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TWICE-A-MONTH

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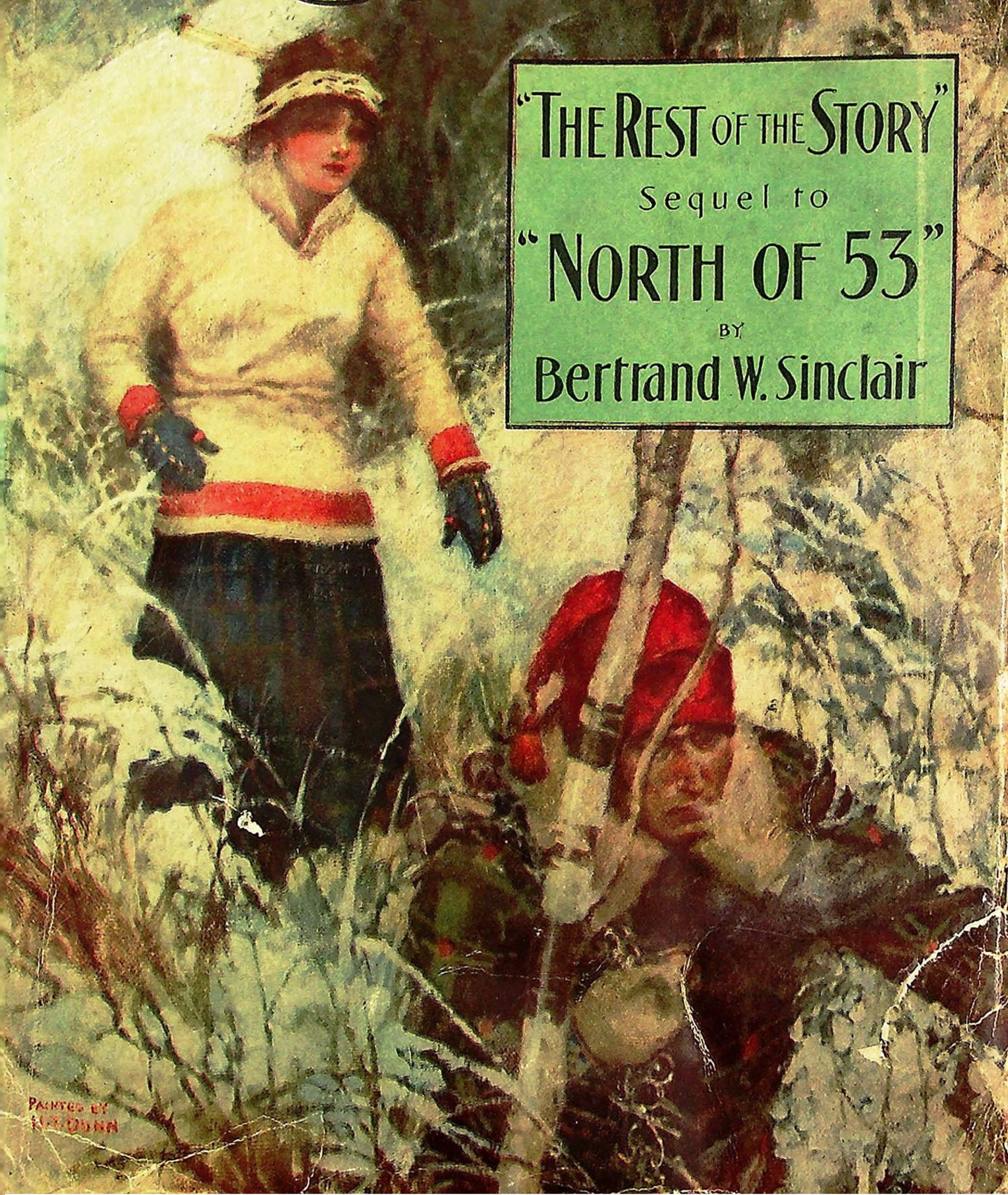

PAINTED BY
H. T. DUNN

"THE REST OF THE STORY"

Sequel to

"NORTH OF 53"

BY

Bertrand W. Sinclair

Rowland's latest novel of mystery and intrigue, complete in next issue.

MONTH-END EDITION

VOLUME XXX NUMBER 5

TWICE-A-MONTH

The Popular Magazine

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DECEMBER 15, 1913

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. XXX. DECEMBER 15, 1913. No. 5.

The Rest of the Story

A SEQUEL TO "NORTH OF FIFTY-THREE"

By Bertrand W. Sinclair

Author of "Raw Gold," "Under the Great Bear," Etc.

Nearly two hundred letters came to us discussing Sinclair's great novel, "North of Fifty-three." You remember the problem: "Was the man's method wrong or right? Was the girl wrong or right?" Most of you answered "Right" to both questions; but Sinclair left us to guess what the final outcome was. The story ended with the girl going back into the wilderness to join Roaring Bill Wagstaff. Here is "the rest of the story"—the mating of the two widely contrasted characters and their subsequent history. It is just as full of human interest as "North of Fifty-three," just as big a story; but it has to do with more matter-of-fact things and for that reason may appeal to a bigger circle of readers than the former novel. Is "The Rest of the Story" what you expected it to be? And does it alter your opinion concerning Roaring Bill and Hazel?

(A Complete Novel)

CHAPTER I.

AN ENDING AND A BEGINNING.

UNCONSCIOUSLY, by natural assimilation, so to speak, Hazel Weir had absorbed more wood craft than she realized in her over-winter stay in the high latitudes. Bill Wagstaff had once told her that few people know just what they can do until they are compelled to try, and upon this, her second journey northward, the truth of that statement grew more patent with each passing day. Little by little the vast central interior of British Columbia unfolded its orderly plan of watercourses, mountain ranges, and valleys. She passed camping places, well remembered of that first protesting journey. And at night she could close her eyes beside the camp fires and visualize the prodigious setting of it all—eastward the pyramided Rockies, westward lesser ranges, the Telegraph, the Babine; and through the plateau between the turbulent Fraser bearing eastward, from the Rockies and turning abruptly for its long flow south, with its sinuous doublings and turnings that were marked in bold lines on Bill Wagstaff's map.

So trailing north with old Limping George, his fat *klootch,* and two half grown Siwash youths, Hazel bore stead

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There are still a few copies of the POPULAR containing "North of Fifty-three." Ask for the issue of March 15, 1913, in which the novel was printed complete.

ily across country, driving as straight as the rolling land allowed for the cabin that snuggled in a woodsy basin close up to the peaks that guard Pine River Pass.

There came a day when brief uncertainty became sure knowledge at sight of an L-shaped body of water glimmering through the fire-thinned spruce. Her heart fluttered for a minute. Like a homing bird, by grace of the rude map and Limping George, she had come to the lake where the Indians had camped in the winter, and she could have gone blindfolded from the lake to Roaring Bill's cabin.

On the lake shore, where the spruce ran out to birch and cottonwood, she called a halt.

"Make camp," she instructed. "Cabin over there," she waved her hand. "I go. Byemby come back."

Then she urged her pony through the light timber growth and across the little meadows where the rank grass and strange varicolored flowers were springing up under the urge of the warm spring sun. Twenty minutes brought her to the clearing. The grass sprang lush there, and the air was pleasant with odors of pine and balsam wafted down from the mountain height behind. But the breath of the woods was now a matter of small moment, for Silk and Satin and Nigger loafing at the sunny end of the stable pricked up their ears at her approach, and she knew that Roaring Bill was home again. She tied her horse to a sapling and drew nearer. The cabin door stood wide.

A brief panic seized her. She felt a sudden shrinking, a wild desire for headlong flight. But it passed. She knew that for good or ill she would never turn back. And so with her heart thumping tremendously and a tentative smile curving her lips she ran lightly across to the open door.

On the soft turf her footsteps gave forth no sound. She gained the doorway as silently as a shadow. Roaring Bill faced the end of the long room, but he did not see her, for he was slumped in the big chair before the fireplace, his chin sunk on his breast, staring straight ahead with absent eyes.

In all the days she had been with him she had never seen him look like that. It had been his habit, his defense, to cover sadness with a smile, to joke when he was hurt. That weary, hopeless expression, the wry twist of his lips, wrung her heart and drew from her a yearning little whisper:

"Bill!"

He came out of his chair like a panther. And when his eyes beheld her in the doorway he stiffened in his tracks, staring, seeing, yet reluctant to believe the evidence of his vision. His brows wrinkled. He put up one hand and absently ran it over his cheek.

"I wonder if I've got to the point of seeing things," he said slowly. "Say, little person, is it your astral body, or is it really you?"

"Of course it's me," she cried tremulously, and with fine disregard for her habitual preciseness of speech.

He came up close to her and pinched her arm with a gentle pressure, as if he had to feel the material substance of her before he could believe. And then he put his hands on her shoulders, as he had done on the steamer that day at Bella Coola, and looked long and earnestly at her—looked till a crimson wave rose from her neck to the roots of her dark, glossy hair. And with that Roaring Bill took her in his arms, cuddled her up close to him, and kissed her, not once but many times.

"You really and truly came back, little person," he murmured. "Lord, Lord—and yet they say the day of miracles is past."

"You didn't think I would, did you?" she asked, with her blushing face snuggled against his sturdy breast. "Still, you gave me a map so that I could find the place?"

"That was just taking a desperate chance. No, I never expected to see you again, unless by accident," he said honestly. "And I've been crying the hurt of it to the stars all the way back from the coast. I only got here yesterday. I pretty near passed up coming back at all. I didn't see how I could stay, with everything to remind me of you. Say, but it looked like a lonesome hole. I used to love this place—but I didn't love it last night. It seemed about the most cheerless and depressing spot I could have picked. I think I should have ended up by touching a match to the whole business and hitting the trail to some new country. I don't know. I'm not weak. But I don't think I could have stayed here long."

They stood silent in the doorway for a long interval, Bill holding her close to him, and she blissfully contented, careless and unthinking of the future, so filled was she with joy of the present.

"Do you love me much, little person?" Bill asked, after a little.

She nodded vigorous assent.

"Why?" he desired to know.

"Oh, just because—because you're a man, I suppose," she returned mischievously.

"The world's chuck-full of men," Bill observed.

"Surely," she looked up at him. "But they're not like you. Maybe it's bad policy to start in flattering you, but there aren't many men of your type, Billy-boy; big and strong and capable, and at the same time kind and patient and able to understand things, things a woman can't always put into words. Last fall you hurt my pride and nearly scared me to death by carrying me off in that lawless, headlong fashion of yours. But you seemed to know just how I felt about it, and you played fairer than any man I ever knew would have done under the same circumstances. I didn't realize it until I got back into the civilized world. And then all at once I found myself longing for you—and for these old forests and the mountains and all. So I came back."

"Wise girl," he kissed her. "You'll never be sorry, I hope. It took some nerve, too. It's a long trail from here to the outside. But this North country—it gets in your blood—if your blood's red—and I don't think there's any water in your veins, little person. Lord! I'm afraid to let go of you for fear you'll vanish into nothing, like a Hindu fakir stunt."

"No fear," Hazel laughed. "I've got a pony tied to a tree out there, and four Siwashes and a camp outfit over by Crooked Lake. If I should vanish I'd leave a plain trail for you to follow."

"Well," Bill said, after a short silence, "it's a hundred and forty miles to a Hudson's Bay post where there's a mission and a preacher. Let's be on our way and get married. Then we'll come back here and spend our honeymoon. Eh?"

She nodded assent.

"Are you game to start in half an hour?" he asked, holding her off at arm's length admiringly.

"I'm game for anything, or I wouldn't be here," she retorted.

"All right. You just watch an exhibition of speedy packing," Bill declared—and straightway fell to work.

Hazel followed him about, helping to get the kyaks packed with food. They caught the three horses, and Bill stripped the pony of her riding gear and placed a pack on him. Then he put her saddle on Silk.

"He's your private mount henceforth," Bill told her laughingly. "You'll ride him with more pleasure than you did the first time, won't you?"

Presently they were ready to start, planning to ride past Limping George's camp and tell him whither they were bound. Hazel was already mounted. Roaring Bill paused, with his toe in the stirrup, and smiled whimsically at her over his horse's back.

"I forgot something," said he, and went back into the cabin—whence he shortly emerged bearing in his hand a sheet of paper upon which something was written in bold, angular characters. This he pinned on the door. Hazel rode Silk up close to see what it might be, and laughed amusedly, for Bill had written:

Mr. and Mrs. William Wagstaff will be at home to their friends on and after June the twentieth.

He swung up into his saddle, and they jogged across the open. In the edge of the first timber they pulled up and looked backward at the cabin drowsing silently under its sentinel tree. Roaring

Bill reached out one arm and laid it across Hazel's shoulders.

"Little person," he said soberly, "here's the end of one trail, and the beginning of another—the longest trail either of us has ever faced. How does it look to you?"

She caught his fingers with a quick, hard pressure.

"All trails look alike to me," she said, with shining eyes, "just so we hit them together."

CHAPTER II.

A BRIEF TIME OF PLANNING.

"What day of the month is this, Bill?" Hazel asked.

"Haven't the least idea," he answered lazily. "Time is of no consequence to me at the present moment."

They were sitting on the warm earth before their cabin, their backs propped comfortably against a log, watching the sun sink behind a distant sky line all notched with purple mountains upon which snow still lingered. Beside them a smudge dribbled a wisp of smoke sufficient to ward off a pestilential swarm of mosquitoes and black flies. In the clear, thin air of that altitude the occasional voices of what bird and animal life was abroad in the wild land broke into the evening hush with astonishing distinctness—a lone goose winged above in wide circles, uttering his harsh and solitary cry. He had lost his mate, Bill told her. Far off in the bush a fox barked. The evening flight of the wild duck from Crooked Lake to a chain of swamps passed intermittently over the clearing with a sibilant whistle of wings. To all the wild things, no less than to the two who watched and listened to the forest traffic, it was a land of peace and plenty.

"We ought to go up to the swamps to-morrow and rustle some duck eggs," Bill observed irrelevantly—his eyes following the arrow flight of a mallard flock. But his wife was counting audibly, checking the days off on her fingers.

"This is July the twenty-fifth, Mr. Roaring Bill Wagstaff," she announced. "We've been married exactly one month."

"A whole month?" he echoed, in mock astonishment. "A regular calendar month of thirty-one days, huh? You don't say so? Seems like it was only day before yesterday, little person."

"I wonder," she snuggled up a little closer to him, "if any two people were ever as happy as we've been?"

Bill put his arm across her shoulders and tilted her head back so that he could smile down into her face.

"They have been a bunch of golden days, haven't they?" he whispered. "We haven't come to a single bump in the road yet. You won't forget this joy time if we ever do hit real hard going, will you, Hazel?"

"The bird of ill omen croaks again," she reproved. "Why should we come to hard going, as you call it?"

"We shouldn't," he declared. "But most people do. And we might. One never can tell what's ahead. Life takes queer and unexpected turns sometimes. We've got to live pretty close to each other, depend absolutely on each other in many ways—and that's the acid test of human companionship. By and by, when the novelty wears off—maybe you'll get sick of seeing the same old Bill around and nobody else. You see I've always been on my good behavior with you. Do you like me a lot?"

His arm tightened with a quick and powerful pressure, then suddenly relaxed to let her lean back and stare up at him tenderly.

"I ought to punish you for saying things like that," she pouted. "Only I can't think of any effective method. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof—and there is no evil in *our* days."

"Amen," he whispered softly—and they fell to silent contemplation of the rose and gold that spread in a wonderful blazon over all the western sky.

"Twenty-fifth of July, eh?" he mused presently. "Summer's half gone already. I didn't realize it. We ought to be stirring pretty soon, lady."

"Let's stir into the house, then," she

suggested. "These miserable little black flies have found a tender place on me. My, but they're bloodthirsty insects."

Bill laughed, and they took refuge in the cabin, the doorways and windows of which were barricaded with cotton mosquito net against the winged swarms that buzzed hungrily without. Ensconced in the big chair by the fireplace, with Bill sprawled on the bearskin at her feet, Hazel came back to his last remark.

"Why did you say it was time for us to be stirring, Billum?"

"Because these Northern seasons are so blessed short," he answered. "We ought to try and do a little good for ourselves—make hay while the sun shines. We'll needa da mon'."

"Needa fiddlesticks," she laughed. "What do we need money for? It costs practically nothing to live up here. Why this sudden desire to pursue the dollar? Besides, how are you going to pursue it?"

"Go prospecting," he replied promptly. "Hit the trail for a place I know where there's oodles of coarse gold, if you can get to it at low water. How'd you like to go into the Upper Naas country this fall, trap all winter, work the sand bars in the spring, and come out next fall with a sack of gold it would take a horse to pack?"

Hazel clapped her hands.

"Oh, Bill, wouldn't that be fine?" she cried. Across her mind flashed a vivid picture of the journey, pregnant with adventure, across the wild hinterlands—they two together. "I'd love to."

"It won't be all smooth sailing," he warned. "It's a long trip and a hard one, and the winter will be longer and harder than the trip. We won't have the semiluxuries we've got here in this cabin. Not by a long shot. Still, there's a chance for a good big stake, right in that one trip."

"But why the necessity for making a stake?" she inquired thoughtfully, after a lapse of five minutes. "I thought you didn't care anything about money so long as you had enough to get along on? And we surely have that. We've got over two thousand dollars in real money—and no place to spend it—so we're compelled to save."

Bill blew a smoke ring over his head and watched it vanish up toward the dusky roof beams before he answered.

"Well, little person," said he, "that's very true, and we can't truthfully say that stern necessity is treading on our heels. The possession of money has never been a crying need with me. But I hadn't many wants when I was playing a lone hand, and I generally let the future take care of itself. It was always easy to dig up money enough to buy books and grub or anything I wanted. Now that I've assumed a certain responsibility, it has begun to dawn on me that we'd enjoy life better if we were assured of a competence. We can live on the country here indefinitely. But we won't stay here always. I'm pretty much contented just now. So are you. But I know from past experience that the outside will grow more alluring as time passes. You'll get lonesome for civilization. It's the most natural thing in the world. And when we go out to mix with our fellow humans we want to meet them on terms of worldly equality. Which is to say with good clothes on, and a fat bank roll in our pocket. The best is none too good for us, lady. And the best costs money. Anyway, I'll plead guilty to changing, or, rather, modifying my point of view—getting married has opened up new vistas of pleasure for us that call for dollars. And last, but not least, old girl, while I love to loaf I can only loaf about so long in contentment. Sabe? I've got to be doing *something;* whether it was profitable or not has never mattered, just so it was action."

"I sabe, as you call it," Hazel smiled. "Of course I do. Only lazy people like to loaf all the time. I love this place, and we might stay here for years and be satisfied. But——"

"But we'd be better satisfied to stay if we knew that we could leave it whenever we wanted to," he interrupted. "That's the psychology of the human animal, all right. We don't like to be coerced, even by circumstances. Well, granted health, one can be boss of old Dame Circumstance, if one has the price in cold cash. It's a melancholy fact that the good things of the world can only be had for a consideration."

