounded good t' Madge—an' Shorty, too—so she flew into th' house, comin' out in a few minutes all rigged up in her ridin' skirt an' th' new Stetson I'd bought for Shorty when I thought his head was gettin' too big for th' one he was wearin'.

I watched 'em out o' sight an' then made tracks for th' room where Big Enough was asleep. I never had had a chance t' look at him as long's I'd wanted, an' here was a good lay.

Sittin' beside his bed, which was a tiny bunk built onto th' wall with slats fixed so's th' youngster couldn't fall out, I fanned him with a newspaper t' keep th' flies off an' got both eyes full o' him.

Directly, without no warnin' whatever, he opens his eyes wide, givin' me th' once over for all th' world like he never saw me before. I give him th' meadow lark whistle an' he looked a trifle pleased; after that I nickered like a horse, but it didn't take much of a eye t' see I was losin' ground; his under lip twisted out an' he started t' tune up.

"Listen, pardner," says I, soothin'. "This ain't th' time o' day for y'ur choir practice. Early mornin's th' time all settled for that."

He wouldn't listen t' reason, an', in a minute, his "m-a-a" rose up an' hit th' rafters—he was singin' pretty bad off key, too.

I've observed in young live stock that they exercise their lungs considerable when they've lost their mas. A calf'll bawl its head off if th' cow has strayed, an', absent-minded, stays away after feedin' time. Therefore, havin' no other lay t' judge by, it looked like Big Enough was callin' for his mother or somethin' t' eat. There bein' neither on th' job I was up against it since my bag o' tricks failed t' charm.

That was th' first time I'd pined any considerable amount for Missus Fullerton since she'd left, 'most a month before. If she'd been there, she'd 'a' knowed what t' do, havin' brought up three children, besides handlin' Dave, her husband.

I was scairt t' pick him up, like I'd seen his gran'ma Fullerton do; so I rummaged 'round an' found some bread which I offered him. He spit it up scornful an' started in again with his notes even worse'n those uproar singers I'd listened to.

Some more scoutin' was rewarded by my findin' a ham that Madge had boiled. I cut a chunk off that an' taken it in to th' young catamount who, by this time, was swingin' his arms an' yellin' so loud I was sure Shorty an' Madge must hear him, a mile off in th' bosky.

Big Enough ceased firin' for a short interval while he tasted th' hog meat—an' then bore down on his noise stranger'n ever. Seemed t' me he was workin' harder'n he was in th' habit o' doin' before sunup, an' he was gettin' off key somethin' terrible.

I made up my mind that th' little rascal was starvin' t' death, but that I hadn't hit on nothin' he liked; wherefore I stepped outdoors t' give my brain

some exercise an' fresh air while I tried t' think what I'd best do under th' circ's. I knowed babies craved milk, but there wasn't none on th' place an' we didn't keep no milk cow.

Out in th' corral, some twenty-five or thirty yards north o' th' house, I see a wild Hereford cow an' her calf that had come up th' barb'-wire lane we'd built from th' bosky so's stock could water there in case they was too far from th' Rio. Seein' that cow give me th' big idea, an' I decided I'd get some milk whether she liked it or not.

I slipped 'round th' barn an' closed th' corral gate which leads to th' bosky, before she could make a get-away, an' then dug up a spare rope from my bunk room.

Mrs. Hereford got on th' prod immediate thinkin', doubtless, that I was after her calf, an' tried t' put me out o' th' corral. We had it tolerable lively 'round th' snubbin' post for several minutes before I could get my rope on her forelegs. When I did, th' war was mostly over. After I'd jerked her off her feet, I spoiled a perfectly good lariat by usin' it as a hoggin' string t' tie her down.

I run into th' house t' get a empty lard pail an' spilled th' glad news t' Big Enough that he'd soon have somethin' t' eat—but he didn't pay much attention, only cuttin' down on a different key.

Out I charged again an', after considerable sweatin' effort, managed t' separate th' bawlin' cow from about a pint o' milk. If she'd been any madder she'd 'a' busted—an' I'd 'a' been th' bustee if th' lay had been right. I opened th' lane gate an' then loosened th' tie rope, leavin' th' indignant ol' heifer t' worry her way out while I beat it *pronto* back to th' house with my peace offerin'.

Big Enough was singin' several different notes all at once when I come bustin' into th' kitchen; so I worked fast, strainin' th' milk through a cheesecloth, an' then hunted up a bottle with a rubber nubbin on it. I'd seen Madge feedin' water t' Lorenzo from this bottle an' it just filled th' bill for milk purposes.

Man! I sure was proud when I had taken that feed in an' give it t' Big Enough. He took to it immediate, forgettin' all about his singin' practice an' just naturally inhaled it, peekin' at me from th' sides o' his eyes like he was tryin' t' smile but didn't have time. When he got pretty near to th' bottom o' his supply he drowsed off—which I judged was a good sign that he was plum' content.

Madge an' Shorty come ridin' up about that time. I tiptoed out o' th' room an' met 'em comin' through th' kitchen door.

"Mercy!" says Madge, lookin' at th' bread an' ham on th' table. "Did you get hungry, Dutch?" Then she looked at th' clock. "Poor fellow, I don't blame you—we were gone longer than we thought—it's nearly seven. Didn't baby get restless? It's past his feeding time."

"No'm," I told her. "I didn't get hungry, but Big Enough got considerable restless."

"Well—why all th' chow layout if y'u wasn't hungry," Shorty inquires interested. "Had visitors?"

Before I had a chance t' answer, Madge wants t' know what I've been doin' t' get her dishcloth all messed up an' where had I got th' milk in that tin pail.

I stepped on my tongue a couple times, tryin' t' tell her how things'd got that way, feelin' somehow that I'd done wrong after all, playin' nursemaid t' Big Enough.