"If you made a lot of money mining, we could travel—one could do lots of things," she reflected. "I don't think I'd want to live in a city again. But it would be nice to go there sometimes."

"Yes, dear girl, it would," Bill agreed. "With a chum to help you enjoy things. I never got much fun out of the bright lights by myself—it was too lonesome. I used to prowl around by myself with an analytical eye upon humanity, and I was always bumping into a lot of sordidness and suffering that I couldn't in the least remedy, and it often gave me a bad taste in my mouth. Then I'd beat it for the woods—and they always looked good to me. The trouble was that I had too much time to think, and nothing to do when I hit a live town. It would be different now. We can do things together that I couldn't do alone, and you couldn't do alone. Remains only to get the wherewithal. And since I know how to manage that with a minimum amount of effort, I'd like to be about it before somebody else gets ahead of me. Though there's small chance of that."

"We'll be partners," said she. "How will we divide the profits, Billum?"

"We'll split even," he declared. "That is, I'll make the money, and you'll spend it."

They chuckled over this conceit, and as the dusk closed in slowly they fell to planning the details. Hazel lit the lamp, and in its yellow glow pored over maps while Bill idly sketched their route on a sheet of paper. His objective lay east of the head of the Naas proper, where amid a wild tangle of mountains and mountain torrents three turbulent rivers, the Stikine, the Skeena, and the Naas, took their rise. A God-forsaken region, he told her, where few white men had penetrated. The peaks flirted with the clouds, and their sides were scarred with glaciers. A lonesome, brooding land, the home of a vast and seldom-broken silence.

"But there's all kinds of game and fur in there," Bill remarked thoughtfully. "And gold. Still, it's a fierce country for a man to take his best girl into. I don't know whether I ought to tackle it."

"We couldn't be more isolated than we are here," Hazel argued, "if we were in the arctic. Look at that poor woman at Pelt House. Three babies born since she saw a doctor or another woman of her own color! What's a winter by ourselves compared to that. And *she* didn't think it so great a hardship. Don't you worry about me, Mr. Bill. I think it will be fun. I'm a real pioneer at heart. The wild places look good to me—when you're along."

She received her due reward for that, and then, the long twilight having brought the hour to a lateness that manifested itself by sundry yawns on their part, they went to bed.

With breakfast over, Bill put a compass in his pocket, after having ground his ax blade to a keen edge.

"Come on," said he, then; "I'm going to transact some important business."

"What is it?" she promptly demanded.

"This domicile of ours. girl," he told her, while he led the way through the surrounding timber, "is ours only by grace of the wilderness. It's built on unsurveyed government land—land that I have no more legal claim to than any passing trapper. I never thought of it before—which goes to show that this double-harness business puts a different face on 'most everything. But I'm going to remedy that. Of course, it may be twenty years before this country begins to settle up enough so that some individual may cast a covetous eye on this particular spot—but I'm not going to take any chances. I'm going to formally stake a hundred and sixty acres of this and apply for its purchase. Then we'll have a cinch on our home. We'll always have a refuge to fly to, no matter where we go."

She nodded appreciation of this. The cabin in the clearing stood for some of those moments that always loom large and unforgettable in every woman's experience. She had come there once in hot, shamed anger, and she had come again as a bride. It was the handiwork of a man she loved with a passion that sometimes startled her by its intensity. She had plumbed depths of bitterness there, and, contrariwise, reached a point of happiness she had never believed possible. Just the mere possibility of that place being given over to others roused in her a pang of resentment. It was theirs, hers and Bill's, and, being a woman, she viewed its possession jealously.

So she watched with keen interest what he did. Which, in truth, was simple enough. He worked his way to a point southeast of the clearing till they gained a little rise whence through the treetops they could look back and see the cabin roof. There Bill cut off an eight-inch jack pine, leaving the stump approximately four feet high. This he hewed square, the four flat sides of the post facing respectively the cardinal points of the compass. On one smoothed surface Bill set to work with his pocketknife. Hazel sat down and watched while he busied himself at this. And when he had finished she read, in deep-carved letters:

W. WAGSTAFF'S S. E. CORNER.

Then he penned on a sheet of letter paper a brief notice to the effect that he, William Wagstaff, intended to apply for the purchase of the land embraced in an area a half mile square, of which the post was the southeast corner mark. This notice he fastened to the stump with a few tacks, and sat down to rest from his labors.

"How long do you suppose that will stay there, and who is there to read it, if it does?" Hazel observed.

"Search me. The moose and the deer and the timber wolves, I guess," Bill grinned. "The chances are the paper won't last long, with winds and rains. But it doesn't matter. It's simply a form prescribed by the Land Act of British Columbia, and, so long as I go through the legal motions, that lets me out. Matter of form, you know."

"Then what else do you have to do?"

"Nothing but furnish the money when the land department gets around to accept my application," he said. "I can get an agent to attend to all the details. Oh, I have to furnish a description of the land by natural boundaries, to give them an idea of about where it's situated. Well, let's take a look at our estate from another corner."

This, roughly ascertained by sighting a line with the compass and stepping off eight hundred and eighty yards, brought them up on a knoll that commanded the small basin of which the clearing was practically in the center.

"Aha!" Bill exclaimed. "Look at our ranch, would you; our widespread acres basking in the sun. A quarter section is quite a chunk. Do you know I never thought much about it before, but there's a piece of the finest land that lies outdoors. I wasn't looking for land when I squatted there. It was a pretty place, and there was hay for our horses in that meadow, and trout in the creek back of the cabin. So I built the old shack largely on the conveniences and the natural beauty of the spot. But let me tell you, if this country should get a railroad and settle up, that quarter section might produce all the income we'd need, just out of hay and potatoes. How'd you like to be a farmer's wife, huh?"

"Fine," she smiled. "Look at the view—it isn't gorgeous. It's—it's simply peaceful and quiet and soothing. I hate to leave it."

"Better be sorry to leave a place than glad to get away," he answered lightly. "Come on, let's pike home and get things in order for the long trail, woman o' mine. I'll teach you how to be a woodland vagabond."

CHAPTER III.

EN ROUTE.

Long since Hazel had become aware that whatsoever her husband set about doing he did swiftly and with inflexible purpose. There was no malingering or doubtful hesitation. Once his mind was made up, he acted. Thus, upon the third day from the land staking they bore away eastward from the clearing, across a trackless area, traveling by the sun and Bill's knowledge of the country.

"Some day there'll be trails blazed through here by a paternal government," he laughed over his shoulder, "for the benefit of the public. But *we* don't need 'em, thank goodness."

The buckskin pony Hazel had bought for the trip in with Limping George ambled sedately under a pack containing bedding, clothes, a light shelter tent. The black horse, Nigger, he of the cocked ear and the rolling eye, carried in a pair of kyaks six weeks' supply of food. Bill led the way, seconded by Hazel on easy-gaited Silk. Behind her trailed the pack horses like dogs well broken to heel, patient under their heavy burdens. Off in the east the sun was barely clear of the towering Rockies, and the woods were still cool and shadowy, full of aromatic odors from plant and tree.

Hazel followed her man contentedly. They were together upon the big adventure, just as she had seen it set forth in books, and she found it good. For her there was no more diverging of trails, no more problems looming fearsomely at the journey's end. To jog easily through woods and over open meadows all day, and at night to lie with her head pillowed on Bill's arm, peering up through interlocked branches at a myriad of gleaming stars—that was sufficient to fill her days. To live and love and be loved, with all that had ever seemed hateful and sordid and mean thrust into a remote background. It was almost too good to be true, she told herself. Yet it was indubitably true. And she was grateful for the fact. Touches of the unavoidable bitterness of life had taught her the worth of days that could be treasured in the memory.

Occasionally she would visualize the cabin drowsing lifeless in its emerald setting, haunted by the rabbits that played timidly about in the twilight, or perhaps a wandering deer peering his wide-eyed curiosity from the timber's edge. The books and rugs and curtains were stowed in boxes and bundles and hung by wires to the ridge log to keep them from the busy bush-tailed rats. Everything was done up and put away for safe-keeping, as became a house that is to be long untenanted. The mother instinct to keep a nest snug and cozy gave her a tiny pang over the abandoned home. The dust of many months would gather on the empty chairs and shelves. Still it was only a passing absence. They would come back, with treasure wrested from the strong box of the wild. Surely Fortune could not forbear smiling on a mate like hers?

There was no monotony in the passing days. Rivers barred their way. These they forded or swam, or ferried a makeshift raft of logs, as seemed most fit. Once their raft came to grief in the maw of a snarling current, and they laid up two days to dry their saturated belongings. Once their horses, impelled by some mysterious home yearning, hit the back trail in a black night of downpour, and they trudged half a day through wet grass and dripping scrub to overtake the truants. Thunderstorms drove up, shattering the hush of the land with ponderous detonations, assaulting them with fierce bursts of rain. Haps and mishaps alike they accepted with an equable spirit and the true philosophy of the trail—to take things as they come. When rain deluged them there was always shelter to be found and fire to warm them. If the flies assailed too fiercely a smudge brought easement of that ill. And when the land lay smiling under a pleasant sun they rode light-hearted and carefree, singing or in silent content, as the spirit moved. If they rode alone, they felt none of that loneliness which is so integral a part of the still, unpeopled places. Each day was something more than a mere toll of so many miles traversed. The unexpected, for which both were eager-eyed, lurked on the shoulder of each mountain, in the hollow of every cool cañon, or met them boldly in the open, naked and unafraid.

Bearing up to where the Nechaco debouches from Fraser Lake, with a Hudson's Bay fur post and an Indian mission on its eastern fringe, they came upon a blazed line in the scrub timber. Roaring Bill pulled up, and squinted away down the narrow lane fresh with ax marks.

"Well," said he, "I wonder what's coming off now? That looks like a survey line of some sort. It isn't a trail —too wide. Let's follow it a while.

"I'll bet a nickel," he asserted next, "that's a railroad survey." They had traversed two miles more or less, and the fact was patent that the blazed line sought a fairly constant level across country. "A land survey runs all same latitude and longitude. Huh!"

Half an hour of easy jogging set the seal of truth on his assertion. They came upon a man squinting through a brass instrument set on three legs, directing, with alternate wavings of his outspread hands, certain activities of other men ahead of him.

"Well, I'll be——" he bit off the sentence, and stared a moment in frank astonishment at Hazel. Then he took off his hat and bowed. "Good morning," he greeted politely.

"Sure," Bill grinned. "We have mornings like this around here all the time. What all are you fellows doing in the wilderness, anyway? Railroad?"

"Cross-section work for the G. T. P.," the surveyor replied.

"Huh," Bill grunted. "Is it a cinch, or is it something that may come to pass in the misty future?"

"As near a cinch as anything ever is," the surveyor answered. "Construction has begun—at both ends. I thought the few white folks in this country kept tab on anything as important as a new railroad."

"We've heard a lot, but none of 'em has transpired yet; not in my time, anyway," Bill replied dryly. "However, the world keeps right on moving. I've heard more or less talk of this, but I didn't know it had got past the talking stage. What's their Pacific terminal?"

"Prince Rupert—new town on a peninsula north of the mouth of the Skeena," said the surveyor. "It's a rush job all the way through, I believe. Three years to spike up the last rail. And that's going some for a transcontinental road. Both the Dominion and B. C. governments have guaranteed the company's bonds away up into millions."

"Be a great thing for this country—say, where does it cross the Rockies? —what's the general route?" Bill asked abruptly.

"Goes over the range through Yellowhead Pass. From here it follows the Nachaco to Fort George, then up the Fraser by Tete Juan Cache, through the pass, then down the Athabasca till it switches over to strike Edmonton."

"Uh-huh," Bill nodded. "One of the modern labors of Hercules. Well, we've got to peg. So long."

"Our camp's about five miles ahead. Better stop in and noon," the surveyor invited, "if it's on your road."

"Thanks. Maybe we will," Bill returned.

The surveyor lifted his hat, with a swift glance of admiration at Hazel, and they passed with a mutual "so long."

"What do you think of that, old girl?" Bill observed presently. "A real, honest-to-God railroad going by within a hundred miles of our shack. Three years. It'll be there before we know it. We'll have neighbors to burn."

"A hundred miles!" Hazel laughed. "Is that your idea of a neighborly distance?"

"What's a hundred miles?" he defended. "Two days' ride, that's all. And the kind of people that come to settle in a country like this don't stick in sight of the cars. They're like me —need lots of elbowroom. There'll be hardy souls looking for a location up where we are before very long. You'll see."

They passed other crews of men, surveyors with transits, chainmen, stake drivers, ax gangs widening the path through the timber. Most of them looked at Hazel in frank surprise, and stared long after she passed by. And when an open bottom beside a noisy little creek showed the scattered tents of the survey camp, Hazel said:

"Let's not stop, Bill."

He looked back over his shoulder with a comprehending smile.

"Getting shy? Make you uncomfortable to have all these boys look at you, little person?" he bantered. "All right, we won't stop. But all these fellows probably haven't seen a white woman for months. You can't blame them for admiring. You do look good to other men besides me, you know."

So they rode through the camp with but a nod to the aproned cook, who thrust out his head, and a gray-haired man with glasses, who humped over a drafting board under an awning. Their noon fire they built at a spring five miles beyond.

Thereafter they skirted three lakes in succession, Fraser, Burns, and Decker, and climbed over a low divide to drop into the Bulkley Valley—a pleasant, rolling country, where the timber was interspersed with patches of open grassland and set with small lakes wherein schools of big trout lived their finny lives unharried by anglers—save when some wandering Indian snared one with a primitive net.

Far down this valley they came upon the first sign of settlement. Hardy souls, far in advance of the coming railroad, had built here and there a log cabin and were hard at it clearing and plowing and getting the land ready for crops. Four or five such lone ranches they passed, tarrying overnight at one where they found a broad-bosomed woman with a brood of tow-headed children. Her husband was out after supplies—a week's journey. She kept Hazel from her bed till after midnight, talking. They had been there over winter, and Hazel Wagstaff was the first white woman she had bespoken in seven months. There were other women in the valley farther along; but fifty or sixty miles leaves scant opportunity for visiting when there is so much work to be done ere wild acres will feed hungry mouths.

At length they fared into Hazleton, which is the hub of a vast area over which men pursue gold and furs. Some hundred odd souls were gathered there, where the stern-wheel steamers that ply the turgid Skeena reach the head of navigation. A land-recording office and a mining recorder Hazleton boasted as proof of its civic importance. The mining recorder, who combined in himself many capacities besides his governmental function, undertook to put through Bill's land deal. He knew Bill Wagstaff.

"Wise man," he nodded, over the description. "If some more uh these boys that have blazed trails through this country would do the same thing they'd be better off. A chunk of land anywhere in this country is a good bet now. We'll have rails here from the coast in a year. Better freeze onto a couple uh lots here in Hazleton, while they're low. Be plumb to the skies in ten years. Natural place for a city, Bill. It's astonishin' how the settlers is comin'."

There was ocular evidence of this last, for they had followed in a road well rutted from loaded wagons. But Bill invested in no real estate, notwithstanding the positive assurance that Hazleton was on the ragged edge of a boom.

"Maybe, maybe," he admitted. "But I've got other fish to fry. That one piece up by Pine River will do me for a while."

Here where folk talked only of gold and pelts and railroads and settlement and the coming boom that would make them all rich, Bill Wagstaff added two more ponies to his pack train. These he loaded down with food, staples only, flour, sugar, beans, salt, tea, and coffee, and a sack of dried fruit. Also he bestowed upon Nigger a further burden of six dozen steel traps.

And in the cool of a midsummer morning, before Hazleton had rubbed the sleep out of its collective eyes and taken up the day's work of discussing its future greatness, Roaring Bill and his wife draped the mosquito nets over their heads and turned their faces north.

They bore out upon a wagon road. For a brief distance only did this endure, then dwindled to a path. A turn in this hid sight of the clustered log houses and tents, and the two steamers that lay up against the bank. The river itself was soon lost in the far stretches of forest. Once more they rode alone in the wilderness. For the first time Hazel felt a quick shrinking from the North, an awe of its huge, silent spaces, which could so easily engulf thousands such as they and still remain a land untamed.

But this feeling passed, and she came again under the spell of the trail, riding with eyes and ears alert, sitting at ease in the saddle, and talking each new crook in the way with quickened interest.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WINTERING PLACE.

On the second day they crossed the Skeena, a risky and tedious piece of business, for the river ran deep and strong. And shortly after this crossing they came to a line of wire strung on poles. Originally a fair passageway had been cleared through low brush and dense timber alike. A pathway of sorts still remained, though dim and little trodden and littered with down trees of various sizes. Bill followed this.

"What is the wire? A rural telephone? Oh, I remember you told me once—that Yukon telegraph," Hazel remarked.

"Uh-huh. That's the famous Telegraph Trail," Bill answered. "Runs from Ashcroft clear to Dawson City, on the Yukon; that is, the line does. There's a lineman's house every twenty miles or so, and an operator every forty miles. The best thing about it is that it furnishes us with a sort of a road. And that's mighty lucky, for there's some tough going ahead of us."

So long as they held to the Telegraph Trail the way led through fairly decent country. In open patches there was ample grazing for their horses. Hills there were, to be sure; all the land rolled away in immense forested billows, but the mountains stood off on the right and left, frowning in the distance. A plague of flies harassed them continually, Hazel's hands suffering most, even though she kept religiously to thick buckskin gloves. The poisonous bites led to scratching, which bred soreness. And as they gained a greater elevation and the timbered bottoms gave way to rocky hills over which she must perforce walk and lead her horse, the sweat of the exertion stung and burned intolerably, like salt water on an open wound.

Minor hardships, these; scarcely to be dignified by that name, more in the nature of aggravated discomforts they were. But they irked, and, like any accumulation of small things, piled up a disheartening total. By imperceptible degrees the glamour of the trail, the lure of gypsying, began to lessen. She found herself longing for the Pine River cabin, for surcease from this never-ending journey. But she would not have owned this to Roaring Bill, not for the world. It savored of weakness, disloyalty. She felt ashamed. Still—it was no longer a pleasure jaunt. The country they bore steadily up into grew more and more forbidding. The rugged slopes bore no resemblance to the kindly, peaceful land where the cabin stood. Swamps and reedy lakes lurked in low places. The hills stood forth grim and craggy, gashed with deep-cleft gorges, and rising to heights more grim and desolate at the uttermost reach of her vision. And into the heart of this, toward a far-distant area where she could faintly distinguish virgin snow on peaks that pierced the sky, they traveled day after day.

Shortly before reaching Station Six they crossed the Naas, foaming down to the blue Pacific. And at Station Seven Bill turned squarely off the Telegraph Trail and struck east by north. It had been a break in the monotony of each day's travel to come upon the lonely men in their little log houses. When they turned away from the single wire that linked them up with the outer world, it seemed to Hazel as if the profound, disquieting stillness of the North became intensified.

Presently the way grew rougher. If anything, Roaring Bill increased his pace. He himself no longer rode. When the steepness of the hills and cañons made the going hard the packs were redivided, and henceforth Satin bore on his back a portion of the supplies. Bill led the way tirelessly. Through flies, river crossings, camp labor, and all the petty irritations of the trail he kept an unruffled spirit, a fine, enduring patience that Hazel marveled at and admired. Many a time wakening at some slight stir she would find him cooking breakfast. In every way within his power he saved her.

"I got to take good care of you, little person," he would say. "I'm used to this sort of thing, and I'm tough as buckskin. But it sure isn't proving any picnic for you. It's a lot worse in this way than I thought it would be. And we've got to get in there before the snow begins to fly, or it will play the dickens with us."

Many a strange shift were they put to. Once Bill had to fell a great spruce across a twenty-foot crevice. It took him two days to hew it flat so that his horses could be led over. The depth was bottomless to the eye. but from far below rose the cavernous growl of rushing water, and Hazel held her breath as each animal stepped gingerly over the narrow bridge. One misstep——

Once they climbed three weary days up a precipitous mountain range, and were turned back in sight of the crest by an impassable cliff, were forced to back track and swing in a fifty-mile detour.

In an air line Roaring Bill's destination lay approximately two hundred miles north—almost due north—of Hazleton. By the devious route they were compelled to take the distance was doubled, more than doubled. And their rate of progress now fell short of a ten-mile average. September was upon them. The days dwindled in length, and the nights grew to have a frosty nip.

Early and late he pushed on. Two camp necessities were fortunately abundant, grass and water. Even so, the stress of the trail told on the horses. They lost flesh. The ungodly steepness of succeeding hills bred galls under the heavy packs. They grew leg weary, no longer following each other with sprightly step and heads high. Hazel pitied them, for she herself was trail weary beyond words. The vagabond instinct had fallen asleep. The fine aura of romance no longer hovered over the venture.

Sometimes when dusk ended the day's journey and she swung her stiffened limbs out of the saddle she would cheerfully have foregone all the gold in the North to be at her ease before the fireplace in their distant cabin, with her man's head nesting in her lap, and no toll of weary miles looming sternly on the morrow's horizon. It was all work, trying work, the more trying because she sensed a latent uneasiness on her husband's part, an uneasiness she could never induce him to embody in words. Nevertheless, it existed, and she resented its existence—a trouble she could not share. But she could not put her finger on the cause, for Bill merely smiled a denial when she mentioned it.

Nor did she fathom the cause until upon a certain day which fell upon the end of a week's wearisome traverse of the hardest country yet encountered. Up and up and still higher he bore into a range of beetling crags, and always his gaze was fixed steadfastly and dubiously on the serrated backbone toward which they ascended with infinite toil and hourly risk, skirting sheer cliffs on narrow rock ledges, working foot by foot over declivities where the horses dug their hoofs into a precarious toe hold, and where a slip meant broken bones on the ragged stones below. But win to the uppermost height they did, where an early snowfall lay two inches deep in a thin forest of jack pine.

They broke out of a cañon up which they had struggled all day onto a level plot where the pine stood in somber ranks. A spring creek split the flat in two. Beside this tiny stream Bill unlashed his packs. It still lacked two hours of dark. But he made no comment, and Hazel forbore to trouble him with questions. Once the packs were off and the horses at liberty Bill caught up his rifle.

"Come on, Hazel," he said. "Let's take a little hike."

The flat was small, and once clear of it the pines thinned out on a steep, rocky slope so that westward they could overlook a vast network of cañons and mountain spurs. But ahead of them the mountain rose to an upstanding backbone of jumbled granite, and on this backbone Bill Wagstaff bent an anxious eye. Presently they sat down on a bowlder to take a breathing spell after a stiff stretch of climbing. Hazel slipped her hand in his and whispered:

"What is it, Billy-boy?"

"I'm afraid we can't get over here with the horses," he answered slowly. "And if we can't find a pass of some kind—well, come on! It isn't more than a quarter of a mile to the top."

He struck out again, clambering over great bowlders, clawing his way along rocky shelves, with a hand outstretched to help her now and then. Her perceptions quickened by the hint he had given, Hazel viewed the long ridge for a possible crossing, and she was forced to the reluctant conclusion that no hoofed beast save mountain sheep or goat could cross that divide. Certainly not by the route they were taking. And north and south as far as she could see the backbone ran like a solid wall.

It was a scant quarter mile to the top, beyond which no farther mountain crests showed—only clear, blue sky. But it was a stretch that taxed her endurance to the limit for the next hour. Just short of the top Bill halted, and wiped the sweat out of his eyes. And as he stood his gaze suddenly became fixed, a concentrated stare at a point northward. He raised his glasses.

"By thunder!" he exclaimed. "I believe—it's me for the top."

He went up the few remaining yards with a haste that left Hazel panting behind. Above her he stood balanced on a bowlder, cut sharp against the sky, and she reached him just as he lowered the field glasses with a long sigh of relief. His eyes shone with exultation.

"Come on up on the perch," he invited, and reached forth a long, muscular arm, drawing her up close beside him on the rock.

"Behold the Promised Land," he breathed, "and the gateway thereof, lying a couple of miles to the north."

They were, it seemed to Hazel, roosting precariously on the very summit of the world. On both sides the mountain pitched away sharply in rugged folds. Distance smoothed out the harsh declivities, blurred over the tremendous cañons. Looking eastward, she saw an ample basin, which gave promise of level ground on its floor. True, it was ringed about with sky-scraping peaks, save where a small valley opened to the south. Behind them, between them and the far Pacific rolled a sea of mountains, snow-capped, glacier-torn, gigantic.

"Down there," Roaring Bill waved his hand, "there's a little meadow, and turf to walk on. Lord, I'll be glad to get out of these rocks! You'll never catch me coming in this way again. It's sure tough going. And I've been scared to death for a week, thinking we couldn't get through."

"But we can?"

"Yes, easy," he assured. "Take the glasses and look. That flat we left our outfit in runs pretty well to the top, about two miles along. Then there's a notch in the ridge that you can't get with the naked eye, and a wider cañon running down into the basin. It's the only decent break in the divide for fifty miles so far as I can see. This backbone runs to high mountains both north and south of us—like the great wall of China. We're lucky to hit this pass."

"Suppose we couldn't get over here?" Hazel asked. "What if there hadn't been a pass?"

"That was beginning to keep me awake nights," he confessed. "I've been studying this rock wall for a week. It doesn't look good from the east side, but it's worse on the west, and I couldn't seem to locate the gap I spotted from the basin one time. And if we couldn't get through it meant a hundred miles or more back south around that white peak you see. Over a worse country than we've come through—and no cinch on getting over at that. Do you realize that it's getting late in the year? Winter may come—bing!—inside of ten days. And me caught in a rock pile, with no cabin to shelter my best girl, and no hay up to feed my horses! You bet it bothered me."

She hugged him sympathetically, and Bill smiled down at her.

"But it's plain sailing now," he continued. "I know that basin and all the country beyond it. It's a pretty decent camping place, and there's a fairly easy way out."

He bestowed a reassuring kiss upon her. They sat on the bowlder for a few minutes, then scrambled downhill to the jack-pine flat, and built their evening fire. And for the first time in many days Roaring Bill whistled and lightly burst into snatches of song in the deep, bellowing voice that had given him his name back in the Cariboo country. His humor was infectious. Hazel felt the gods of high adventure smiling broadly upon them once more.

Before daybreak they were up and packed. In the dim light of dawn Bill picked his way up through the jack-pine flat. [illegible]h easy traveling they made such time as enabled them to cross through the narrow gash—cut in the divide by some glacial offshoot when the Klappan Range was young—before the sun, a ball of molten fire, heaved up from behind the far mountain chain.

At noon, two days later, they stepped out of a heavy stand of spruce into a sun-warmed meadow, where ripe, yellow grasses waved to their horses' knees. Hazel came afoot, a fresh-killed deer lashed across Silk's back.

Bill hesitated, as if taking his bearings, then led to where a rocky spur of a hill jutted into the meadow's edge. A spring bubbled out of a pebbly basin, and he poked about in the grass beside it with his foot, presently stooping to pick up something which proved to be a short bit of charred stick.

"The remains of my last camp fire," he smiled reminiscently. "Packs off, old pal. We're through with the trail for a while."

CHAPTER V.

FOUR WALLS AND A ROOF.

To such as view with a kindly eye the hushed areas of virgin forest and the bold cliffs and peaks of mountain ranges it is a joy to tread unknown trails, camping as the spirit moves, journeying leisurely and in decent comfort from charming spot to spots more charming. With no spur of need to drive, such inconsequential wandering gives to each day and incident an added zest. Nature appears to have on her best bib and tucker for the occasion. The alluring finger of the unknown beckons alluringly onward, so that if one should betimes strain to physical exhaustion in pursuit that is a matter of no moment whatever.

But it is a different thing to face the wilderness for a purpose, to journey in haste toward a set point, with a penalty swift and sure for failure to reach that point in due season. Especially is this so in the high latitudes. Natural barriers uprear before the traveler, barriers which he must scale with sweat and straining muscles. He must progress by devious ways, seeking always the line of least resistance. The season of summer is brief, a riot of flowers and vegetation. A certain number of weeks the land smiles and flaunts gay flowers in the shadow of the ancient glaciers. Then the frost and snow come back to their own, and the long nights shut down like a pall.

Brought to it by a kindlier road, Hazel would have found that nook in the Klappan Range a pleasant enough place. She could not deny its beauty. It snuggled in the heart of a wild tangle of hills all turreted and battlemented with ledge and pinnacle of rock, from which ran huge escarpments clothed with spruce and pine, scarred and gashed on every hand with slides and deep-worn watercourses, down which tumultuous streams rioted their foamy way. And nestled amid this, like a precious stone in its massive setting, a few hundred acres of level, grassy turf dotted with trees. Southward opened a narrow valley, as if pointing the road to a less rigorous land. No, she could not deny its beauty. But she was far too trail weary to appreciate the grandeur of the Klappan Range. She desired nothing so much as rest and comfort, and the solemn mountains were neither restful nor soothing. They stood too grim and aloof in a lonely land.

There was so much to be done, work of the hands; a cabin to build, and a stable; hay to be cut and stacked so that their horses might live through the long winter—which already heralded his approach with sharp, stinging frosts at night, and flurries of snow along the higher ridges.

Bill staked the tent beside the spring, fashioned a rude fork out of a pronged willow, and fitted a handle to the scythe he had brought for the purpose. From dawn to dark he swung the keen blade in the heavy grass which carpeted the bottom. Behind him Hazel piled it in little mounds with the fork. She insisted on this, though it blistered her hands and brought furious pains to her back. If her man must strain every nerve she would lighten the burden with what strength she had. And with two pair of hands to the task, the piles of hay gathered thick on the meadow. When Bill judged that the supply reached twenty tons, he built a rude sled with a rack on it, and hauled in the hay with a saddle horse.

"Amen!" said Bill, when he had emptied the rack for the last time, and the hay rose in a neat stack. "That's another load off my mind. I can build a cabin and a stable in six feet of snow if I have to, but there would have been a slim chance of haying once a storm hit us. And the caballos need a grubstake for the winter worse than we do, because they can't eat meat. *We* wouldn't go hungry—there's moose enough to feed an army ranging in that low ground to the south."

"There's everything that one needs, almost, in the wilderness, isn't there?" Hazel observed reflectively. "But still the law of life is awfully harsh, don't you think, Bill? Isolation is a terrible thing when it is so absolutely complete. Suppose something went wrong? There's no help, and no mercy—absolutely none. You could die here by inches and the woods and mountains would look calmly on, just as they have looked on everything for thousands of years. It's like prison regulations. You *must* do this, and you *must* do that, and there's no excuse for mistakes. Nature, when you get close to her, is so inexorable."

Bill eyed her a second. Then he put his arms around her, and patted her hair tenderly.

"Is it getting on your nerves already, little person?" he asked. "Nothing's going to go wrong. I've been in wild country too often to make mistakes or get careless. And those are the two crimes for which the North—or any wilderness—inflicts rather serious penalties. Life isn't a bit harsher here than in the human ant heaps. Only everything is more direct; cause and effect are linked up close. There are no complexities. It's all done in the open, and if you don't play the game according to the few simple rules you go down and out. That's all there is to it. There's no doctor in the next block, nor a grocer to take your order over the phone, and you can't run out to a café and take dinner with a friend. But neither is the air swarming with disease germs, nor are there malicious gossips to blast you with their tongues, nor rent and taxes to pay every time you turn around. Nor am I at the mercy of a job. And what does the old, settled country do to you when you have neither money nor job? It treats you worse than the worst the North can do; for, lacking the price, it denies you access to the abundance that mocks you in every shop window, and bars you out of the houses that line the streets. Here, everything needful is yours for the taking. If one is ignorant, or unable to convert wood and water and game to his own uses, he must learn how, or pay the penalty of incompetence. No, little person, I don't think the law of life is nearly so harsh here as it is where the mob struggles for its daily bread. It's more open and aboveboard here; more up to the individual. But it's lonely sometimes. I guess that's what ails you."

"Oh, pouf!" she denied. "I'm not lonely, so long as I've got you. But sometimes I think of something happening to you—sickness and accidents, and all that. One can't help thinking what *might* happen."

"Forget it!" Bill exhorted. "That's the worst of living in this big, still country—it makes one introspective, and so confoundedly conscious of what puny atoms we human beings are, after all. But there's less chance of sickness here than any place. Anyway, we've got to take a chance on things now and then, in the course of living our lives according to our lights. We're playing for a stake—and things that are worth having are never handed to us on a silver salver. Besides, I never had worse than a stomachache in my life—and you're a pretty healthy specimen yourself. Wait till I get that cabin built, with a big fireplace at one end. We'll be more comfortable, and things will look a little rosier. This thing of everlasting hurry and hard work gets on anybody's nerves."

The best of the afternoon was still unspent when the haystacking terminated, and Bill declared a holiday. He rigged a line on a limber willow wand, and with a fragment of venison for bait sought the pools of the stream which flowed out the south opening. He prophesied that in certain black eddies plump trout would be lurking, and he made his prophecy good at the first pool. Hazel elected herself gun bearer to the expedition, but before long Bill took up that office while she snared trout after trout from the stream—having become something of an angler herself under Bill's schooling. And when they were frying the fish that evening he suddenly observed:

"Say, they were game little fellows, these, weren't they? Wasn't that better sport than taking a street car out to the park and feeding the swans?"

"What an idea!" she laughed. "Who wants to feed swans in a park?"

But when the fire had sunk to dull embers, and the stars were peeping shyly in the open flap of their tent, she whispered in his ear:

"You mustn't think I'm complaining or lonesome or anything, Billy-boy, when I make remarks like I did to-day. I love you a heap, and I'd be happy *anywhere* with you. And I'm really and truly at home in the wilderness. Only—only sometimes I have a funny feeling; as if I were afraid. It seems silly, but this is all so different from our little cabin. I look up at these big mountains, and they seem to be scowling—as if we were trespassers or something."

"I know." Bill drew her close to him. "But that's just mood. I've felt that same sensation up here—a foolish, indefinable foreboding. All the out-of-the-way places of the earth produce that effect, if one is at all imaginative. It's the bigness of everything, and the eternal stillness. I've caught myself listening—when I knew there was nothing to hear. Makes a fellow feel like a small boy left by himself in some big, gloomy building—awesome. Sure, I know it. It would be hard on the nerves to live here always. But we're only after a stake—then all the pleasant places of the earth are open to us; with that little, old log house up by Pine River for a refuge whenever we get tired of the world at large. Cuddle up and go to sleep. You're a dead-game sport, or you'd have hollered long ago."

And, next day, to Hazel, sitting by watching him swing the heavy, double-bitted ax on the foundation logs of their winter home, it all seemed foolish, that heaviness of heart which sometimes assailed her. She was perfectly happy. In each of them the good, red blood of youth ran full and strong, offering ample security against illness. They had plenty of food. In a few brief months Bill would wrest a sack of gold from the treasure house of the North, and they would journey home by easy stages. Why should she brood?

It was sheer folly—a mere ebb of spirit.

Fortune favored them to the extent of letting the October storms remain in abeyance until Bill finished his cabin, with a cavernous fireplace of rough stone at one end. He split planks for a door out of raw timber, and graced his house with two windows—one of four small panes of glass carefully packed in their bedding all the way from Hazleton, the other a two-foot square of deerskin scraped parchment thin; opaque to the vision, it still permitted light to enter. The floor was plain earth, a condition Bill promised to remedy with hides of moose once his buildings were completed. Rudely finished, and lacking much that would have made for comfort, still it served its purpose, and Hazel made shift contentedly.

Followed then the erection of a stable to shelter the horses. Midway of its construction a cloud bank blew out of the northeast, and a foot of snow fell. Then it cleared to brilliant days of frost. Bill finished his stable. At night he tied the horses therein. By day they were turned loose to rustle their fodder from under the crisp snow. It was necessary to husband the stock of hay, for spring might be late.

After that they went hunting. The third day Bill shot two moose in an open glade ten miles afield. It took them two more days to haul in the frozen meat on a sled.

"Looks like one side of a butcher shop," Bill remarked, viewing the dressed meat where it hung on a pole scaffolding beyond reach of the wolves.

"It certainly does," Hazel replied. "We'll never eat all that."

"Probably not," he smiled. "But there's nothing like having plenty. The moose might emigrate, you know. I think I'll add a deer to that lot for variety—if I can find one."

He managed this in the next few days, and also laid in a stock of frozen trout by the simple expedient of locating a large pool, and netting the speckled denizens thereof through a hole in the ice.

So their larder was amply supplied. And, as the cold rigidly tightened its grip, and succeeding snows deepened the white blanket till snowshoes became imperative, Bill began to string out a line of traps.

CHAPTER VI.

BOREAS CHANTS HIS LAY.

December winged by, the days succeeding each other like glittering panels on a black ground of long, drear nights. Christmas came. They mustered up something of the holiday spirit, dining gayly off a roast of caribou. For the occasion Hazel had saved the last half dozen potatoes. With the material at her command she evolved a Christmas pudding, serving it with brandy sauce. And after satisfying appetites bred of a morning tilt with Jack Frost along Bill's trap line they spent a pleasant hour picturing their next Christmas. There would be holly and bright lights and music—the festival spirit freed of all restraint.

The new year was born in a wild smother of flying snow, which died at dawn to let a pale, heatless sun peer tentatively over the southern mountains, his slanting beams setting everything aglitter. Frost particles vibrated in the air, coruscating diamond dust. Underfoot, on the path beaten betwixt house and stable, the snow crunched and complained as they walked, and in the open where the mad winds had piled it in hard, white windrows. But in the thick woods it lay as it had fallen, full five foot deep, a downy wrapping for the slumbering earth, over which Bill Wagstaff flitted on his snowshoes as silently as a ghost—a fur-clad ghost, however, who bore a rifle on his shoulder, and whose breath exhaled in white, steamy puffs.