"Don't you know that bread or ham would choke Baby to death if he swallowed any of it?" Madge wails. "And that raw cows' milks is for calves—not babies"—she rushed away, Shorty an' me followin' her t' Big Enough's bunk.

He was wide awake an' had a sur-

prised look on his face. His little forehead was all screwed up in a frown an' he was makin' funny noises.

Madge picked up th' bottle from which I'd fed Big Enough his milk. "He drank nearly all of it—four ounces—and strained through a dishcloth," she gasps. "Oh-oh-oh! He'll die!"

At that, Shorty got excited an' collared me when I was tryin' t' slip out o' th' room. He started in t' abuse me, but Madge saved my bacon.

"Don't blame Dutch," she orders, gettin' real businesslike. "You'd probably have done worse—if it's possible. Build a fire in the stove, heat some water, fill the hot-water bag, get me some lime-water——" Shorty turned me loose an' got busy.

So did Big Enough. He "gugged" a few times t' get under a full head o' steam an' then broke into song different from anythin' I'd ever heard him do before. It was a sort o' panicky squall similar t' that of a calf that's bein' branded. It come in gasps, grunts, high notes an' pauses while he was holdin' his breath; his face turned red, an' th' house got too small t' contain all th' racket—which give me th' hunch t' move out an' give it more room.

Neither Madge or Shorty paid me any notice when I left. Shorty was engaged in pourin' kerosene onto th' wood fire t' speed it up, an' Madge was callin' to him for some kind o' oil.

I led Coyote an' Redman out t' th' corral, bein' scared stiff an' not knowin' what else t' do, listenin' close t' all th' new tones Big Enough was puttin' in his song. He was experimentin' on everythin' he had!

My fingers was tremblin' as I undid Redman's cinch buckles. Them cries was gettin' worse all th' time, an' when I was ready t' unsaddle Coyote they'd rose to a shrill, wild scream. I was near a tee-total collapse, thinkin' o' my responsibility.

Shorty come bulgin' out o' th' house so fast he left his hat hangin' on th' screen door.

"Make a run t' Ringolade," he shouts, "an' get Doc Swank. If we can keep baby alive till he gets here we'll be lucky. I think he's dyin' now!"

"Aw, Shorty," I protested, pullin' Coyote's front cinch tighter, preparin' for a hard ride, "don't make it so squally. It makes me feel like a murderer, an' y'u know I wouldn't 'a' done anythin' t' hurt Big Enough if I could help it——"

"Can that noise," Shorty yelled. "Get under way."

Shorty held th' gate open, an' I vaulted aboard Coyote, spurrin' him to a high run as we charged through th' cornfield on a short cut to th' nearest gate leadin' to th' trail through th' sandhills.

Coyote seemed t' sense that a heap was expected o' him for he laid back his ears an' tried t' conduct hisself like a runnin' horse. He couldn't cover a mile under three minutes on th' best race track in th' world; but what he could do was run that same mile in th' same time any place—an' moreover he was able to continue runnin' when a whole relay o' other horses would give out.

As was customary when Coyote was doin' anythin'—or doin' nothin'—he moaned, as if he was melancholy or in pain. Whatever ailed him must 'a' been in his mind because any physical pain weakens—an' Coyote could do more work'n a team o' mules an' groan continuous while he was at it. Any one ridin' him was more apt t' be sufferin' since Coyote, travelin' natural, had a rougher gait than most ponies have when they're pitchin' their best. I might add that nobody had ever rode Coyote when he chose different—though several had tried.

We hit deep sand on th' trail t' town with Coyote lopin' steady at top speed. He stumbled ever' few jumps, but never

fell—besides his other faults, he was awkward—an' each time he stubbed his toe he groaned. It was gettin' dusk, but I could see his neck was black from sweat—what with th' evenin' bein' hot an' th' exertion somethin' terrific, travelin' on a high lope through sand that should 'a' been taken at a walk.

I got t' wonderin' what key Big Enough was singin' in or if, maybe, he'd done quit his singin' forever. Sweat poured down in my eyes an' made 'em sting so I could hardly see, thinkin' such thoughts, an' without intendin' it, I gigged Coyote with my spurs. He tried t' speed up, but he couldn't go any faster.

Th' last long grade was a heart breaker, an' if it wasn't that th' loss o' a minute might mean the loss o' Big Enough, I'd 'a' had mercy on Coyote. He was sure laborin' an' it was painful t' hear him breathe, but he was willin' an' never slackened th' least bit from his top speed.

We topped out on th' final hill an' could see Ringolade spread out below us—just gettin' lighted up for th' night. We slipped down th' grade on th' remainin' half mile so fast that Coyote's hoofs was always about two jumps behind. I never could figure out how we stayed right side up.

As we dashed past th' lamp-post on th' border o' town I take a flash at my watch. Coyote had made th' trip in thirty-four minutes—through ten miles o' th' hardest goin' that a horse was ever called on t' make! Folks won't believe it now on my say-so; but I can prove it. Shorty knows what time I left Lonesome Cove, an' Doc Swank can swear what time I get t' Ringolade.

Th' doc was sittin' on his front gallery, smokin' his after-supper cigar when I got to him.

"Li'l' Lorenzo is dyin'," I gasped, fallin' off Coyote who was weavin' sideways with his nose next to th' ground.

"What?" doc hollers. "How'd he get in such a shape?"

"Nemmind how he got that way—stir a stump," I beg him. "We may be too late now."

"How'll I get there?" he inquires helpless, consultin' his timepiece. "It'd take me three hours to drive in my buggy around by way of the Flats, and there's no train till morning."

"Mount up on Coyote," I invite. "He'll take y'u back—never was such a horse for strength."

"Is he gentle?" doc asks.

"Get y'u're gripsack," I squalled, "an' don't waste no more time."