Gold or no gold, the wild land was giving up its treasure to them. Already the catch of furs totaled ninety marten, a few mink, a dozen wolves—and two pelts of that rara avis, the silver fox. Around twelve hundred dollars, Bill estimated, with four months yet to trap. And the labor of tending the trap lines, of skinning and stretching the catch, served to keep them both occupied—Hazel as much as he, for she went out with him on all but the hardest trips. So that their isolation in the hushed, white world where the frost ruled with an iron hand had not so far become oppressive. They were too busy to develop that dour affliction of the spirit which loneliness and idleness breeds through the long winters of the North.

A day or two after the first of the year Roaring Bill set out to go over one of the uttermost trap lines. Five minutes after closing the door he was back.

"Easy with that fire, little person," he cautioned. "She's blowing out of the northwest again. The sparks are sailing pretty high. Keep your eye on it, Hazel."

"All right, Billum," she replied. "I'll be careful."

Not more than fifty yards separated the house and stable. At the stable end stood the stack of hay, a low hummock above the surrounding drift. Except for the place where Bill daily removed the supply for his horses there was not much foothold for a spark, since a thin coat of snow overlaid the greater part of the top. But there was that chance of catastrophe. The chimney of their fireplace yawned wide to the sky, vomiting sparks and ash like a miniature volcano when the fire was roughly stirred, or an extra heavy supply of dry wood laid on. When the wind whistled out of the northwest the line of flight was fair over the stack. It behooved them to watch wind and fire. By keeping a bed of coals and laying on a stick or two at a time a gale might roar across the chimney-top without sucking forth a spark large enough to ignite the hay. Hence Bill's warning. He had spoken of it before.

Hazel washed up her breakfast dishes, and set the cabin in order according to her housewifely instincts. Then she curled up in the chair which Bill had painstakingly constructed for her especial comfort with only ax and knife for tools. She was working up a pair of moccasins after an Indian pattern, and she grew wholly absorbed in the task, drawing stitch after stitch of sinew strongly and neatly into place. The hours flicked past in unseemly haste, so completely was she engrossed. When at length the soreness of her fingers warned her that she had been at work a long time, she looked at her watch.

"Goodness me! Bill's due home any time, and I haven't a thing ready to eat," she exclaimed. "And here's my fire nearly out."

She piled on wood, and stirring the coals under it, fanned them with her husband's old felt hat, forgetful of sparks or aught but that she should be cooking against his hungry arrival. Outside, the wind blew lustily, driving the loose snow across the open in long, wavering ribbons. But she had forgotten that it was in the dangerous quarter, and she did not recall that important fact even when she sat down again to watch her moose steaks broil on the glowing coals raked apart from the leaping blaze. The flames licked into the throat of the chimney with the pur of a giant cat.

No sixth sense warned her of impending calamity. It burst upon her with startling abruptness only when she opened the door to throw out some scraps of discarded meat, for the blaze of the burning stack shot thirty feet in the air, and the smoke rolled across the meadow in a sooty banner.

Bareheaded, in a thin pair of moccasins, without coat or mittens to fend her from the lance-toothed frost, Hazel ran to the stable. She could get the horses out, perhaps, before the log walls became their crematory. But Bill, coming in from his traps, reached the stable first, and there was nothing for her to do but stand and watch with a sickening self-reproach. He untied and clubbed the reluctant horses outside. Already the stable end against the hay was shooting up tongues of flame. As the blaze lapped swiftly over the roof and ate into the walls, the horses struggled through the deep drift, lunging desperately to gain a few yards, then turned to stand with ears pricked up at the strange sight, shivering in the bitter northwest wind that assailed their bare, unprotected bodies.

Bill himself drew back from the fire, and stared at it fixedly. He kept silence until Hazel timidly put her hand on his arm.

"You watched that fire all right, didn't you?" he said then.

"Bill, Bill!" she cried. But he merely shrugged his shoulders, and kept his gaze on the burning stable.

To Hazel, shivering with the cold, even close as she was to the intense heat, it seemed an incredibly short time till a glowing mound below the snow level was all that remained; a black-edged pit that belched smoke and sparks. That and five horses humped tail to the driving wind, stolidly enduring. She shuddered with something besides the cold. And then Bill spoke absently, his eyes still on the smoldering heap.

"Five feet of caked snow on top of every blade of grass," she heard him mutter. "They can't browse on trees, like deer. Aw, hell!"

He had stuck his rifle butt first in the snow. He walked over to it; Hazel followed. When he stood, with the rifle slung in the crook of his arm, she tried again to break through this silent aloofness which cut her more deeply than any harshness of speech could have done.

"Bill, I'm so sorry!" she pleaded. "It's terrible, I know. What can we do?"

"Do? Huh!" he snorted. "If I ever have to die before my time, I hope it will be with a full belly and my head in the air—and mercifully swift."

Even then she had no clear idea of his intention. She looked up at him pleadingly, but he was staring at the horses, his teeth biting nervously at his under lip. Suddenly he blinked, and she saw his eyes moisten. In the same instant he threw up the rifle. At the thin, vicious crack of it, Silk collapsed.

She understood then. With her hand pressed hard over her mouth to keep back the hysterical scream that threatened, she fled to the house. Behind her the rifle spat forth its staccato message of death. For a few seconds the mountains flung whiplike echoes back and forth in a volley. Then the sibilant voice of the wind alone broke the stillness.

Numbed with the cold, terrified at the elemental ruthlessness of it all, she threw herself on the bed, denied even the relief of tears. Dry-eyed and heavy-hearted, she waited her husband's coming, and dreading it—for the first time she had seen her Bill look on her with cold, critical anger. For an interminable time she lay listening for the click of the latch, every nerve strung tight.

He came at last, and the thump of his rifle as he stood it against the wall had no more than sounded before he was bending over her. He sat down on the edge of the bed, and putting his arm across her shoulders, turned her gently so that she faced him.

"Never mind, little person," he whispered. "It's done and over. I'm sorry I slashed at you the way I did. That's a fool man's way—if he's hurt and sore he always has to jump on somebody else."

Then by some queer complexity of her woman's nature the tears forced their way. She did not want to cry—only the weak and mushy-minded wept. She had always fought back tears unless she was shaken to the roots of her soul. But it was almost a relief to cry with Bill's arm holding her close. And it was brief. She sat up beside him presently. He held her hand tucked in between his own two palms, but he looked wistfully at the window, as if he were seeing what lay beyond.

"Poor, dumb devils!" he murmured. "I feel like a murderer. But it was pure mercy to them. They won't suffer the agony of frost, nor the slow pain of starvation. That's what it amounted to—they'd starve if they didn't freeze first. I've known men I would rather have shot. I bucked many a hard old trail with Silk and Satin. Poor, dumb devils!"

"D-don't, Bill!" she cried forlornly. "I know it's my fault. I let the fire almost go out, and then built it up big without thinking. And I know being sorry doesn't make any difference. But please—I don't want to be miserable over it. I'll never be careless again."

"All right; I won't talk about it, hon," he said. "I don't think you will ever be careless about such things again. The North won't let us get away with it. The wilderness is bigger than we are, and it's merciless if we make mistakes."

"I see that." She shuddered involuntarily. "It's a grim country. It frightens me."

"Don't let it," he said tenderly. "So long as we have our health and strength we can win out, and be stronger for the experience. Winter's a tough proposition up here, but you want to fight shy of morbid brooding over things that can't be helped. This everlasting frost and snow will be gone by and by. It'll be spring. And everything looks different when there's green grass and flowers, and the sun is warm. Buck up, old girl—Bill's still on the job."

"How can you prospect in the spring without horses to pack the outfit?" she asked, after a little. "How can we get out of here with all the stuff we'll have?"

"We'll manage it," he assured lightly. "We'll get out with our furs and gold, all right, and we won't go hungry on the way, even if we have no pack train. Leave it to me."

CHAPTER VII.

JACK FROST WITHDRAWS.

All through the month of January each evening as dusk folded its somber mantle about the meadow the wolves gathered to feast on the dead horses, till Hazel's nerves were strained to the snapping point. Continually she was reminded of that vivid episode, of which she had been the unwitting cause. Sometimes she would open the door, and from out the dark would arise the sound of wolfish quarrels over the feast, disembodied snappings and snarlings. Or when the low-swimming moon shed a misty glimmer on the open she would peer through a thawed place on the windowpane, and see gray shapes circling about the half-picked skeletons. Sometimes, when Bill was gone, and all about the cabin was utterly still, one, bolder or hungrier than his fellows, would trot across the meadow, drawn by the scent of the meat. Two or three of these Hazel shot with her own rifle.

But when February marked another span on the calendar the wolves came no more. The bones were clean.

There was no impending misfortune or danger that she could point to or forecast with certitude. Nevertheless, struggle against it as she might, knowing it for pure psychological phenomena arising out of her harsh environment, Hazel suffered continual vague forebodings. The bald, white peaks seemed to surround her like a prison from which there could be no release. From day to day she was harassed by dismal thoughts. She would wake in the night clutching at her husband. Such days as he went out alone she passed in restless anxiety. Something would happen. What it would be she did not know, but to her it seemed that the bleak stage was set for untoward drama, and they two the puppets that must play.

She strove against this impression with cold logic; but reason availed nothing against the feeling that the North had but to stretch forth its mighty hand and crush them utterly. But all of this she concealed from Bill. She was ashamed of her fears, the groundless uneasiness. Yet it was a constant factor in her daily life, and it sapped her vitality as surely and steadily as lack of bodily nourishment could have done.

Had there been in her make-up any inherent weakness of mentality Hazel might perhaps have brooded herself into neurasthenia. Few save those who have actually experienced complete isolation for extended periods can realize the queer, warped outlook such an existence imposes on the human mind, if that mind is a trifle more than normally sensitive to impressions, and a nature essentially social both by inclination and habit. In the first months of their marriage she had assured herself and him repeatedly that she could be perfectly happy and contented any place on earth with Bill Wagstaff.

Emotion has blinded wiser folk, and perhaps that is merely a little device of nature's, for if one could look into the future with too great a clarity of vision there would be fewer matings. In the main her declaration still held true. She loved her husband with the same intensity; possibly even more, for she had found in him none of the flaws which every woman dreads that time and association may bring to light in her chosen mate.

When Bill drew her up close in his arms, the intangible menace of the wilderness and all the dreary monotony of the days faded into the background. But they, no more than others who have tried and failed for lack of understanding, could live their lives with their heads in an emotional cloud. For every action there must be a corresponding reaction. They who have the capacity to reach the heights must likewise, upon occasion, plumb the depths. Life, she began to realize, resolved itself into an unending succession of little, trivial things, with here and there some great event looming out above all the rest for its bestowal of happiness or pain.

Bill knew. He often talked about such things. She was beginning to understand that he had a far more comprehensive grasp of the fundamentals of existence than she had. He had explained to her that the individual unit was nothing outside of his group affiliations, and she applied that to herself in a practical way in an endeavor to analyze herself. She was a group product, and only under group conditions could her life flow along nonirritant lines. Such being the case, it followed that if Bill persisted in living out of the world they would eventually drift apart, in spirit if not in actuality. And that was an absurd summing-up.

She rejected the conclusion decisively. For was not their present situation the net result of a concrete endeavor to strike a balance between the best of what both the wilderness and the humming cities had to offer them? It seemed treason to Bill to long for other voices and other faces. Yet she could not help the feeling. She wondered if he, too, did not sometimes long for company besides her own. And the thought stirred up a perverse jealousy. They two, perfectly mated in all things, should be able to make their own little world complete—but they could not, she knew. Life was altogether too complex an affair to be solved in so primitive a fashion. She felt that continued living under such conditions would drive her mad; that if she stayed long enough under the somber shadow of the Klappan Range she would hate the North and all it contained.

That would have been both unjust and absurd, so she set herself resolutely to overcome that feeling of oppression. She was too well-balanced to drift unwittingly along this perilous road of thought. She schooled herself to endure and to fight off introspection. She had absorbed enough of her husband's sturdy philosophy of life to try and make the best of a bad job. After all, she frequently assured herself, the badness of the job was mostly a state of mind. And she had a growing conviction that Bill sensed the struggle, and that it hurt him. For that reason, if for no other, she did her best to make light of the grim environment, and to wait patiently for spring.

February and March stormed a path furiously across the calendar. Higher and higher the drifts piled about the cabin, till at length it was banked to the eaves with snow save where Bill shoveled it away to let light to the windows. Day after day they kept indoors, stoking up the fire, listening to the triumphant whoop of the winds.

"Snow, snow!" Hazel burst out one day. "Frost that cuts you like a knife. I wonder if there's ever going to be an end to it? I wish we were home again—or some place."

"So do I, little person," Bill said gently. "But spring's almost at the door. Hang on a little longer. We've made a fair stake, anyway, if we don't wash an ounce of gold."

Hazel let her gaze wander over the pelts hanging thick from ridge log and wall. Bill had fared well at his trapping. Over two thousand dollars he estimated the value of his catch.

"How are we going to get it all out?" She voiced a troublesome thought.

"Shoulder pack to the Skeena," he answered laconically. "Build a dugout there, and float downstream. Portage the rapids as they come."

"Oh, Bill!" she came and leaned her head against him contritely. "Our poor ponies! And it was all my carelessness."

"Never mind, hon," he comforted. "They blinked out without suffering. And we'll make it like a charm. Be game—it'll soon be spring."

As if in verification of his words, with the last breath of that howling storm came a sudden softening of the atmosphere. The sharp teeth of the frost became swiftly blunted, and the sun, swinging daily in a wider arc, brought the battery of his rays into effective play on the mountainsides. The drifts lessened, shrunk, became moisture sodden. For ten days or more the gradual thaw increased. Then a lusty-lunged chinook wind came booming up along the Klappan Range, and stripped it to a bare, steaming heap. Overhead whistled the first flight of the wild goose, bound for the nesting grounds. Night and day the roar of a dozen cataracts droned on all sides of the basin, as the melting snow poured down in the annual spring flood.

By April the twentieth the abdication of Jack Frost was complete. A kindlier despot ruled the land, and Bill Wagstaff began to talk of gold.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE STRIKE.

> that precious yellow metal sought by men
> In regions desolate.
> Pursued in patient hope or furious toil;
> Breeder of discord, wars, and murderous hate;
> The victor's spoil."

So Hazel quoted, leaning over her husband's shoulder. In the bottom of his pan, shining among a film of black sand, lay half a dozen bright specks, varying from pin-point size to the bigness of a grain of wheat.

"That's the stuff," Bill murmured. "Only it seems rather far-fetched for your poet to blame inanimate matter for the cussedness of humanity in general. I suppose, though, he thought he was striking a highly dramatic note. Anyway, it looks as if we'd struck it pretty fair. It's time, too—the June rise will hit us like a whirlwind one of these days."

"About what is the value of those little pieces?" Hazel asked.

"Oh, fifty or sixty cents," he answered. "Not much by itself. But it seems to be uniform over the bar—and I can wash a good many pans in a day's work."

"I should think so," she remarked. "It didn't take you ten minutes to do that one."

"Whitey Lewis and I took out over two hundred dollars a day on that other creek last spring—no, a year last spring, it was," he observed reminiscently. "This isn't as good, but it's not to be sneezed at, either. I think I'll make me a rocker. I've sampled this bend quite a lot, and I don't think I can do any better than fly at this while the water stays low."

"I can help, can't I?" she said eagerly.

"Sure," he smiled. "You help a lot, little person, just sitting around keeping me company."

"But I want to work," she declared. "I've sat around now till I'm getting the fidgets."

"All right; I'll give you a job," he returned good-naturedly. "Meantime, let's eat that lunch you packed up here."

In a branch of the creek which flowed down through the basin, Bill had found plentiful colors as soon as the first big run-off of water had fallen. He had followed upstream painstakingly, panning colors always, and now and then a few grains of coarse gold to encourage him in the quest. The loss of their horses precluded ranging far afield to that other glacial stream which he had worked with Whitey Lewis when he was a free lance in the North. He was close to his base of supplies, and he had made wages—with always the prospector's lure of a rich strike on the next bar.

And now, with May well advanced, he had found definite indications of good pay dirt. The creek swung in a hairpin curve, and in the neck between the two sides of the loop the gold was sifted through wash gravel and black sand, piled there by God only knew how many centuries of glacial drift and flood. But it was there. He had taken panfuls at random over the bar, and uniformly it gave up coarse gold. With a rocker he stood a fair chance of big money before the June rise.

"In the morning," said he, when lunch was over, "I'll bring along the ax and some nails and a shovel, and get busy."

That night they trudged down to the cabin in high spirits. Bill had washed out enough during the afternoon to make a respectable showing on Hazel's outspread handkerchief. And Hazel was in a gleeful mood over the fact that she had unearthed a big nugget by herself. Beginner's luck, Bill said teasingly, but that did not diminish her elation. The old, adventurous glamour, which the long winter and moods of depression had worn threadbare, began to cast its pleasant spell over her again. The fascination of the gold hunt gripped her. Not for the stuff itself, but for what it would get. She wondered if the men who dared the impassive solitudes of the North for weary, lonesome years saw in every morsel of the gold they found a picture of what that gold would buy them in kindlier lands. And some never found any, never won the stake that would justify the gamble. It was a gamble, in a sense —a pure game of chance; but a game that took strength, and nerve, a sturdy soul, to play.

Still, the gold was there, locked up in divers storing places in the lap of the earth, awaiting those virile enough to find and take. And out beyond, in the crowded places of the earth, were innumerable gateways to comfort and pleasure which could be opened with gold. It remained only to balance the one against the other. Just as she had often planned according to her opportunities when she was a wage slave in the office of Bush & Co., so now did she view and plan for the future on a broader scale, now that the North promised to open its treasure vault to them—an attitude which Bill Wagstaff encouraged and abetted in his own whimsical fashion. There was nothing too good for them, he sometimes observed, provided it could be got. But there was one profound difference in their respective temperaments, Hazel sometimes reflected. Bill would shrug his wide shoulders, and forget or forego the unattainable, where she would chafe and fume. She was quite positive of this.

But as the days passed there seemed no question of their complete success. Bill fabricated his rocker, a primitive, boxlike device with a blanket screen and transverse slats below. It was faster than the pan, even rude as it was, and it caught all but the finer particles of gold. Hazel helped operate the rocker, took her turn at shoveling or filling the box with water while Bill rocked. Each day's end sent her to her bed healthily tired, but happily conscious that she had helped to accomplish something.

A queer twist of luck put the capsheaf on their undertaking. Hazel ran a splinter of wood into her hand, thus putting a stop to her activities with shovel and pail. Until the wound lost its soreness she was forced to sit idle. She could watch Bill ply his rocker while she fought flies on the bank. This grew tiresome, particularly since she had the sense to realize that a man who works with sweat streaming down his face and a mind wholly absorbed in the immediate task has no desire to be bothered with inconsequential chatter. So she rambled along the creek one afternoon, armed with hook and line on a pliant willow.