He got his little satchel an' I boosted him up on Coyote. It was a dirty trick t' play on th' game ol' goat, but I didn't see how it was t' be avoided with Big Enough's life hangin' in th' balance.

Coyote went lopin' down th' street with doc on top an' I tracked it in a hurry for Jim Frazier who runs th' hotel an' livery stable. Jim led me out t' his corral where I selected a peart four-year-old roan which I mounted up on in a hurry after Jim loaned me a saddle.

"I'll send him back with Doc Swank," I called back at Jim as I was leavin'.

That roan prob'ly give th' best he had, but it was only on down grades that I could get much speed from him on th' return trip. It seemed like hours before we come in sight o' Bitter Spring which was figured at six miles from Ringolade an' four mile from Lonesome Cove. At a distance I could see some animal at th' waterin' trough an', approachin' closer, I heard a mournful sigh which told me that th' figure was none other'n Coyote.

He was standin' with his bridle reins down, groanin' an' lookin' sad. A rod further on I found my saddle an' blanket. Th' hurried once over which I give Coyote showed why doc was afoot.

Th' cinch which I'd tightened before leavin' th' bosky had sored Coyote somethin' cruel. He was built like a wedge, an' a saddle slipped forward on him, causin' him more grief than any other saddle animal I'd ever seen. When th' cinch gouged him he'd pitch—an' that was what made it impossible t' ride him till I'd discovered what ailed him—an', bein' built th' way he was. th' saddle come off over his head in short order.

I left Coyote standin' there an' whipped my mount into a run, overtakin' doc a mile down th' trail, swearin' a blue streak, but headed for Lonesome Cove.

"Take this pony, doc," I yelled, fallin' off th' roan while it was still runnin' "an' keep goin'."

He was inclined t' augur some that I'd give him a bum steer about Coyote bein' gentle, but it didn't get him t' first base with me. I told him about Big Enough dyin'—maybe dead—an' that we'd fix up our misunderstandin's later.

I helped him into th' saddle an' throwed sand t' scare th' roan—which started 'em off on a run, doc's satchel wavin' in th' breezes. Then I went back, afoot, after Coyote who was still waitin', tryin' t' comfort myself that I'd done my best an' if that wasn't good enough I'd always have t' suffer for havin' been th' cause o' Lorenzo's death.

Coyote was gentle as ever, though still makin' his doleful sounds, when I throwed my kak on him—but I made sure th' cinches was so loose they wasn't touchin' him. With th' saddle that way we had t' travel slow an' it seemed that daylight was bound t' overtake me any minute, though my watch showed it t' be only a quarter past nine—when I come in sight o' lights at Lonesome Cove.

I opened th' gate to th' home ranch, leadin' Coyote through after me, listenin' for Big Enough's voice. It seemed t' me that nothin' in th' world would 'a' sounded sweeter t' me than that young un's squallin'. There wasn't a sound except live stock trompin' 'round in th' water corral; not a rustle o' corn an' maize stalks in th' field!

I tied th' reins up on th' saddle horn, leavin' Coyote t' follow me down th' road we'd built through th' corn earlier in th' evenin'. Th' closer we got to th' house th' silenter it become—even th' cows in th' corral stopped shiftin' an' stood still.

I thought that any sound would be better'n so much quiet—Shorty's cussin' —a scream from Madge, even. I thought wrong—Coyote, with his nose right under my arm moaned an' I jumped like I'd been shot. It sounded like some dead person tellin' his troubles to a graveyard—an' I cared less for that than I did for th' silence.

At th' corral gate I stopped, not darin' t' go in th' house. I told myself that it wasn't possible for Big Enough t' be dead—that there must be some fightin' chance. I looked for doc's horse, an' located it in th' pen with its saddle an' bridle still on. Anyhow, doc had been there t' do what he could, an' had got in action without wastin' any time.

I could see in th' kitchen, through th' screen. Directly I spy doc, in his shirt sleeves, walkin' toward th' door. If only he'd come out so I could talk t' him an' learn th' worst!

He did, an' I did.

Doc opened th' door quiet an' stepped outside, lookin' at th' stars. He walked in circles for a minute before I could get up my nerve t' approach him.

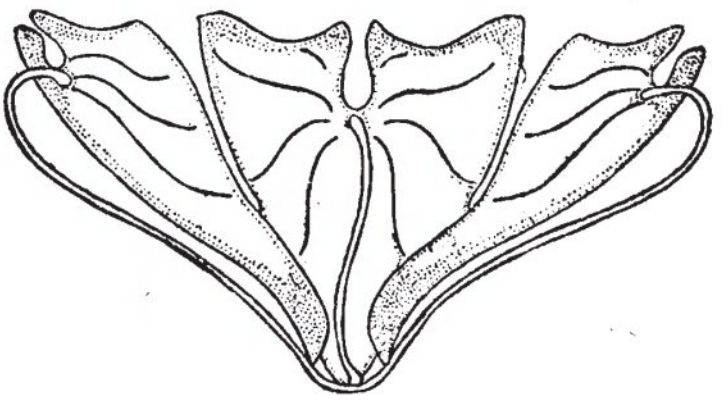
It bein' plum' dark he couldn't see me. I slipped, silent, up to within a few yards o' him an' was about t' speak when Coyote groaned again—he was still followin' me, though I'd forgot about him.

Doc made a flyin' leap for cover.

"Wait, doc," I whispered, hoarse,

bound that he shouldn't get away without my findin' out about Big Enough. "Did—did—did—th' baby?" I couldn't say no more. My voice give out.

"Oh, hello, Dutch. Your horse nearly scared me to death," says doc, relieved. "Yes—young Lorenzo's asleep. Just had a little touch of colic."