The trout were hungry, and struck fiercely at the bait. She soon had plenty for supper and breakfast. Wherefore she abandoned that diversion, and took to prying tentatively in the lee of certain bowlders on the edge of the creek —prospecting on her own initiative, as it were. She had no pan, and only one hand to work with, but she knew gold when she saw it—and, after all, it was but an idle method of killing time.

She noticed behind each rock and in every shallow, sheltered place in the stream a plentiful gathering of tiny red stones. They were of a pale, ruby cast, and mostly flawed; dainty trifles, translucent and full of light when she held them to the sun. She began a search for a larger specimen. It might mount nicely into a stickpin for Bill, she thought; a memento of the Klappan Range.

And in this search she came upon a large, rusty pebble, snuggled on the downstream side of an overhanging rock right at the water's edge. It attracted her first by its symmetrical form, a perfect oval; then, when she lifted it, by its astonishing weight. She continued her search for the pinkish-red stones, carrying the rusty pebble along. Presently she worked her way back to where Roaring Bill labored prodigiously.

"I feel ashamed to be loafing while you work so hard, Billy-boy," she greeted.

"Give me a kiss and I'll call it square," he proposed cheerfully. "Got to work like a beaver, kid. This hot weather'll put us to the bad before long. There'll be ten feet of water roaring down here one of these days."

"Look at these pretty stones I found," she said. "What are they, Bill?"

"Those?" He looked at her outstretched palm. "Garnets."

"Garnets? They must be valuable, then," she observed. "The creek's full of them."

"Valuable? I should say so," he grinned. "I sent a sample to a Chicago firm once. They replied to the effect that they would take all I could deliver, and pay thirty-six dollars a ton, f. o. b., my nearest railroad station."

"Oh!" she protested. "But they're pretty."

"Yes, if you can find one of any size. What's the other rock?" he inquired casually. "You making a collection of specimens?"

"That's just a funny stone I found," she returned. "It must be iron or something. It's terribly heavy for its size."

"Eh? Let me see it," he said.

She handed it over.

He weighed it in his palm, scrutinized it closely, turning it over and over. Then he took out his knife and scratched the rusty surface.

"Huh!" he grunted. "Look at your funny stone."

He held it out for her inspection. The blade of his knife had left a dull, yellow scar.

"Oh!" she gasped. "Why—it's gold!"

"It is, woman," he declaimed, with mock solemnity. "Gold—glittering gold!

"Say, where did you find this?" he asked, when Hazel stared at the nugget, dumb in the face of this unexpected stroke of fortune.

"Just around the second bend," she cried. "Oh, Bill, do you suppose there's any more there?"

"Lead me to it with my trusty pan and shovel, and we'll see," Bill smiled.

Forthwith they set out. The overhanging bowlder was a scant ten minutes' walk up the creek.

Bill leaned on his shovel, and studied the ground. Then, getting down on his knees at the spot where the marks of Hazel's scratching showed plain enough, he began to paw over the gravel.

Within five minutes his fingers brought to light a second lump, double the size of her find. Close upon that he winnowed a third. Hazel leaned over him, breathless. He sifted the gravel and sand through his fingers slowly, picking out and examining all that might be the precious metal, and as he picked and clawed the rusty, brown nuggets came to light. At last he reached bottom. The bowlder thrust out below in a natural shelf. From this Bill carefully scraped the accumulation of black sand and gravel, gleaning as a result of his labor a baker's dozen of assorted chunks—one giant that must have weighed three pounds. He sat back on his haunches, and looked at his wife, speechless.

"Is that *all* gold, Bill?" she whispered incredulously.

"It certainly is—as good gold as ever went into the mint," he assured. "All laid in a nice little nest on this shelf of rock. I've heard of such things up in this country, but I never ran into one before—and I've always taken this pocket theory with a grain of salt. But there you are. That's a real, honest-to-God pocket. And a well-lined one, if you ask me. This rusty-colored outside is oxidized iron—from the black sand, I guess. Still, it might be something else. But I know what the inside is, all right, all right."

"My goodness!" she murmured. "There might be wagonloads of it in this creek."

"There might, but it isn't likely." Bill shook his head. "This is a simon-pure pocket, and it would keep a graduate mineralogist guessing to say how it got here, because it's a different proposition from the wash gold in the creek bed. I've got all that's here, I'm pretty sure. And you might prospect this creek from end to end and never find another nugget bigger than a pea. It's rich placer ground, at that—but this pocket's almost unbelievable. Must be forty pounds of gold there. And you found it. You're the original mascot, little person."

He bestowed a bearlike hug upon her.

"Now what?" she asked. "It hardly seems real to pick up several thousand dollars in half an hour or so like this. What will we do?"

"Do? Why, bless your dear soul," he laughed. "We'll just consider ourselves extra lucky, and keep right on with the game till the high water makes us quit."

Which was a contingency nearer at hand than even Bill, with a firsthand knowledge of the North's vagaries in the way of flood, quite anticipated.

Three days after the finding of the pocket the whole floor of the creek was awash. His rocker went downstream overnight. To the mouth of the cañon where the branch sought junction with the parent stream they could ascend, and no farther. And when Bill saw that he rolled himself a cigarette, and, putting one long arm across his wife's shoulders, said whimsically:

"What d'you say we start home?"

CHAPTER IX.

THE STRESS OF THE TRAIL.

Roaring Bill dumped his second pack on the summit of the Klappan, and looked away to where the valley that opened out of the basin showed its blurred hollow in the distance. But he uttered no useless regrets. With horses they could have ridden south through a rolling country, where every stretch of timber gave on a grass-grown level. Instead they were forced back over the rugged route by which they had crossed the range the summer before. Grub, bedding, furs, and gold totaled two hundred pounds. On his sturdy shoulders Bill could pack half that weight. For his wife the thing was a physical impossibility, even had he permitted her to try. Hence every mile advanced meant that he doubled the distance, relaying from one camp to the next. They cut their bedding to a blanket apiece, and that was Hazel's load—all he would allow her to carry.

"You're no pack mule, little person," he would say. "It don't hurt me. I've done this for years."

But even with abnormal strength and endurance, it was killing work to buck those ragged slopes with a heavy load. Only by terrible, unremitting effort could he advance any appreciable distance. From daybreak till noon they would climb and rest alternately. Then, after a meal and a short breathing spell, he would go back alone after the second load. They were footsore, and their bodies ached with weariness that verged on pain when they gained the pass that cut the summit of the Klappan Range.

"Well, we're over the hump," Bill remarked thankfully. "It's a downhill shoot to the Skeena. I don't think it's more than fifty or sixty miles to where we can take to the water."

They made better time on the western slope, but the journey became a matter of sheer endurance. Summer was on them in full blaze. The creeks ran full and strong. Thunderstorms blew up out of a clear sky to deluge them. Food was scanty—flour and salt and tea; with meat and fish got by the way. And the black flies and mosquitoes swarmed about them maddeningly day and night.

So they came at last to the Skeena, and Hazel's heart misgave her when she took note of its swirling reaches, the sinuous eddies—a deep, swift, treacherous stream. But Bill rested overnight, and in the morning sought and felled a sizable cedar, and began to hew. Slowly the thick trunk shaped itself to the form of a boat under the steady swing of his ax. Hazel had seen the type in use among the coast Siwashes, twenty-five feet in length, narrow-beamed, the sides cut to a half inch in thickness, the bottom left heavier to withstand scraping over rock, and to keep it on an even keel. A rude and tricky craft, but one wholly efficient in capable hands.

In a week it was finished. They loaded the sack of gold, the bundle of furs, their meager camp outfit amidships, and swung off into the stream.

The Skeena drops fifteen hundred feet in a hundred miles. Wherefore there are rapids, boiling stretches of white water in which many a good canoe has come to grief. Some of these they ran at imminent peril. Over the worst they lined the canoe from the bank. One or two short cañons they portaged, dragging the heavy dugout through the brush by main strength. Once they came to a wall-sided gorge that ran away beyond any attempt at portage, and they abandoned the dugout, to build another at the lower end. But between these natural barriers they clicked off the miles in hot haste, such was the swiftness of the current. And in the second week of July they brought up at the head of Kispiox Cañon. Hazleton lay a few miles below. But the Kispiox stayed them, a sluice box cut through solid stone, in which the waters raged with a deafening roar. No man ventured into that wild gorge. They abandoned the dugout. Bill slung the sack of gold and the bale of furs on his back.

"It's the last lap, Hazel," said he. "We'll leave the rest of it for the first Siwash that happens along."

So they set out bravely to trudge the remaining distance. And as the fortunes of the trail sometimes befall, they raised an Indian camp on the bank of the river at the mouth of the cañon. A ten-dollar bill made them possessors of another canoe, and an hour later the roofs of Hazleton cropped up above the bank.

"Oh, Bill," Hazel called from the bow. "Look! There's the same old steamer tied to the same old bank. We've been gone a year, and yet the world hasn't changed a mite. I wonder if Hazleton has taken a Rip van Winkle sleep all this time?"

"No fear," he smiled. "I can see some new houses—quite a few, in fact. And look—by Jiminy! They're working on the grade. That railroad, remember? See all those teams? Maybe I ought to have taken up old Hackaberry on that town-lot proposition, after all."

"Fiddlesticks!" she retorted, with fine scorn of Hazleton's real-estate possibilities. "You could buy the whole town with this."

She touched the sack with her toe.

"Not quite," Bill returned placidly. "I wouldn't, anyway. We'll get a better run for our money than that. I hope old Hack didn't forget to attend to that ranch business for me."

He drove the canoe alongside a float. A few loungers viewed them with frank curiosity. Bill set out the treasure sack and the bale of furs, and tied the canoe

"A new hotel, by Jove!" he remarked, when upon gaining the level of the town a new two-story building blazoned with a huge sign its function as a hostelry. "Getting quite metropolitan in this neck of the woods. Say, little person, do you think you can relish a square meal? Planked steak and lobster salad—huh? I wonder if they *could* rustle a salad in this man's town? Say, do you know I'm just beginning to find out how hungry I am for the fleshpots. What's the matter with a little variety?—as Lin MacLean said. Aren't you, hon?"

She was; frankly so. For long, monotonous months she had been struggling against just such cravings, impossible of realization, and therefore all the more tantalizing. She had been a year in the wilderness, and the wilderness had not only lost its glamour, but had become a thing to flee from. Even the rude motley of Hazleton was a welcome change. Here at least—on a minor scale, to be sure—was that which she craved, and to which she had been accustomed—life, stir, human activity, the very antithesis of the lonely mountain fastnesses. She bestowed a glad pressure on her husband's arm as they walked up the street, Bill carrying the sack of gold perched carelessly on one shoulder.

"Say, their enterprise has gone the length of establishing a branch bank here, I see."

He called her attention to a square-fronted edifice, its new-boarded walls as yet guiltless of paint, except where a row of black letters set forth that it was the Bank of British North America.

"That's a good place to stow this bullion," he remarked. "I want to get it off my hands."

So to the bank they bent their steps. A solemn, horse-faced Englishman weighed the gold, and issued Bill a receipt, expressing a polite regret that lack of facility to determine its fineness prevented him from converting it into cash.

"That means a trip to Vancouver," Bill remarked outside. "Well, we can stand that."

From the bank they went to the hotel, registered, and were shown to a room. For the first time since the summit of the Klappan Range, where her tiny hand glass had suffered disaster, Hazel was permitted a clear view of herself in a mirror.

"I'm a perfect fright!" she mourned.

"Huh!" Bill grunted. *"You're* all right. Look at me."

The trail had dealt hardly with both, in the matter of their personal appearance. Tanned to an abiding brown, they were, and Hazel's one-time smooth face was spotted with fly bites and marked with certain scratches suffered in the brush as they skirted the Kispiox. Her hair had lost its sleek, glossy smoothness of arrangement. Her hands were reddened and rough. But chiefly she was concerned with the sad state of her apparel. She had come a matter of four hundred miles in the clothes on her back—and they bore unequivocal evidence of the journey.

"I'm a perfect fright," she repeated pettishly. "I don't wonder that people lapse into semibarbarism in the backwoods. One's manners, morals, clothing, and complexion all suffer from too close contact with your beloved North, Bill."

"Thanks!" he returned shortly. "I suppose I'm a perfect fright, too. Long hair, whiskers, grimy, calloused hands, and all the rest of it. A shave and a hair cut, a bath and a new suit of clothes will remedy that. But I'll be the same personality in every essential quality that I was when I sweated over the Klappan with a hundred pounds on my back."

"I hope so," she retorted. "I don't require the shave, thank goodness, but I certainly need a bath—and clothes. I wish I had the gray suit that's probably getting all moldy and moth-eaten at the Pine River cabin. I wonder if I can get anything to wear here?"

"Women live here," Bill returned quietly, "and I suppose the stores supply 'em with duds. Unlimber that bank roll of yours, and do some shopping."

She sat on the edge of the bed, regarding her reflection in the mirror with extreme disfavor. Bill fingered his thick stubble of a beard for a thoughtful minute. Then he sat down beside her.

"Wha's a mollah, hon?" he wheedled. "What makes you such a crosser patch all at once?"

"Oh, I don't know," she answered dolefully. "I'm tired and hungry, and I look a fright—and—oh, just everything."

"Tut, tut!" he remonstrated good-naturedly. "That's just mood again. We're out of the woods, literally and figuratively. If you're hungry, let's go and see what we can make this hotel produce in the way of grub, before we do anything else."

"I wouldn't go into their dining room looking like this for the world," she said decisively. "I didn't realize how dirty and shabby I was."

"All right; you go shopping, then," he proposed, "while I take these furs up to old Hack's place and turn them into money. Then we'll dress, and make this hotel feed us the best they've got. Cheer up. Maybe it was tough on you to slice a year out of your life and leave it in a country where there's nothing but woods and eternal silence—but we've got around twenty thousand dollars to show for it, Hazel. And one can't get something for nothing. There's a price mark on it somewhere, always. We've got all our lives before us, little person, and a better chance for happiness than most folks have. Don't let little things throw you into the blues. Be my good little pal—and see if you can't make one of these stores dig up a white waist and a black skirt, like you had on the first time I saw you."

He kissed her, and went quickly out. And after a long time of sober staring at her image in the glass Hazel shook herself impatiently.

"I'm a silly, selfish, incompetent little beast," she whispered. "Bill ought to thump me, instead of being kind. I can't do anything, and I don't know much, and I'm a scarecrow for looks right now. And I started out to be a real partner."

She wiped an errant tear away, and made her way to a store—a new place sprung up, like the bank and the hotel, with the growing importance of the town. The stock of ready-made clothing drove her to despair. It seemed that what women resided in Hazleton must invariably dress in Mother Hubbard gowns of cheap cotton print with other garments to match. But eventually they found for her undergarments of a sort, a waist and skirt, and a comfortable pair of shoes. Hats, as a milliner would understand the term, there were none. And in default of such she stuck to the gray felt sombrero she had worn into the Klappan and out again—which, in truth, became her very well, when tilted at the proper angle above her heavy black hair. Then she went back to the hotel, and sought a bathroom.

Returning from this she found Bill, a Bill all shaved and shorn, unloading himself of sundry packages of new attire.

"Aha, everything is lovely," he greeted enthusiastically. "Old Hack jumped at the pelts, and paid a fat price for the lot. Also the ranch deal has gone through. He's a prince, old Hack. Sent up a man and had it surveyed and classified and the deed waiting for me. And—oh, say, here's a letter for you."

"For me? Oh, yes," as she looked at the handwriting and postmark. "I wrote to Loraine Marsh when we were going north. Good heavens, look at the date—it's been here since last September!"

"Hackaberry knew where we were," Bill explained. "Sometimes in camps like this they hold mail two or three years for men that have gone into the interior."

She put aside the letter, and dressed while Bill had his bath. Then, with the smoke and grime of a hard trail obliterated, and with decent clothes upon them, they sought the dining room. There, while they waited to be served, Hazel read Loraine Marsh's letter, and passed it to Bill with a self-conscious little laugh.

"There's an invitation there we might accept," she said casually.

Bill read. There were certain comments upon her marriage, such as the average girl might be expected to address to her chum who has forsaken spinsterhood, a lot of chatty mention of Granville people and Granville happenings, which held no particular interest for Bill since he knew neither one nor the other, and it ended with an apparently sincere hope that Hazel and her husband would visit Granville soon as the Marshes' guests.

He returned the letter as the waitress brought their food.

"Wouldn't it be nice to take a trip home?" Hazel suggested thoughtfully. "I'd love to."

"We are going home," Bill reminded gently.

"Oh, of course," she smiled. "But I mean to Granville. I'd like to go back there with you for a while, just to—just to——"

"To show 'em," he supplied laconically.

"Oh, Bill!" she pouted.

Nevertheless, she could not deny that there was a measure of truth in his brief remark. She did want to "show 'em." Bill's vernacular expressed it exactly. She had compassed success in a manner that Granville—and especially that portion of Granville which she knew and which knew her—could appreciate and understand and envy according to its individual tendencies.

She looked across the table at her husband, and thought to herself with proud satisfaction that she *had* done well. Viewed from any angle whatsoever, Bill Wagstaff stood head and shoulders above all the men she had ever known. Big, physically and mentally, clean-minded and capable—indubitably she had captured a lion, and, though she might have denied stoutly the imputation, she wanted Granville to see her lion and hear him roar.

Whether they realize the fact or not, to the average individual, male or female, reflected glory is better than none at all. And when two people stand in the most intimate relation to each other, the success of one lends a measure of its luster to the other. Those who had been so readily impressed by Andrew Bush's device to singe her social wings with the flame of gossip had long since learned their mistake. She had the word of Loraine Marsh and Jack Barrow that they were genuinely sorry for having been carried away by appearances. And she could nail her colors to the mast if she came home the wife of a man like Bill Wagstaff, who could wrest a fortune from the wilderness in a briefer span of time than it took most men to make current expenses. Hazel was quite too human to refuse a march triumphal if it came her way. She had left Granville in bitterness of spirit, and some of that bitterness required balm.

"Still thinking Granville?" Bill queried, when they had finished an uncommonly silent meal.

Hazel flushed slightly. She was, and momentarily she felt that she should have been thinking of their little nest up by Pine River Pass instead. She knew that Bill was homing to the cabin. She herself regarded it with affection, but of a different degree from his. Her mind was more occupied with another, more palpitating circle of life than was possible at the cabin, much as she appreciated its green and peaceful beauty. The sack of gold lying in the bank had somehow opened up far-flung possibilities. She skipped the interval of affairs which she knew must be attended to, and betook herself and Bill to Granville, thence to the bigger, older cities, where money shouted in the voice of command, where all things were possible to those who had the price.

She had had her fill of the wilderness—for the time being, she put it. It loomed behind her—vast, bleak, a desolation of loneliness from which she must get away. She knew now, beyond peradventure, that her heart had brought her back to the man in spite of, rather than because of, his environment. And secure in the knowledge of his love for her and her love for him she was already beginning to indulge a dream of transplanting him permanently to kindlier surroundings, where he would have wider scope for his natural ability and she less isolation.