ROMANCE HAS NEVER LEFT ME

By Harry Kemp

ROMANCE has never left me since the day that I was born,
The strange romance in common things that many greet with scorn,
The strange romance of every day renewed with every morn.
There is no small, accepted thing but holds its mystery;
I am astonished at my hands, and at the thing that's "me;"
Am overwhelmed by the romance of men's identity;
By animals that live with us, though of an alien clan;
By faithful dog that has been ours since human thought began;
By cow and sheep and horse that share companionship with man;
By houses that we build with wood hewn out of living trees;
By chairs that fit themselves to us, by beds that hold our ease;
By engines climbing distant hills and ships that sail the seas.
Then there is fire that lifts and dies within a little space,
And water that must ever walk back to the sea apace,
And vast, invisible air that pours with soft and unseen grace.
True, I have found romance in those who sought the Golden Fleece,
In legends of the ages from the classic days of Greece,
In tales that will not darken till the hearts of people cease.
But though I've followed many dreams and found far music sweet
I've never passed the wonder in the faces on the street;
I've never missed the miracle of flowers at my feet!

The Get-Together Club

WHEN, in a recent number of the magazine, we asked you for an expression of your preference as to the size and length of the complete novel in each number of PEOPLE'S we believed that it would probably result in a conflict of opinion.

This belief, no doubt, was due to the fact that, we frankly confess, our editorial mind has been fighting itself on the subject without knowing it. We have unconsciously fallen into the habit of supposing that you people liked one moderately long story and a fairly large number of short ones. See how easily one takes things for granted and complacently follows a custom. Formerly, prior to the change of PEOPLE'S to an illustrated magazine, it was a rare thing for a complete novel to run more than fifty pages—often it was much less. So it was a natural and comfortable thing to do to keep it up after the change back to the all-fiction form.

But then we woke up to the fact that our complete novels were running upward of seventy pages and, inasmuch as we were finding it difficult, for some reason, to get hold of shorter novels good enough to offer you we began to ask ourselves questions which we finally passed along to you.

Now your replies are beginning to come in, and thus far they express but one opinion.

RICHARDS, MISSOURI,
September 24, 1921.

STREET & SMITH, PUBLISHERS,

DEAR SIRS: In the last number of the PEOPLE'S MAGAZINE, you ask for an expression from your readers as to whether we like the complete novel to be a long or a short one.

Give us long ones and from men, if possible, in the same class as Frank L. Packard, Ralph D. Paine, Bertrand Sinclair, Roy Norton, Henry C. Rowland, and many others whose work has appeared in your publications the past fifteen years.

These men have something to tell and put into their stories something that you seldom feel in the majority of the short ones. I am,

Yours truly,
A. J. SMITH.

PHILADELPHIA, September 25, 1921.

PEOPLE'S FAVORITE MAGAZINE,
New York, N. Y.

TO THE EDITOR: In your last issue of PEOPLE'S you ask for an expression of opinion on the matter of book-length novels. I am not backward in saying that I want them long, and for you not to deviate from the plan you have been following in the past. My reason is this: In a novelette or short story one just about begins to get acquainted with the plot and characters when it suddenly terminates. In a book-length novel from sixty to eighty pages this is not so; one can start a story knowing that at least two hours of pleasure confronts them.

I sincerely implore you not to wreck the magazine on the shore of dissatisfaction. The sudden stoppage of circulation when it was changed before and the hearty response that was given when PEOPLE'S came into its own again is sufficient argument, I believe, to go on the way you have been. At any rate,

I am a full book-length-novel advocate, and so you can register my humble vote as one.

Respectfully yours,
FREDERIC W. SNAPE.

7315 Limekiln Pike, Germantown,
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

POULTNAY, VERMONT,
September 25, 1921.

Editor of PEOPLE'S: As you say, presumably we have *our* own ideas on the subject, namely, "book-length novels."

It is usually with regret that I turn to the last page of your "book-length novels." Why, oh, why can't they be longer, the longer the better, for me, and I am of the opinion that you will find it also the will of the majority in this proposed "plebiscite."

This being my second letter since the return of our PEOPLE'S to its real form, I don't dare take any more space. Here's hoping my side wins. CHARLES T. KERR.

You needn't have felt obliged to curtail the space you used, Mr. Kerr, simply because you have written us before—or for any other reason for that matter.

ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI,
September 26, 1921.

Editor of PEOPLE'S MAGAZINE,
New York.

DEAR SIR: I see you want to know from the readers of PEOPLE'S MAGAZINE if they like complete novels as long as seventy-five or eighty pages, or if they rather have shorter ones.

Well, I am only one reader out of many—I hope a great many—but anyway, I know what I like and as long as you have asked the question, I take the liberty of answering it.

I don't think you are ever going to put out a complete novel that will be too long for me, that is, unless it is so uninteresting that I could not read it if it was a quarter as long. You have not done that yet and I guess you won't. For they have all been first class so far. I like a good, long novel because I have the time evenings to read them and when I start reading I don't like to skip from one kind of story to another. Short stories are all right, too, but you want to take them up when you have a short time now and then for reading.

But when you sit down with a couple of hours or so to read, I think you want to read about the same people. Anyway, I do. So my vote is for a long story.

Yours truly,
FRED HUNTER.

MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE,
September 24, 1921.

PEOPLE'S FAVORITE MAGAZINE,
79 Seventh Avenue,
New York.

DEAR EDITOR: I think you did a good thing when you asked your readers to say whether they wanted long stories for complete novels or short stories.

It was a good thing for the readers and a good thing for the magazine to know about this, for I suppose you mean to give them what they ask for, and then we will all be satisfied.

Now I like the kind of long novels you get out in PEOPLE'S, but I don't think I would care for them a little bit if they weren't as good as they are. And that is all there is to it. A real good story can't be too long, and sometimes it isn't long enough.

I don't suppose that is a very good answer to your question, but I like a good, long story if it can keep me reading. When I read some short stories that take as long to go through as one long one, it's like taking a bite of an apple and then out of a peach, and then out of a banana, and then some grapes. But that's only when I read them all at once.

I'll say for your magazine that it interests me more than any other one I read and I read three or four others. I like yours best because the people you tell about are "regular fellows," and they act the way people I know much about act when the same things happen to them.

Keep them doing things that way and give us long novels. Yours truly,
HARTER CROWELL.

We think the following letter deserves to be published, and we think Mr. Howard will agree with us. The writer of it is evidently a man who takes pride in his craft and is in earnest.

We are going to give Mr. Howard a chance to reply to it. We have sent the letter to him for that purpose.

DOUGLAS, WYOMING.

Editor, PEOPLE'S MAGAZINE.

Referring to the story "Bentley's Pride," by Harrison R. Howard in September number. First, I have been an engineer for ten years and I have never yet heard or seen an exhaust popping. I notice Mr. Howard uses this word exhaust popping many times. For Mr. Howard's information, I'll state that steam is brought from the boilers to the

engines by pipe, the steam passes through the engine and is then exhausted, that is the spent steam is forced out and is termed the exhaust steam. He also says, "The huge exhaust above the boiler snapped open." I wonder if Mr. Howard ever saw a boiler? There is a safety valve on all boilers—or should be—but it is not of any huge proportions. For instance, a boiler of 125 H. P. will have a valve of approximately four inches in diameter. These valves are so set that when the steam pressure reaches a certain point, they will open and relieve the pressure; after the pressure is down to a certain point, they will again close. This is what is termed popping. Mr. Howard would have done well to have procured an engineer's criticism of his story. Also, let me say, that no good fireman will ever keep his boilers popping and that most chief engineers will discharge a fireman who makes a practice of popping his boilers continuously.

As for the exhaust popping, I think all my brother engineers will agree with me. "It's one on me." Yours truly,

E. SEARL.

There is a question that we have been planning to ask you people, and this seems to us to be an appropriate time to put it up to you.

With this number you have had ten issues of PEOPLE'S, since last May, restored to its form as an all-fiction magazine. These ten issues ought to furnish the material for a pretty accurate estimate of what the magazine has been trying to do, and how well—or ill—it has succeeded in doing it.

Perhaps you will recall what we said in the May number as to what we thought the new PEOPLE'S ought to be. Maybe it will do no harm to repeat it.

We promised you that you would find that "the magazine has kept abreast of the times. The world, of course, isn't what it was before the war; neither is it what it was two years ago or a year ago. We have just begun to realize the changed conditions, and the world's fiction has not escaped this influence. Hence you need not expect to identify the present PEOPLE'S with the old PEOPLE'S, for it, too, has outgrown the standards and, in a certain sense, the ideals of two years ago.

"Human nature's great longing now, as we see it, is for *human nature*. Understanding and sympathy between the peoples of the earth are sought, more or less blindly, by nations as they always have been by individuals. Everywhere, in every place, we are groping for it. We seek it in international relations, in industry, in commerce, in social life, in newspapers, in magazines, in fiction.

"PEOPLE'S begins its new era preparing to help, as it can, to satisfy this longing. Stories to be worthy of the name must have a tinge, at least, of drama, and real drama is wholly lacking without the human touch. The greatest need of American fiction to-day is heart interest! Not the heart interest that used to be understood as that shared by a man and a girl—love interest—but the unexpected display of any form of generous human emotion. . . . This is the appeal that PEOPLE'S seeks to make to you."

We haven't forgotten for an instant what we set out to do with the new PEOPLE'S. We have ransacked the manuscript market, without ceasing, in a search for stories that measure up to the standard we set for ourselves. Stories of the most modern, up-to-date type with the genuine, sincere heart interest that we spoke of.

Now we want to know from you what you think of the results. Have we kept our promise? Have we only partly kept it, and if so, how far have we fallen short of it? Have we entirely failed?

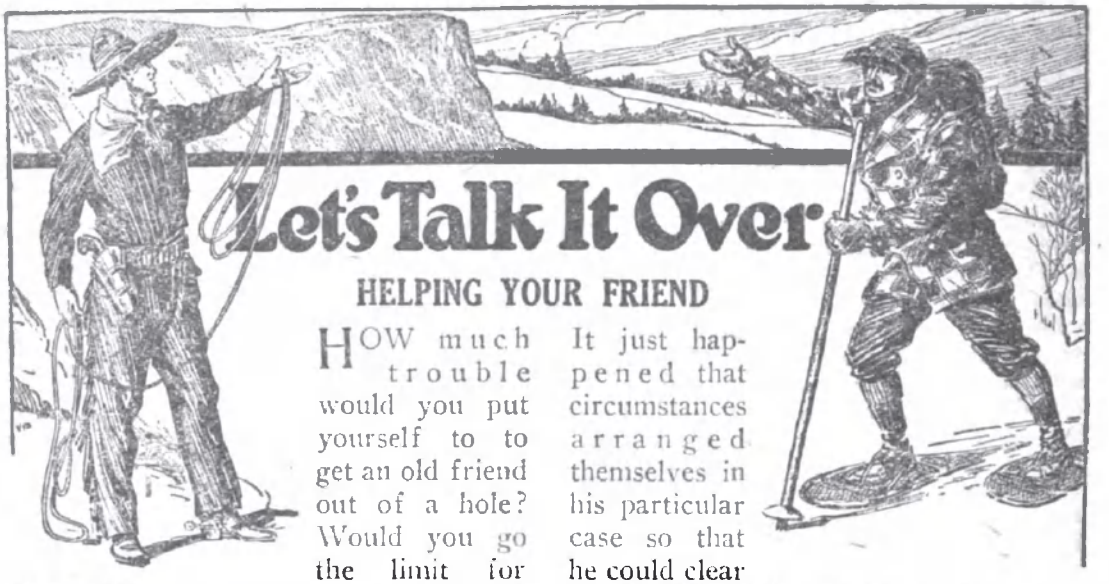
Your interests are involved in these questions as much as ours are.