But she was beginning to know this husband of hers too well to propose anything of the sort abruptly. Behind his tenderness and patience she had sometimes glimpsed something inflexible, unyielding as the wilderness he loved. So she merely answered:

"In a way, yes."

"Let's go outside where I can smoke a decent cigar on top of this fairly decent meal," he suggested. "Then we'll figure on the next move. I think about twenty-four hours in Hazleton will do me. There's a steamer goes down-river to-morrow."

CHAPTER X.

NEIGHBORS.

Four days later they stood on the deck of a grimy little steamer breasting the outgoing tide that surged through the First Narrows. Wooded banks on either hand spread dusky green in the hot August sun. On their left glinted the roofs and white walls of Hollyburn, dear to the suburban heart. Presently they swung around Brockton Point, and Vancouver spread its peninsular clutter before them. Tugs and launches puffed by, about their harbor traffic. A ferry clustered black with people hurried across the inlet. But even above the harbor noises, across the intervening distance they could hear the vibrant hum of the industrial hive.

"Listen to it," said Bill. "Like surf on the beaches. And, like the surf, it's full of treacherous undercurrents, a bad thing to get into unless you can swim strong enough to keep your head above water."

"You're a thoroughgoing pessimist," she smiled.

"No," he shook his head. "I merely know that it's a hard game to buck, under normal conditions. We're of the fortunate few, that's all."

"You're not going to spoil the pleasure that's within your reach by pondering the misfortunes of those who are less lucky, are you?" she inquired curiously.

"Not much," he drawled. "Besides, that isn't my chief objection to town. I simply can't endure the noise and confusion and the manifold stinks, and the universal city attitude—which is to gouge the other fellow before he gouges you. Too much like a dog fight. No, I haven't any mission to remedy social and economic ills. I'm taking the egotistic view that it doesn't concern me, that I'm perfectly justified in enjoying myself in my own way, seeing that I'm in a position to do so. We're going to take our fun as we find it. Just the same," he finished thoughtfully, "I'd as soon be pulling into that ranch of ours on the hurricane deck of a right good horse as approaching Vancouver's water front. This isn't any place to spend money or to see anything. It's a big, noisy, overgrown village, overrun with business exploiters and real-estate sharks. It'll be a city some day. At present it's still in the shambling stage of civic youth."

In so far as Hazel had observed upon her former visit, this, if a trifle sweeping, was in the main correct. So she had no regrets when Bill confined their stay to the time necessary to turn his gold into a bank account, and allow her to buy a trunkful, more or less, of pretty clothes. Then they bore on eastward and halted at Ashcroft. Bill had refused to commit himself positively to a date for the eastern pilgrimage. He wanted to see the cabin again. For that matter she did, too—so that their sojourn there did not carry them over another winter. That loomed ahead like a vague threat. Those weary months in the Klappan Range had filled her with the subtle poison of discontent, for which she felt that new scenes and new faces would prove the only antidote.

"There's a wagon road to Fort George," he told her. "We could go in there by the B. X. steamers, but I'm afraid we couldn't buy an outfit to go on. I guess a pack outfit from the end of the stage line will be about right."

From Ashcroft an auto stage whirled them swiftly into the heart of the Cariboo country—to Quesnelle, where Bill purchased four head of horses in an afternoon, packed, saddled, and hit the trail at daylight in the morning.

It was very pleasant to loaf along a passable road mounted on a light-footed horse, and Hazel enjoyed it if for no more than the striking contrast to that terrible journey in and out of the Klappan. Here were no heartbreaking mountains to scale. The scourge of flies was well-nigh past. They took the road in easy stages, well-provisioned, sleeping in a good bed at nights, camping as the spirit moved when a likely trout stream crossed their trail, venison and grouse all about them for variety of diet and the sport of hunting.

So they fared through the Telegraph Range, crossed the Blackwater, and came to Fort George by way of a ferry over the Fraser.

"This country is getting civilized," Bill observed that evening. "They tell me the G. T. P. has steel laid to a point three hundred miles east of here. This bloomin' road'll be done in another year. They're grading all along the line. I bought that hundred and sixty acres on pure sentiment, but it looks like it may turn out a profitable business transaction. That railroad is going to flood this country with farmers, and settlement means a network of railroads and skyrocketing ascension of land values."

The vanguard of the land hungry had already penetrated to Fort George. Up and down the Nechaco Valley, and bordering upon the Fraser, were the cabins of the preëmptors. The roads were dotted with the teams of the incoming. A sizable town had sprung up around the old trading post.

"They come like bees when the rush starts," Bill remarked.

Leaving Fort George behind, they bore across country toward Pine River. Here and there certain landmarks, graven deep in Hazel's recollection, uprose to claim her attention. And one evening at sunset they rode up to the little cabin, all forlorn in its clearing. The grass waved to their stirrups, and the pigweed stood rank up to the very door.

Inside, a gray film of dust had accumulated on everything, and the rooms were oppressive with the musty odors that gather in a closed, untenanted house. But apart from that it stood as they had left it thirteen months before. No foot had crossed the threshold. The pile of wood and kindling lay beside the fireplace as Bill had placed it the morning they left.

" 'Be it ever so humble,' " Bill left the line of the old song unfinished, but his tone was full of jubilation. Between them they threw wide every door and window. The cool evening wind filled the place with sweet, pine-scented air. Then Bill started a blaze roaring in the black-mouthed fireplace, to make it look natural, he said; and went out to hobble his horses for the night.

In the morning they began to unpack their household goods. Rugs and bearskins found each its accustomed place upon the floor. His books went back on the shelves. With magical swiftness the cabin resumed its old-home atmosphere. And that night Bill stretched himself on the grizzly hide before the fireplace, and kept his nose in a book until Hazel, who was in no humor to read, fretted herself into something approaching a temper.

"You're about as sociable as a clam," she broke into his absorption at last.

He looked up in surprise, then chucked the volume carelessly aside, and twisted himself around till his head rested in her lap.

"Vot iss?" he asked cheerfully. "Lonesome? Bored with yourself? Ain't I here?"

"Your body is," she retorted. "But your spirit is communing with those musty old philosophers."

"Oh, be good—go thou and do likewise," he returned impenitently. "I'm tickled to death to be home. And I'm fairly book-starved. It's fierce to be deprived of even a newspaper for twelve months. I'll be a year getting caught up. Surely you don't feel yourself neglected because I happen to have my nose stuck in a book?"

"Of course not!" she denied vigorously. The childish absurdity of her attitude struck her with sudden force. "Still, I'd like you to talk to me *once* in a while."

"'Of shoes and ships and sealing wax; of cabbages and kings,'" he flung at her mischievously. "I'll make music; that's better than mere words."

He picked up his mandolin and tuned the strings. Like most things which he set out to do, Bill had mastered his instrument, and could coax out of it all the harmony of which it was capable. He seemed to know music better than many who pass for musicians. But he broke off in the midst of a bar.

"Say, we could get a piano in here next spring," he said. "I just recollected it. We'll do it."

Now, this was something that she had many a time audibly wished for. Yet the prospect aroused no enthusiasm.

"That'll be nice," she said—but not as she would have said it a year earlier. Bill's eyes narrowed a trifle, but he still smiled. And suddenly he stepped around behind her chair, put both hands under her chin, and tilted her head backward.

"Ah, you're plumb sick and tired to death of everything, aren't you?" he said soberly. "You've been up here too long. You sure need a change. I'll have to take you out and give you the freedom of the cities, let you dissipate and pink-tea, and rub elbows with the mob for a while. Then you'll be glad to drift back to this woodsy hiding place of ours. When do you want to start?"

"Why, Bill!" she protested.

But she realized in a flash that Bill could read her better than she could read herself. Few of her emotions could remain long hidden from that keenly observing and mercilessly logical mind. She knew that he guessed where she stood, and by what paths she had gotten there. Trust him to know. And it made her very tender toward him that he was so quick to understand. Most men would have resented.

"I want to stack a few tons of hay," he went on, disregarding her exclamation. "I'll need it in the spring, if not this winter. Soon as that's done we'll hit the high spots. We'll take three or four thousand dollars, and while it lasts we'll be a couple of—of high-class tramps. Huh? Does it sound good?"

She nodded vigorously.

"High-class tramps," she repeated musingly. "That sounds fine."

"Perk up, then," he wheedled.

"Billy-boy," she murmured, "you mustn't take me too seriously."

"I took you for better or for worse," he answered, with a kiss. "I don't want it to turn out worse. I want you to be contented and happy here, where I've planned to make our home. I know you love me quite a lot, little person. Nature fitted us in a good many ways to be mates. But you've gone through a pretty drastic siege of isolation in this rather grim country, and I guess it doesn't seem such an alluring place as it did at first. I don't want you to nurse that feeling until it becomes chronic. Then we would be out of tune, and it would be good-by happiness. But I think I know the cure for your malady."

That was his final word. He deliberately switched the conversation into other channels.

In the morning he began his hay cutting. About eleven o'clock he threw down his scythe and stalked to the house.

"Put on your hat, and let's go investigate a mystery," said he. "I heard a cow bawl in the woods a minute ago. A regular barnyard bellow."

"A cow bawling?" she echoed. "Sure? What would cattle be doing away up here?"

"That's what I want to know?" Bill laughed. "I've never seen a cow north of the Fraser—not this side of the Rockies, anyway."

They saddled their horses, and rode out in the direction from whence had arisen the bovine complaint. The sound was not repeated, and Hazel had begun to chaff Bill about a too-vivid imagination when within a half mile of the clearing he pulled his horse up short in the middle of a little meadow.

"Look!"

The track of a broad-tired wagon had freshly crushed the thick grass. Bill squinted at the trail, then his gaze swept the timber beyond.

"Well!"

"What is it, Bill?" Hazel asked.

"Somebody has been cutting timber over there," he enlightened. "I can see the fresh ax work. Looks like they'd been hauling poles. Let's follow this track a ways."

The tiny meadow was fringed on the north by a grove of poplars. Beyond that lay another clear space of level land, perhaps forty acres in extent. They broke through the belt of poplars—and pulled up again. On one side of the meadow stood a cabin, the fresh-peeled log walls glaring yellow in the sun, and lifting an earth-covered roof to the autumn sky. Bill whistled softly.

"I'll be hanged," he uttered, "if there isn't the cow!"

Along the west side of the meadow ran a brown streak of sod, and down one side of this a man guided the handles of a plow drawn by the strangest yokemates Hazel's eyes had seen for many a day.

"For goodness sake!" she exclaimed.

"That's the true pioneer spirit for you," Bill spoke absently. "He has bucked his way into the heart of a virgin country, and he's breaking sod with a mule and a cow. That's adaptation to environment with a vengeance—and grit."

"There's a woman, too, Bill. And see—she's carrying a baby!" Hazel pointed excitedly. "Oh, Bill!"

"Let's go over." He stirred up his horse. "What did I tell you about folk that hanker for lots of elbowroom? They're coming."

The man halted his strangely assorted team to watch them come. The woman stood a step outside the door, a baby in her arms, another toddler holding fast to her skirt. A thick-bodied, short, square-shouldered man was this newcomer, with a round, pleasant face.

"Hello, neighbor!" Bill greeted.

The plowman lifted his old felt hat courteously. His face lit up.

"Ach!" said he. "Neighbor. Dot iss a goot vord in diss country vere dere iss no neighbor. But I am glat to meet you. Vill you come do der house und rest a v'ile?"

"Sure!" Bill responded. "But we're neighbors, all right. Did you notice a cabin about half a mile west of here? That's our place—when we're at home."

"So?" The word escaped with the peculiar rising inflection of the Teuton. "I haf saw dot cabin ven ve come here. But I dink it vass abandon. Und I pick dis place mitout hope off a neighbor. Id iss goot lant. Vell, let us to der house go. Id vill rest der mule—und Gretchen, der cow. Hah!"

He rolled a blue eye on his incongruous team, and grinned widely.

"Come," he invited; "mine vife vill be glat."

They found her a matron of thirty-odd; fresh-cheeked, round-faced like her husband, typically German, without his accent of the Fatherland. Hazel at once appropriated the baby. It lay peacefully in her arms, staring wide-eyed, making soft, gurgly sounds.

"The little dear!" Hazel murmured.

"Lauer, our name iss," the man said casually, when they were seated.

"Wagstaff, mine is," Bill completed the informal introduction.

"So?" Lauer responded. "Id hass a German sount, dot name, yes."

"Four or five generations back," Bill answered. "I guess I'm as American as they make 'em."

"I am from Bavaria," Lauer told him. "Vill you shmoke? I light mine bibe—mit your vife's permission.

"Yes," he continued, stuffing the bowl of his pipe with a stubby forefinger, "I am from Bavaria. Dere I vass upon a farm brought oop. I serf in der army my dime. Den Ameriga. Dere I marry my vife, who is born in Milvaukee. I vork in der big brrewerries. Afder dot I learn do be a carpenter. Now I am a kink, mit a castle all mine own. I am no more a vage slafe."

He laughed at his own conceit, a great, roaring bellow that filled the room.

"You're on the right track," Bill nodded. "It's a pity more people don't take the same notion. What do you think of this country, anyway?"

"It iss goot," Lauer answered briefly, and with unhesitating certainty. "It iss goot. Vor der boor man it iss—it iss salfation. Mit fife huntret tollars und hiss two hants he can himself a home make—und a lifing be sure off."

Beside Hazel Lauer's wife absently caressed the blond head of her four-year-old daughter.

"No, I don't think I'll ever get lonesome," she said. "I'm too glad to be here. And I've got lots of work and my babies. Of course, it's natural I'd miss a woman friend running in now and then to chat. But a person can't have it all. And I'd do anything to have a roof of our own, and to have it some place where our livin' don't depend on a pay envelope. Oh, a city's dreadful, I think, when your next meal almost depends on your man holdin' his job. I've lived in town ever since I was fifteen. I lost three babies in Milwaukee—hot weather, bad air, bad milk, bad everything, unless you have plenty of money. Many a time I've sat and cried, just from thinkin' how bad I wanted a little place of our own, where there was grass and trees and a piece of ground for a garden. And I knew we'd never be able to buy it. We couldn't get ahead enough."

"Und so," her husband took up the tale, "I hear off diss country, vere lant can be for noddings got. Und so we scrape und pinch und safe nickels und dimes for fife year. Und here ve are. All der vay from Visconsin in der vaigon, yes. Mit two mules. In Ashcroft I buy der cow, so dot ve haf der fresh milk. Und dot iss lucky. For von mule iss die on der road. So I am plow oop der lant und haul my vaigon mit von mule und Gretchen, der cow."

Hazel had a momentary vision of unrelated hardships by the way, and she wondered how the man could laugh and his wife smile over it. She knew the stifling heat of narrow streets in midsummer, and the hungry longing for cool, green shade. She had seen something of a city's poverty. But she knew also the privations of the trail. Two thousand miles in a wagon! And at the journey's end only a rude cabin of logs—and years of steady toil. Isolation in a huge and lonely land. Yet these folk were happy. She wondered briefly if her own viewpoint were possibly askew. She knew that she could not face such a prospect except in utter rebellion. Not now. The bleak peaks of the Klappan rose up before her mind's eye, the picture of five horses dead in the snow, the wolves that snapped and snarled over their bones. She shuddered. She was still pondering this when she and Bill dismounted at home.

CHAPTER XI.

THE DOLLAR CHASERS.

Granville took them to its bosom with a haste and earnestness that made Hazel catch her breath. The Marshes took possession of them upon their arrival, and they were no more than domiciled under the Marsh roof than all her old friends flocked to call. Tactfully none so much as mentioned Andrew Bush, nor the five-thousand-dollar legacy—the disposition of which sum still perplexed that defunct gentleman's worthy executors. And once more in a genial atmosphere Hazel concluded to let sleeping dogs lie. Many a time in the past two years she had looked forward to cutting them all as dead as they had cut her during that unfortunate period. But once among them, and finding them willing, nay, anxious, to forget that they had ever harbored unjust thoughts of her, she took their proffered friendship at its face value. It was quite gratifying to know that many of them envied her. She learned from various sources that Bill's fortune loomed big, had grown by some mysterious process of Granville tattle, until it had reached the charmed six figures of convention.

That in itself was sufficient to establish their prestige. In a society that lived by and for the dollar, and measured most things with its dollar yardstick, that murmured item opened—indeed, forced open—many doors to herself and her husband which would otherwise have remained rigid on their fastenings. It was pleasant to be sought out and made much of, and it pleased her to think that some of her quondam friends were genuinely sorry that they had once stood aloof. They attempted to atone, it would seem. For three weeks they lived in an atmosphere of teas and dinners and theater parties; a giddy little whirl that grew daily more attractive, so far as Hazel was concerned.

There had been changes. Jack Barrow had consoled himself with a bride. Moreover, he was making good, in the popular phrase, at the real-estate game. The Marshes, as she had previously known them, had been tottering on the edge of shabby gentility. But they had come into money. And as Bill slangily put it, they were using their pile to cut a lot of social ice. Kitty Brooks' husband was now the head of the biggest advertising agency in Granville. Hazel was glad of that mild success. Kitty Brooks was the one person for whom she had always kept a warm corner in her heart. Kitty had stood stoutly and unequivocally by her when all the others had viewed her with a dubious eye. Aside from these there were scores of young people who revolved in their same old orbits. Two years will upon occasion make profound changes in some lives, and leave others untouched. But, change or no change, she found herself caught up and carried along on a pleasant tide.

She was inordinately proud of Bill, when she compared him with the average Granville male—yet she found herself wishing he would adopt a little more readily the Granville viewpoint. He fell short of it, or went beyond it, she could not be sure which; she had an uneasy feeling sometimes, that he looked upon Granville doings and Granville folk with amused tolerance, not unmixed with contempt. But he attracted attention. Whenever he was minded to talk he found ready listeners. And he did not seem to mind being dragged to various functions, matinées, and the like. He fell naturally into that mode of existence, no matter that it was in profound contrast to his previous manner of life, as she knew it. She felt a huge satisfaction in that. Anything but a well-bred man would have repelled her, and she had recognized that quality in Bill Wagstaff even when he had carried her bodily into the wilderness against her explicit desire that memorable time. And he was now exhibiting an unsuspected polish. She used to wonder amusedly if he were possibly the same Roaring Bill whom she had with her own eyes seen hammer a man insensible with his fists, who had kept "tough" frontiersmen warily sidestepping him in Cariboo Meadows. Certainly he was a many-sided individual.

Once or twice she conjured up a vision of him getting into some business there, and utterly foregoing the North—which for her was already beginning to take on the aspect of a bleak and cheerless region where there was none of the things which daily whetted her appetite for luxury, nothing but hardships innumerable—and gold. The gold had been their reward—a reward well earned, she thought. Still—they had been wonderfully happy there at the Pine River cabin, she remembered.

They came home from a theater party late one night. Bill sat down by their bedroom window, and stared out at the street lights, twin rows of yellow beads stretching away to a vanishing point in the pitch-black of a cloudy night. Hazel kicked off her slippers, and gratefully toasted her silk-stockinged feet at a small coal grate. Fall had come, and there was a nip to the air.

"Well, what do you think of it as far as you've gone?" he asked abruptly.

"Of what?" she asked, jarred out of meditation upon the play they had just witnessed.

"All this." He waved a hand comprehensively. "This giddy swim we've got into."

"I think it's fine," she candidly admitted. "I'm enjoying myself. I like it. Don't you?"

"As a diversion," he observed thoughtfully. "I don't mind it. These people are all very affable and pleasant, and they've rather gone out of their way to entertain us. But, after all, what the dickens does it amount to? They spend their whole life running in useless circles. I should think they'd get sick of it. You will."

"Hardly, Billum," she smiled. "We're merely making up for two years of isolation. I think we must be remarkable people that we didn't fight like cats and dogs. For eighteen months, you know, there wasn't a soul to talk to, and not much to think about except what you could do if you were some place else."

"You're acquiring the atmosphere," he remarked—sardonically, she thought.

"No; just enjoying myself," she replied lightly.

"Well, if you really are," he answered slowly, "we may as well settle here for the winter—and get settled right away. I'm rather weary of being a guest in another man's house, to tell you the truth."

"Why, I'd love to stay here all winter," she said. "But I thought you intended to knock around more or less."

"But don't you see, you don't particularly care to," he pointed out; "and it would spoil the fun of going any place for me if you were not interested. And when it comes to a show-down I'm not aching to be a bird of passage. One city is pretty much like another to me. You seem to have acquired a fairly select circle of friends and acquaintances, and you may as well have your fling right here. We'll take a run over to New York. I want to get some books and things. Then we'll come back here and get a house or a flat. I tell you right now," he laughed not unpleasantly, "I'm going to renig on this society game. You can play it as hard as you like, until spring. I'll be there with bells on when it comes to a dance. And I'll go to a show—when a good play comes along. But I won't mix up with a lot of silly women and equally silly she-men, any more than is absolutely necessary."

"Why, Bill!" she exclaimed, aghast.

"Well, ain't it so?" he defended lazily. "There's Kitty Brooks—she has certainly got intelligence above the average. That Lorimer girl has brains superimposed on her artistic temperament, and she uses 'em to advantage. Practically all the rest that I've met are intellectual nonentities—strong on looks and clothes and amusing themselves, and that lets them out. And they have no excuse, because they've had unlimited advantages. The men divide themselves into two types. One that chases the dollar, talks business, thinks business, knows nothing outside of business, and their own special line of business at that; the other type, like these Arthur fellows, and Dave Allan and T. Fordham Brown, who go in for afternoon teas and such gentlemanly pastime, and whose most strenuous exercise is a game of billiards. Shucks, there isn't a real man in the lot. Maybe I'll run across some people who don't take a two-by-four view of life if I stay around here long enough, but it hasn't happened to me yet. I hope I'm not an intellectual snob, little person, any more than I'm puffed up over happening to be a little bigger and stronger than the average man, but I must say that the habitual conversation of these people gives me a pain. That platitudinous discussion of the play to-night, for instance."

"That *was* droll." Hazel chuckled at the recollection, and she recalled the weary look that had once or twice flitted over Bill's face during that after-theater supper.

But she herself could see only the humor of it. She was fascinated by the social niceties and the surroundings of the set she had drifted into. The little dinners, the impromptu teas, the light chatter and general atmosphere of luxury more than counterbalanced any other lack. She wanted only to play, and she was prepared to seize avidly on any form of pleasure, no matter if in last analysis it were utterly frivolous. She could smile at the mental vacuity she encountered, and think nothing of it, if with that vacuity went those material factors which made for ease and entertainment. The physical side of her was all alert. Luxury and the mild excitements of a social life that took nothing seriously, those were the things she craved. For a long time she had been totally deprived of them. Nor had such unlimited opportunities ever before been in her grasp.

"Yes, that was droll," she repeated.

Bill snorted.

"Droll? Perhaps," he said. "Blatant ignorance, coupled with a desire to appear the possessor of culture, is sometimes amusing. But as a general thing it simply irritates."

"You're hard to please," she replied. "Can't you enjoy yourself, take things as they come, without being so critical?"

He shrugged his shoulders, and remained silent.

"Well," he said presently, "we'll take that jaunt to New York day after to-morrow."

He was still sitting by the window when Hazel was ready to go to bed. She came back into the room in a trailing silk kimono, and, stealing softly up behind him, put both hands on his shoulders.

"What are you thinking so hard about, Billy-boy?" she whispered.

"I was thinking about Jake Lauer, and wondering how he was making it go," Bill answered. "I was also picturing to myself how some of these worthy citizens would mess things up if they had to follow in his steps. Hang it, I don't know but we'd be better off if we were pegging away for a foothold somewhere, like old Jake."

"If we *had* to do that," she argued, "I suppose we would, and manage to get along. But since we don't have to, why wish for it? Money makes things pleasanter."

"If money meant that we would be compelled to lead the sort of existence most of these people do," he retorted, "I'd take measures to be broke as soon as possible. What the deuce is there to it? The women get up in the morning, spend the forenoon fixing themselves up to take in some innocuous gabblefest after luncheon. Then they get into their war paint for dinner, and after dinner rush madly off to some other festive stunt. Swell rags and a giddy round. If it were just fun, it would be all right. But it's the serious business of life with them. And the men are in the same boat. All of 'em collectively don't amount to a pinch of snuff. This thing that they call business is mostly gambling with what somebody else has sweated to produce. They're a soft-handed, soft-bodied lot of incompetent egotists, if you ask me. Any of 'em would lick your boots in a genteel sort of way if there was money in it; and they'd just as cheerfully chisel their best friend out of his last dollar, if it could be done in a business way. They haven't even the saving grace of physical hardihood."

"You're awful!" Hazel commented.

Bill snorted again.

"To-morrow, you advise our hostess that we're traveling," he instructed. "When we come back we'll make headquarters at a hotel until we locate a place of our own—if you are sure you want to winter here."

Her mind was quite made up to spend the winter there, and she frankly said so—provided he had no other choice. They had to winter somewhere. They had set out to spend a few months in pleasant idleness. They could well afford that. And, unless he had other plans definitely formed, was not Granville as good as any place? Was it not better, seeing that they did know someone there? It was big enough to afford practically all the advantages of any city.

"Oh, yes, I suppose so. All right; we'll winter here," Bill acquiesced. "That's settled."

And, as was his habit when he had come to a similar conclusion, he refused to talk further on that subject, but fell to speculating idly on New York. In which he was presently aided and abetted by Hazel, who had never invaded Manhattan, nor, for that matter, any of the big Atlantic cities. She had grown up in Granville, with but brief journeys to near-by points. And Granville could scarcely be classed as a metropolis. It numbered a trifle over three hundred thousand souls. Bill had termed it "provincial." But it meant more to her than any other place in the East, by virtue of old associations and more recent acquaintance. One must have a pivotal point of such a sort, just as one cannot forego the possession of a nationality.

New York, she was constrained to admit, rather overwhelmed her. She traversed Broadway and other world-known arteries, and felt a trifle dubious amid the unceasing crush. Bill piloted her to famous cafés, and to equally famous theaters. She made sundry purchases in magnificent shops. The huge conglomeration of sights and sounds made an unforgetable impression upon her. She sensed keenly the colossal magnitude of it all. But she felt a distinct wave of relief when they were Granville bound once more.

In a week they were settled comfortably in a domicile of their own—five rooms in an up-to-date apartment house. And since the social demands on Mrs. William Wagstaff's time grew apace, a capable maid and a cook were added to the Wagstaff establishment. Thus she was relieved of the onus of housework. Her time was wholly her own, at her own disposal or Bill's as she elected.

But by imperceptible degrees they came to take diverse roads in the swirl of life which had caught them up. There were so many little woman affairs where a man was superfluous. There were others which Bill flatly refused to attend. "Hen parties," he dubbed them. More and more he remained at home with his books. Invariably he read through the daytime, and unless to take Hazel for a walk or a drive, or some simple pleasure which they could indulge in by themselves, he would not budge. If it were night, and a dance was to the fore, he would dress and go gladly. At such, and upon certain occasions when a certain little group would take supper at some café, he was apparently in his element. But there was always a back fire if Hazel managed to persuade him to attend anything in the nature of a formal affair. He drew the line at what he defined as social tommyrot, and he drew it more and more sharply.

Sometimes Hazel caught herself wondering if they were getting as much out of the holiday as they should have gotten, as they had planned to get when they were struggling through that interminable winter. *She* was. But not Bill. And while she wished that he could get the same satisfaction out of his surroundings and opportunities as she conceived herself to be getting, she often grew impatient with his sardonic, tolerant contempt toward the particular set she mostly consorted with. If she ventured to give a tea, he fled the house as if from the plague. He made acquaintances of his own, men from God only knew where, individuals who occasionally filled the dainty apartment with malodorous tobacco fumes, and who would cheerfully sit up all night discoursing earnestly on any subject under the sun. But so long as Bill found Granville habitable she did not mind.

Above all, as the winter and the winter gayety set in together with equal vigor, she thought with greater reluctance of the ultimate return to that hushed, deep-forested area that surrounded the cabin.

She wished fervently that Bill would take up some business that would keep him in touch with civilization. He had the capital, she considered, and there was no question of his ability. Her faith in his power to encompass whatever he set about was strong. Other men, less gifted, had acquired wealth, power, even a measure of fame, from a less auspicious beginning. Why not he?

It seemed absurd to bury one's self in an uninhabited waste, when life held forth so much to be grasped. Her friends told her so—thus confirming her own judgment. But she could never quite bring herself to put it in so many words to Bill.

CHAPTER XII.

A BUSINESS PROPOSITION.

The cycle of weeks brought them to January. They had dropped into something of a routine in their daily lives. Bill's interest and participation in social affairs became negligible. Of Hazel's circle he classed some half dozen people as desirable acquaintances, and saw more or less of them—Kitty Brooks and her husband; Vesta Lorimer, a keen-witted young woman upon whom nature had bestowed a double portion of physical attractiveness and a talent akin to genius for the painting of miniatures; her Brother Paul, who was the silent partner in a brokerage firm; Doctor Hart, a silent, grim-visaged physician, whose vivacious wife was one of Hazel's new intimates. Of that group Bill was always a willing member. The others he met courteously when he was compelled to meet them; otherwise he passed them up entirely.

When he was not absorbed in a book or magazine, he spent his time in some downtown haunt, having acquired membership in a club as a concession to their manner of life. Once he came home with flushed face and overbright eyes, radiating an odor of whisky. Hazel had never seen him drink to excess. She was correspondingly shocked, and took no pains to hide her feelings. But Bill was blandly undisturbed.

"You don't need to look so horrified," he drawled. "I won't beat you up nor wreck the furniture. Inadvertently took a few too many, that's all. Nothing else to do, anyhow. Your friend Brooks' Carlton Club is as barren a place as one of your tea fights. They don't do anything much but sit around and drink Scotch and soda, and talk about the market. I'm drunk, and glad of it. If I were in Cariboo Meadows, now," he confided owlishly, "I'd have some fun with the natives. You can't turn yourself loose here. It's too blame civilized and proper. I had half a notion to lick a Johnnie or two, just for sport, and then I thought probably they'd have me up for assault and battery. Just recollected our social reputation—long may she wave—in time."

"*Your* reputation certainly won't be unblemished if any one saw you come in in that condition," she cried, in angry mortification. "Surely you could find something better to do than to get drunk."

"I'm going straight to bed, little person," he returned. "Scold not, nor fret. William will be himself again ere yet the morrow's sun shall clear the horizon. Let us avoid recrimination. The tongue is, or would seem to be, the most vital weapon of modern society. Therefore let us leave the trenchant blade quiescent in its scabbard. *I'd* rather settle a dispute with my fists, or even a gun. Good night."

He made his unsteady way to their extra bedroom, and he was still there with the door locked when Hazel returned from a card party at the Krones'. It was the first night they had spent apart since their marriage, and Hazel was inclined to be huffed when he looked in before breakfast, dressed, shaved, and smiling, as if he had never had even a bowing acquaintance with John Barleycorn. But Bill refused to take her indignation seriously, and it died for lack of fuel.

A week or so later he became suddenly and unexpectedly active. He left the house as soon as his breakfast was eaten, and he did not come home to luncheon—a circumstance which irritated Hazel, since it was one of those rare days when she herself lunched at home. Late in the afternoon he telephoned briefly that he would dine downtown. And when he did return, at nine or thereabouts in the evening, he clamped a cigar between his teeth, and fell to work covering a sheet of paper with interminable rows of figures.

Hazel had worried over the possibility of his having had another tilt with the Scotch and sodas. He relieved her of that fear, and she restrained her curiosity until boredom seized her. The silence and the scratching of his pen began to grate on her nerves.

"What is all the clerical work about?" she inquired. "Reckoning your assets and liabilities?"

Bill smiled and pushed aside the paper.

"I'm going to promote a mining company," he told her, quite casually. "It has been put up to me as a business proposition—and I've got to the stage where I have to do *something,* or I'll have the Willies."

She overlooked the latter statement; it conveyed no special significance at the time. But his first statement opened up possibilities such as of late she had sincerely hoped would come to pass, and she was all interest.

"Promote a mining company?" she repeated. "That sounds extremely businesslike. How—when—where?"

"Now—here in Granville," he replied. "The how is largely Paul Lorimer's idea. You see," he continued, warming up a bit to the subject, "when I was prospecting that creek where we made the clean-up last summer I ran across a well-defined quartz lead. I packed out a few samples in my pockets, and I happened to show them as well as one or two of the nuggets to some of these fellows at the club a while back. Lorimer took a piece of the quartz and had it assayed. It looms up as something pretty big. So he and Brooks and a couple of other fellows want me to go ahead and organize and locate a group of claims in there. Twenty or thirty thousand dollars capital might make 'em all rich. Of course, the placer end of it will be the big thing while the lode is being developed. It should pay well from the start. Getting the start is easy. As a matter of fact, you could sell any old wildcat that has the magic of gold about it. Men seem to get the fever as soon as they finger the real yellow stuff. These fellows I've talked to are dead anxious to get in."

"But"—her knowledge of business methods suggested a difficulty—"you can't sell stock in a business that has no real foundation—yet. Don't you have to locate those claims first?"

"Wise old head; you have the idea, all right." He smiled. "But this is not a stock-jobbing proposition. I wouldn't be in on it if it were, believe me. It's to be a corporation, where not to exceed six men will own all the stock that's issued. And so far as the claims are concerned, I've got Whitey Lewis located in Fort George, and I've been burning the wires and spending a bundle of real money getting him grubstaked. He has got four men besides himself all ready to hit the trail as soon as I give the word."

"*You* won't have to go?" she put in quickly.

"No," he murmured. "It isn't necessary, at this stage of the game. But I wouldn't mind popping a whip over a good string of dogs, just the same."

"B-r-r-r!" she shivered involuntarily. "Four hundred miles across that deep snow, through that steady, flesh-searing cold. I don't envy them the journey."

Bill relapsed into unsmiling silence, sprawling listless in his chair, staring absently at the rug, as if he had lost all interest in the matter.

"If you stay here and manage this end of it," she pursued lightly, "I suppose you'll have an office downtown."

"I suppose so," he returned laconically.

She came over and stood by him, playfully rumpling his brown hair with her fingers.

"I'm glad you've found something to loose that pent-up energy of yours on, Billy-boy," she said. "You'll make a success of it, I know. I don't see why you shouldn't make a success of any kind of business. But I didn't think you'd ever tackle business. You have such peculiar views about business and business practice."

"I despise the ordinary business ethic," he returned sharply. "It's a get-something-for-nothing proposition all the way through; it is based on exploiting the other fellow in one form or another. I refuse to exploit my fellows along the accepted lines—or any lines. I don't have to; there are too many other ways of making a living open to me. I don't care to live fat and make some one else foot the bill. But I can exploit the resources of nature. And that is my plan. If we make money it won't be filched by a complex process from the other fellow's pockets; it won't be wealth created by shearing lambs in the market, by sweatshop labor, or adulterated food, or exorbitant rental of filthy tenements. And I have no illusions about the men I'm dealing with. If they undertake to make a get-rich-quick scheme of it I'll knock the whole business in the head. I'm not overly anxious to get into it with them. But it promises action of some sort—and I have to do something till spring."

In the spring! That brief phrase set Hazel to sober thinking. With April or May Bill would spread his wings for the North. There would be no more staying him than the flight of the wild goose to the reedy nesting grounds could be stayed. Well, a summer in the North would not be so bad, she reflected. But she hated to think of the isolation. It grieved her to contemplate exchanging her beautifully furnished apartment for a log cabin in the woods. There would be a dreary relapse into monotony after months of association with clever people, the swift succession of brilliant little functions. It all delighted her; she responded to her present surroundings as naturally as a grain of wheat responds to the germinating influences of warmth and moisture. It did not occur to her that saving Bill Wagstaff's advent into her life she might have been denied all this. Indeed she felt a trifle resentful that he should prefer the forested solitudes to the pleasant social byways of Granville.

Still she had hopes. If he plunged into business associations with Jimmie Brooks and Paul Lorimer and others of that group there was no telling what might happen. His interests might become permanently identified with Granville. She loved her big, wide-shouldered man, anyway. So she continued to playfully rumple his hair and kept her thoughts to herself.

Bill informed her from time to time as to the progress of his venture. Brooks and Lorimer put him in touch with two others who were ready to chance money on the strength of Bill's statements. The company was duly incorporated, with an authorized capital of one hundred thousand dollars, five thousand dollars' worth of stock being taken out by each on a cash basis—the remaining seventy-five thousand lying in the company treasury, to be held or sold for development purposes as the five saw fit when work began to show what the claims were capable of producing.

Whitey Lewis set out. Bill stuck a map on their living-room wall and pointed off each day's journey with a pin. Hazel sometimes studied the map, and pitied them. So many miles daily in a dreary waste of snow; nights when the frost thrust its keen-pointed lances into their tired bodies; food cooked with numbed fingers; the dismal howling of wolves; white frost and clinging icicles upon their beards as they trudged across trackless areas; and over all that awesome hush which she had learned to dread—breathless, brooding silence. Gold madness or trail madness, or simply adventurous unrest? She could not say. She knew only that a certain type of man found pleasure in such mad undertakings, bucked hard trails and plunged headlong into vast solitudes and permitted no hardship nor danger to turn him back.

Bill was tinged with that madness for unbeaten trails. But surely when a man mated, and had a home and all that makes home desirable, he should forsake the old ways? Once when she found him studying the map, traversing a route with his forefinger and muttering to himself, she had a quick catch at her heart—as if hers were already poised to go. And she could not follow him. Once she had thought to do that, and gloried in the prospect. But his trail, his wilderness trail, and his trail gait, were not for any woman to follow. It was too big a job for any woman. And she could not let him go alone. He might never come back.