We put them to you straight!

Will you answer them straight?

You needn't be afraid of hurting our feelings.

We ask you, because you *know!*



Let's Talk It Over

HELPING YOUR FRIEND

HOW much trouble would you put yourself to to get an old friend out of a hole? Would you go the limit for him? Not necessarily in the way of financial assistance; that way of helping a friend is of very doubtful value, for more often than not it tends to impair a man's fighting capacity to lend or give him money when he is in trouble. It's bad for him and, in an indirect way it's bad for you because it may be an easy means of quieting your conscience and getting a sense of obligation off your mind.

That sort of thing is not what we are speaking of. What we are thinking about is what Jarvis—"The Man From Detroit"—did for Standbridge. How much of your time and thought are you prepared to give to the tangled affairs of an old friend? We don't ask you how much are you *willing* to give; we know that. It is an almost universal human instinct to respond promptly to an appeal for help, direct or indirect. You *want* to do something.

It's what comes after the first impulse to be of service to your friend. And that's what really counts. Presumably every decent-minded man or woman feels that first impulse, but we don't all of us act upon it; and yet there are very few of us that can't offer something.

Maybe not as effectively as Jarvis did. It just happened that circumstances arranged themselves in his particular case so that he could clear up the difficulties of Standbridge in a single night. But the point is that he lost no time in acting. He thought and he acted, both; he put aside his own plans and devoted a whole night to his friend's troubles. He neither spared himself nor others.

Of course, he put the thing through because it was his habit. And in this fact lies the contrast between him and his friend.

But Jarvis' practice of going to the limit in anything he undertook to do proved its effectiveness in a matter of friendship just as it had always done in matters of business. Imagine Standbridge in the position of Jarvis in such a case as this.

Nevertheless, while we are not all of us Jarvises, either in means or ability, we can do something for embarrassed friends. We can give them time and sympathy and thoughtfulness and, perhaps, even advice and information. We believe that almost always when these things are withheld it is from a sense of impotence rather than from any unwillingness to "go the limit."

Almost every one would contribute these things, without stint, if he realized that he was doing something that was practical.

The Oliver Typewriter

The Oliver Typewriter Company announces a further reduction in price of the latest and improved Oliver No. 9—formerly $100—lately $64. The price alone is changed—not the standard model that has won such fame. Over 900,000 have been sold.

This offer is based on the fact that the Oliver has proven that it sells itself. We ship it direct from the factory to you, saving you the cost of selling.

If any typewriter is worth $100, it is this sturdy, proven Oliver—the finest, the costliest Oliver we have ever built.

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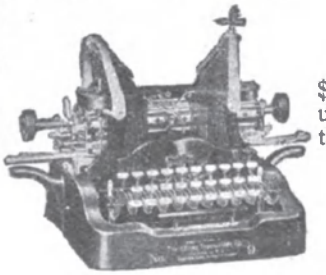

You get exactly what $100 or more brings the usual way. And you are the sole judge.

Send No Money

Merely mail the coupon below for a Free Trial Oliver or for further information. Check which.

The method has been in use for 4 years. Thousands have taken advantage of it. Why should *you* pay double, when double cannot bring you more? This announcement is bound to bring a flood of orders. Mail your coupon NOW, so your order can be filled promptly.

FREE TRIAL

The new reduction is due solely to our simplified method of selling. It created a sensation when introduced in 1917. To abandon the standard price of $100 won the approval of the public. We now make a further reduction, anticipating lowered costs of production.

This standard $100 Oliver now sells for $49.50 cash or $55 on installments.

The coupon brings the Oliver to you for five days' free trial. Be your own salesman. If you agree that it is the finest typewriter that any price can buy, you can save yourself half the usual price.

When it arrives, put it through every test and comparison with other $100 standard typewriters. Then if you want to buy it, send $49.50 in cash. Or if you wish to take advantage of the installment plan, send us $3, then $4 per month until the $55 is paid.

If you decide against it, ship it back at our expense. You do not risk a penny.

Remember, this is a brand new Oliver—not second hand, not rebuilt. Do not let the remarkably low price confuse you. This is the standard $100 typewriter, but sold direct from the factory to the user. You do not have to pay for an enormous army of salesmen nor for a costly chain of branch houses in 50 cities.

The OLIVER Typewriter Company
738 Oliver Typewriter Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

SAVE $50.50

THE OLIVER TYPEWRITER COMPANY,
738 Oliver Typewriter Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

☐ Ship me a new Oliver No. 9 Typewriter for five days' free inspection. If I keep it I will pay $55 as follows: $3 at the end of trial period and then at the rate of $4 per month. The title to remain in you until fully paid for. If I make cash settlement at end of trial period I am to deduct ten per cent and remit to you $49.50.

If I decide not to keep it, I will ship it back at your expense at the end of five days.

My shipping point is.....

☐ Do not send a machine until I order it. Mail me your book—"The High Cost of Typewriters—The Reason and the Remedy," your de luxe catalog and further information.

Name.....

Street Address.....

City.....State.....

Occupation or Business.....

PEOPLE'S FAVORITE MAGAZINE

Vol. XXXVI. No. 2 **November 10, 1921**

CONTENTS FOR THIS ISSUE

Published semi-monthly by Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York City. ORMOND G. SMITH, President; GEORGE C. SMITH, Treasurer; GEORGE C. SMITH, JR., Secretary.

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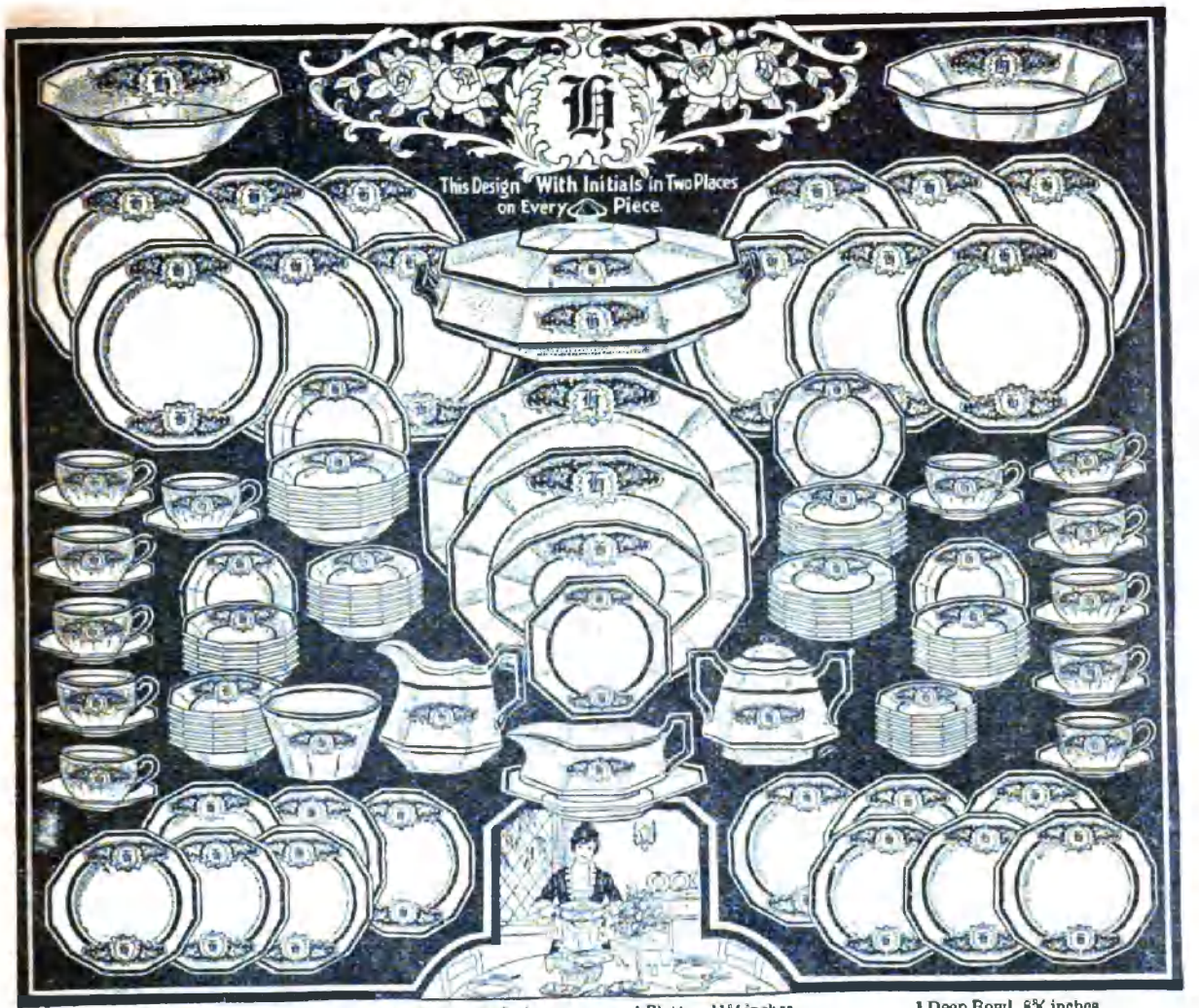

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12 Breakfast Plates, 7 inches
12 Cups
12 Saucers
12 Soup Plates, 7¾ inches
12 Cereal Dishes, 6 inches
12 Fruit Dishes, 5¼ inches
12 Individual Bread and Butter Plates, 6¾ inches
1 Platter, 13½ inches
1 Platter, 11⅝ inches
1 Celery Dish, 8¾ inches
1 Sauce Boat Tray, 7⅝ inches
1 Butter Plate, 6 inches
1 Vegetable Dish, 10½ inches, with lid (2 pieces)
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My earnings for March were over $1,000 and over $1,800 for the last six weeks, while last week my earnings were $358.00. I travel eleven months out of the year, working 5 days each week. The N.S.T.A. dug me out of a rut where I was earning less than $1,000 a year and showed me how to make a success. J. P. Overstreet, Denison, Texas.

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National Salesmens Training Association
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City ..... State.....

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...Civil Engineer $5,000 to $15,000	...Steam Engineer $2,000 to $4,000
...Structural Engineer $4,000 to $10,000	...Foreman's Course $2,000 to $4,000
...Business Manager $5,000 to $15,000	...Sanitary Engineer $2,000 to $5,000
...Certified Public Accountant $7,000 to $15,000	...Telephone Engineer $2,500 to $6,000
...Accountant and Auditor $2,500 to $7,000	...Telegraph Engineer $2,500 to $5,000
...Draftsman and Designer $2,500 to $4,000	..High School Graduate In two years
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Name .....

Present Position.....

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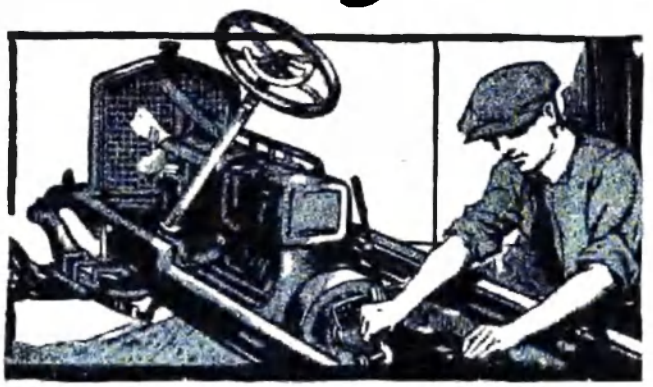

You Can Qualify

You can earn as much money as this man. You can turn your love for motor cars into cash. If you are already an automobile mechanic, repair man or chauffeur, you can climb far higher.

Right now is the time to act. The field of automobile and commercial car manufacturing is growing tremendously. Its future is unlimited.

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Beware! Unless you see the name "Bayer" on package or on tablets you are not getting genuine Aspirin prescribed by physicians for twenty-one years and proved safe by millions. Take Aspirin only as told in the Bayer package for Colds, Headache, Neuralgia, Rheumatism, Earache, Toothache, Lumbago, and for Pain. Handy tin boxes of twelve Bayer Tablets of Aspirin cost few cents. Druggists also sell larger packages. Aspirin is the trade mark of Bayer Manufacture of Monoaceticacidester of Salicylicacid.

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Burglars Don't Seek The Limelight

DARKNESS is their stock in trade. They work by stealth—unheard and unseen—their movements cloaked in secrecy. It's honest folks that seek the light. They are the only ones who can risk it.

It's the same way in business. The manufacturer who is not sure of his goods does not dare to advertise. Advertising would hasten the end of his business career—put him to a test he could not meet.

The manufacturer who advertises, deliberately invites your inspection. He tells you about his product and then lets it stand on its own merits. You can depend on him. *He knows his product is good.*

That's one reason why it pays you to read the advertisements. It is through advertising that you are able to keep in touch with the good things that progressive business men are spending their money to introduce and to keep before you.

Advertisements are interesting, instructive and profitable. They throw a powerful light on the very things that concern you most. Read them.

Notable among current musical announcements is that Florence Easton, soprano, Metropolitan Opera Company, now records exclusively for Brunswick. Her initial record (just released) is the Bach-Gounod "Ave Maria."

Soprano High "C"

Without "Metallic" Suggestion

A Brunswick Achievement Vouched For By Highest Musical Authorities

Musicians, critics, teachers, all will tell you the severe test of a phonograph is in rendering "high notes," especially *soprano.*

Remember this when buying a phonograph, and insist that soprano records be played.

Note, then, how most instruments vibrate, sound "metallic" when the higher notes are reached.

Then hear the same records on The Brunswick.

Hear the full range of "high notes." Soprano High "C" in ringing intensity, without slightest "metallic" intrusion—clear-toned, vibrationless! And you will marvel at difference so great in phonographs.

Exclusive methods the reason

By means of exclusive methods of Reproduction and of Interpretation, Brunswick achieves perfect rendition of the so-called "difficult" tones—the piano, the harp, the human voice. Methods which apply to no other phonographs or records.

The Brunswick Method of Reproduction is exclusively Brunswick. The Brunswick Method of Interpretation, in producing records, has not been successfully imitated.

Hence, buying any phonograph without at least *hearing* The Brunswick is a mistake. And to be without Brunswick Records is to be without what is best in music.

Ask your nearest Brunswick dealer for a demonstration. The Brunswick plays all records, and Brunswick Records can be played on any phonograph. Hear, compare—then judge for yourself.

THE BRUNSWICK-BALKE-COLLENDER CO., Chicago
Manufacturers—Established 1845

BRUNSWICK

PHONOGRAPHS AND RECORDS

Note: New Brunswick Records are on advance sale at all Brunswick dealers on the 16th of each month in the East, and in Denver and the West on the 20th.

Hear These Brunswick Super-Feature Records

Each month Brunswick releases from three to six Super-Feature records—the best phonographic music of the month. The current release presents three Metropolitan Opera Company's stars, two of whom, Florence Easton and Giuseppe Danise, make their debut as exclusive Brunswick artists on these records. A notable release.

30011—Ave Maria (Bach-Gounod) ..... **Florence Easton**
30010—Di Provenza il mar (Verdi's "Traviata," Act II, Scene 1) ..... **Giuseppe Danise**
10040—Dreams of Long Ago (Carroll-Caruso) ... **Mario Chamlee**

NOTE—The above records are on sale at all Brunswick dealers in conveniently packed envelopes of three—price $4.00. Or singly, if desired. Hear them by all means.

Any phonograph can play Brunswick Records

With acknowledgments to K. C. B.

"I smiled— and he shot me"

AFTER MONTHS and months.
MY WIFE persuaded me.
TO HAVE it done.
SO I went around.
TO THE photographer.
AND GOT mugged.
WHEN THE pictures came.
I SHOWED them to a gang.
OF AMATEUR art critics.
AND PROFESSIONAL crabs.
DISGUISED AS friends.
WHO FAVORED me.
WITH SUCH remarks as.
"DOESN'T HE look natural?"
"HAS IT got a tail?"
"A GREAT resemblance."
AND THAT last one.
MADE ME sore.
SO WHEN friend wife,
ADDED HER howl.
I TRIED again.
THIS TIME they were great.

FOR HERE'S what happened.
THE PHOTOGRAPHER said.
"LOOK THIS way, please."
AND HELD up something.
AS HE pushed the button.
AND NO one could help.
BUT LOOK pleasant.
FOR WHAT he held up.
WAS A nice full pack.
OF THE cigarettes.
THAT SATISFY.

LIGHT up a Chesterfield and sense the goodness of those fine Turkish and Domestic tobaccos in that wonderful Chesterfield blend. Taste that flavor! Sniff that aroma! You'll register "They Satisfy." You can't help it.

Chesterfield

CIGARETTES

LIGGETT & MYERS TOBACCO CO.