Not so long since she and Kitty Brooks had been discussing a certain couple who had separated. Vesta Lorimer sat by, listening.

"How could they help but fail in mutual flight?" the Lorimer girl had demanded. "An eagle mated to a domestic fowl!"

And, watching Bill stare at the map, his body there but the soul of him tramping the wild woods, she recalled Vesta Lorimer's characterization of that other pair. Surely this man of hers was of the eagle brood. But there, in her mind, the simile ended.

In early March came a telegram from Whitey Lewis saying that he had staked the claims, both placer and lode; that he was bound out the Telegraph Trail to file at Hazleton. Bill showed her the message—wired from Station Six.

"I wish I could have been in on it—that was some trip," he said—and there was a trace of discontent in his tone. "I don't fancy somebody else pawing my chestnuts out of the coals for me. It was sure a man's job to cross the Klappan in the dead of winter."

The filing completed, there was ample work in the way of getting out and whipsawing timber to keep the five men busy till spring—the five who were on the ground. Lewis sent word that thirty feet of snow lay in the gold-bearing branch. And that was the last they heard from him. He was a performer, Bill said, not a correspondent.

So in Granville the affairs of the Free Gold Mining Company remained at a standstill until the spring floods should peel off the winter blanket of the North. Hazel was fully occupied, and Bill dwelt largely with his books, or sketched and figured on operations at the claims. Their domestic affairs moved with the smoothness of a perfectly balanced machine. To the very uttermost Hazel enjoyed the well-appointed orderliness of it all, the unruffled placidity of an existence where the unexpected, the disagreeable, the uncouth, was wholly eliminated, where all the strange shifts and struggles of her two years beyond the Rockies were altogether absent and impossible. Bill's views he kept largely to himself. And Hazel began to nurse the idea that he was looking upon civilization with a kindlier eye.

Ultimately, spring overspread the eastern provinces. And when the snows of winter successively gave way to muddy streets and then to clean pavements in the city of Granville, a new gilt sign was lettered across the windows of the brokerage office in which Paul Lorimer was housed.

FREE GOLD MINING COMPANY

P. H. Lorimer, Pres. **J. L. Brooks, Sec.-Treas.**
William Wagstaff, Manager.

So it ran. Bill was commissioned in the army of business at last.

CHAPTER XIII.

A BUSINESS JOURNEY.

"I have to go to the Klappan," Bill apprised his wife one evening. "Want to come along?"

Hazel hesitated. Her first instinctive feeling was one of reluctance to retrace that nerve-trying trail. But neither did she wish to be separated from him.

"I see you don't," he observed dryly. "Well, I can't say that I blame you. It's a stiff trip. If your wind and muscle are in as poor shape as mine, I guess it would do you up—the effort would be greater than any possible pleasure."

"I'm sorry I can't feel any enthusiasm for such a journey," she remarked candidly. "I could go as far as the coast with you, and meet you there when you come out. How long do you expect to be in there?"

"I don't know exactly," he replied. "I'm not going in from the coast, though. I'm taking the Ashcroft-Fort George Trail. I have to take in a pack train and more men and get work started on a decent scale."

"But you won't have to stay there all summer and oversee the work, will you?" she inquired anxiously.

"I should," he said.

For a second or two he drummed on the table top.

"I should do that. It's what I had in mind when I started this thing," he said wistfully. "I thought we'd go in this spring and rush things through the good weather, and come out ahead of the snow. We could stay a while at the ranch, and break up the winter with a jaunt here or some place."

"But is there any real necessity for you to stay on the ground?" she pursued her own line of thought. "I should think an undertaking of this size would justify hiring an expert to take charge of the actual mining operations. Won't you have this end of it to look after?"

"Lorimer and Brooks are eminently capable of upholding the dignity and importance of that sign they've got smeared across the windows downtown," he observed curtly. "The chief labor of the office they've set up will be to divide the proceeds. The work will be done and the money made in the Klappan Range. You sabe that, don't you?"

"I'm not stupid," she pouted.

"I know you're not, little person," he said quietly. "But you've changed a heap in the last few months. You don't seem to be my pal any more. You've fallen in love with this butterfly life. You appear to like me just as much as ever, but if you could you'd sentence me to this kid-glove existence for the rest of my natural life. Great Cæsar's ghost!" he burst out. "I've laid around like a well-fed poodle for seven months. And look at me—I'm mush! Ten miles with a sixty-pound pack would make my tongue hang out. I'm thick-winded, and twenty pounds overweight—and you talk calmly about my settling down to office work!"

His semiindignation, curiously enough, affected Hazel as being altogether humorous. She had a smile-compelling vision of that straight, lean-limbed, powerful body developing a protuberant waistline and a double chin. That was really funny, so far-fetched did it seem. And she laughed. Bill froze into rigid silence.

"I'm going to-morrow," he said suddenly. "I think, on the whole, it'll be just as well if you don't go. Stay here and enjoy yourself. I'll transfer some more money to your account. I think I'll drop down to the club."

She followed him out into the hall, and, as he wriggled into his coat, she had an impulse to throw her arms around his neck and declare, in all sincerity, that she would go to the Klappan or to the north pole or any place on earth with him, if he wanted her. But by some peculiar feminine reasoning she reflected in the same instant that if Bill were away from her a few weeks he would be all the more glad to get back. That closed her mouth. She felt too secure in his affection to believe it could be otherwise. And then she would cheerfully capitulate and go back with him to his beloved North, to the Klappan or the ranch or wherever he chose. It was not wise to be too meek or obedient where a husband was concerned. That was another mite of wisdom she had garnered from the wives of her circle.

So she kissed Bill good-by at the station next day with perfect good humor and no parting emotion of any particular keenness. And if he were a trifle sober he showed no sign of resentment, nor uttered any futile wishes that she could accompany him.

"So long," he said from the car steps. "I'll keep in touch—all I can."

Then he was gone.

Somehow, his absence made less difference than Hazel had anticipated. She had secretly expected to be very lonely at first. And she was not. She began to realize that, unconsciously, they had of late so arranged their manner of life that separation was a question of degree rather than kind. It seemed that she could never quite forego the impression that Bill was near at hand. She always thought of him as downtown or in the living room, with his feet up on the mantel and a cigar in his mouth. Even when in her hand she held a telegram dated at a point five hundred or a thousand miles or double that distance away she did not experience the feeling of complete bodily absence. She always felt as if he were near. Only at night, when there was no long arm to pillow her head, no good-night kiss as she dozed into slumber, she missed him, realized that he was far away. Even when the days marched past, mustering themselves in weekly and monthly platoons and Bill still remained in the Klappan, she experienced no dreary leadenness of soul. Her time passed pleasantly enough.

Early in June came a brief wire from Station Six. Three weeks later the Free Gold Mining Company set up a mild ripple of excitement along Broad Street by exhibiting in their office window a forty-pound heap of coarse gold; raw, yellow gold, just as it had come from the sluice. Every day knots of men stood gazing at the treasure. The Granville papers devoted sundry columns to this remarkably successful enterprise of its local business men. Bill had forwarded the first clean-up.

And close on the heels of this—ten days later, to be exact—he came home.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BOMB.

"You great bear," Hazel laughed, in the shelter of his encircling arms. "My, it's good to see you again."

She pushed herself back a little and surveyed him admiringly, with a gratified sense of proprietorship. The cheeks of him were tanned to a healthy brown, his eyes clear and shining. The offending flesh had fallen away on the strenuous paths of the Klappan. He radiated boundless vitality, strength, alertness, that perfect coördination of mind and body that is bred of faring resourcefully along rude ways. Few of his type trod the streets of Granville. It was a product solely of the outer places. And for the time being the old, vivid emotion surged strong within her. She thrilled at the touch of his hand, was content to lay her head on his shoulder and forget everything in the joy of his physical nearness. But the maid announced dinner, and her man must be fed. He had missed luncheon on the train, he told her, by reason of an absorbing game of whist.

"Come, then," said she. "You must be starving."

They elected to spend the evening quietly at home, as they used to do. To Hazel it seemed quite like old times. Bill told her of the Klappan country, and their prospects at the mine.

"It's going to be a mighty big thing," he declared. "We've got a group of ten claims. Whitey Lewis and the original stakers hold an interest in their claims. I, acting as agent for these other fellows in the company, staked five more. I took in eight more men—and, believe me, things were humming when I left. Lewis is a great rustler. He had out lots of timber, and we put in a wing dam three hundred feet long, so she can flood and be darned; they'll keep the sluice working just the same. And that quartz lead will justify a fifty-thousand-dollar mill. So I'm told by an expert I took in to look it over. And, say, I went in by the ranch. Old Jake has a fine garden. He's still pegging away with the mule 'und Gretchen, der cow.' I offered him a chance to make a fat little stake at the mine, but he didn't want to leave the ranch. Great old feller, Jake. Something of a philosopher in his way. Pretty wise old head. He'll make good, all right."

In the morning, Bill ate his breakfast and started downtown.

"That's the dickens of being a business man," he complained to Hazel, in the hallway. "It rides a man, once it gets hold of him. I'd rather get a machine and go joy riding with you than anything else. But I have to go and make a long-winded report; and I suppose those fellows will want to talk gold by the yard. Adios, little person. I'll get out for lunch, business or no business."

Eleven-thirty brought him home, preoccupied and frowning. And he carried his frown and his preoccupation to the table.

"Whatever is the matter, Bill?" Hazel anxiously inquired.

"Oh, I've got a nasty hunch that there's a nigger in the woodpile," he replied.

"What woodpile?" she asked.

"I'll tell you more about it to-night," he said bluntly. "I'm going to pry something loose this afternoon or know the reason why."

"Is something the matter about the mine?" she persisted.

"No," he answered grimly. "There's nothing the matter with the mine. It's the mining company."

And that was all he vouchsafed. He finished his luncheon and left the house. He was scarcely out of sight when Jimmie Brooks' runabout drew up at the curb. A half minute later he was ushered into the living room.

"Bill in?" was his first query.

"No, he left just a few minutes ago," Hazel told him.

Mr. Brooks, a short, heavyset, neatly dressed gentleman, whose rather weak blue eyes loomed preternaturally large and protuberant behind pince-nez that straddled an insignificant snub nose, took off his glasses and twiddled them in his white, well-kept fingers.

"Ah, too bad!" he murmured. "Thought I'd catch him.

"By the way," he continued, after a pause, "you—ah—well, frankly, I have reason to believe that you have a good deal of influence with your husband in business matters, Mrs. Wagstaff. Kitty says so, and she don't make mistakes very often in sizing up a situation."

"Well, I don't know; perhaps I have." Hazel smiled noncommittally. She wondered what had led Kitty Brooks to that conclusion. "Why?"

"Well—ah—you see," he began rather lamely. "The fact is—I hope you'll regard this as strictly confidential, Mrs. Wagstaff. I wouldn't want Bill to think I, or any of us, was trying to bring pressure on him. But the fact is, Bill's got a mistaken impression about the way we're conducting the financial end of this mining proposition. You understand? Very able man, your husband, but headstrong as the deuce. I'm afraid—to speak frankly—he'll create a lot of unpleasantness. Might disrupt the company, in fact, if he sticks to the position he took this morning. Thought I'd run in and talk it over with him. Fellow's generally in a good humor, you know, when he's lunched comfortably at home."

"I'm quite in the dark," Hazel confessed. "Bill seemed a trifle put out about something. He didn't say what it was about."

"Shall I explain?" Mr. Brooks suggested. "You'd understand—and you might be able to help. I don't as a rule believe in bringing business into the home, but this bothers me. I hate to see a good thing go wrong."

"Explain, by all means," Hazel promptly replied. "If I can help, I'll be glad to."

"Thank you." Mr. Brooks polished his glasses industriously for a second and replaced them with painstaking exactitude. "Now—ah—this is the situation: When the company was formed, five of us, including your husband, took up enough stock to finance the preliminary work of the undertaking. The remaining stock, seventy-five thousand dollars in amount, was left in the treasury, to be held or put on the market as the situation warranted. Bill was quite conservative in his first statements concerning the property, and we all felt inclined to go slow. But when Bill got out there on the ground and the thing began to pay enormously right from the beginning, we—that is, the four of us here, decided we ought to enlarge our scope. With the first clean-up, Bill forwarded facts and figures to show that we had a property far beyond our greatest expectations. And, of course, we saw at once that the thing was ridiculously undercapitalized. By putting the balance of the stock on the market, we could secure funds to work on a much larger scale. Why, this first shipment of gold is equal to an annual dividend of ten per cent on four hundred thousand dollars capital. It's immense, for six weeks' work.

"So we held a meeting and authorized the secretary to sell stock. Naturally, your husband wasn't cognizant of this move, for the simple reason that there was no way of reaching him—and his interests were thoroughly protected, anyway. The stock was listed on Change. A good bit was disposed of privately. We now have a large fund in the treasury. It's a cinch. We've got the property, and it's rich enough to pay dividends on a million. The decision of the stockholders is unanimously for enlargement of the capital stock. The quicker we get that property to its maximum output the more we make, you see. There's a fine vein of quartz to develop, expensive machinery to install. It's no more than fair that these outsiders who are clamoring to get aboard should pay their share of the expense of organization and promotion. You understand? You follow me?"

"Certainly," Hazel answered. "But what is the difficulty with Bill?"

Mr. Brooks once more had recourse to polishing his pince-nez.

"Bill is opposed to the whole plan," he said, pursing up his lips with evident disapproval of Bill Wagstaff and all his works. "He seems to feel that we should not have taken this step. He declares that no more stock must be sold; that there must be no enlargement of capital. In fact, that we must peg along in the little one-horse way we started. And that would be a shame. We could make the Free Gold Mining Company the biggest thing on the map, and put ourselves all on Easy Street."

He spread his hands in a gesture of real regret.

"Bill's a fine fellow," he said, "and one of my best friends. But he's a hard man to do business with. He takes a very peculiar view of the matter. I'm afraid he'll queer the company if he stirs up trouble over this. That's why I hope you'll use whatever influence you have, to induce him to withdraw his opposition."

"But," Hazel murmured, in some perplexity, "from what little I know of corporations, I don't see how he can set up any difficulty. If a majority of the stockholders decide to do anything, that settles it, doesn't it? Bill is a minority of one, from what you say. And I don't see what difference his objections make. How can he stop you from taking any line of action whatever?"

"Oh, not that at all," Brooks hastily assured. "Of course, we can outvote him, and put it through But we want him with us, don't you see? We've a high opinion of his ability. He's the sort of man who gets results; practical, you know; knows mining to a T. Only he shies at our financial method. And if he began any foolish litigation, or silly rumors got started about trouble among the company officers, it's bound to hurt the stock. It's all right, I assure you. We're not foisting a wildcat on the market. We've got the goods. Bill admits that. It's the regular method, not only legitimate, but good finance. Every dollar's worth of stock sold has the value behind it. Distributes the risk a little more, that's all, and gives the company a fund to operate successfully.

"If Bill mentions it, you might suggest that he look into the matter a little more fully before he takes any definite action," Brooks concluded, rising. "I must get down to the office. It's his own interests I'm thinking of, as much as my own. Of course, he couldn't block a reorganization—but we want to satisfy him in every particular, and, at the same time, carry out these plans. It's a big thing for all of us. A big thing, I assure you."

He rolled away in his car, and Hazel watched him from the window, a trifle puzzled. She recalled Bill's remark at luncheon. In the light of Brooks' explanation, she could see nothing wrong. On the other hand, she knew Bill Wagstaff was not prone to jump at rash conclusions. It was largely his habit to give others the benefit of the doubt. If he objected to certain manipulations of the Free Gold Mining Company, his objection was likely to be based on substantial grounds. But then, as Brooks had observed, or, rather, inferred, Bill was not exactly an expert on finance, and this new deal savored of pure finance—a term which she had heard Bill scoff at more than once. At any rate, she hoped nothing disagreeable would come of it.

So she put the whole matter out of her mind. She had an engagement with a dressmaker, and an invitation to afternoon tea following on that. She dressed, and went whole-heartedly about her own affairs.

Dinner time was drawing close when she returned home. She sat down by a window that overlooked the street to watch for Bill. As a general thing he was promptness personified, and since he was but twenty-four hours returned from a three months' absence she felt that he would not linger—and Granville's business normally ceased at five o'clock.

Six passed. The half-hour chime struck on the mantel clock. Hazel grew impatient, petulant, aggrieved. Dinner would be served in twenty minutes. Still there was no sign of him. And for lack of other occupation she went into the hall and got the evening paper, which the carrier had just delivered.

A staring headline on the front page stiffened her to scandalized attention. Straight across the tops of two columns it ran, a facetious caption:

WILLIAM WAGSTAFF IS A BEAR.

Under that the subhead:

Husky Mining Man Tumbles Prices and Brokers.
Whips Four Men in Broad Street Office.
Slugs Another on Change. His Mighty
Fists Subdue Society's Finest.
Finally Lands in Jail.

The body of the article Hazel read in what a sob sister would describe as a state of mingled emotions.

William Wagstaff is a mining gentleman from the northern wilds of British Columbia. He is a big man, a natural-born fighter. To prove this he inflicted a black eye and a split lip on Paul Mortimer, a broken nose and sundry bruises on James L. Brooks. Also Allen T. Bray and Edward Gurney Parkinson suffered certain contusions in the mêlée. The fracas occurred in the office of the Free Gold Mining Company, 1546 Broad Street, at three-thirty this afternoon. While hammering the brokers a police officer arrived on the scene and Wagstaff was duly escorted to the city bastile. Prior to the general encounter in the Broad Street office Wagstaff walked into the Stock Exchange, and made statements about the Free Gold Mining Company which set all the brokers by the ears. Mortimer was on the floor, and received his discolored optic there.

Mortimer is a partner in the brokerage firm of Bray, Parkinson & Co., and is president of the Free Gold Mining Company. Brooks is manager of the Acme Advertisers, and secretary of Free Gold. Bray and Parkinson are stockholders, and Wagstaff is a stockholder and also manager of the Free Gold properties in B. C. All are well known about town.

A reporter was present when Wagstaff walked on the floor of the Stock Exchange. He strode up to the post where Mortimer was transacting business.

"I serve notice on you right now," he said loudly and angrily, "that if you sell another dollar's worth of Free Gold stock, I'll put you out of business."

Lorimer appeared to lose his temper. Some word was passed which further incensed Wagstaff. He smote the broker and the broker smote the floor. Wagstaff's punch would do credit to a champion pugilist, from the execution it wrought. He immediately left the Stock Exchange, and not long afterward Broad Street was electrified by sounds of combat in the Free Gold office. It is conceded that Wagstaff had the situation and his three opponents well in hand when the cop arrived.

None of the men concerned would discuss the matter. From the remarks dropped by Wagstaff, however, it appears that the policy of marketing Free Gold stock was inaugurated without his knowledge or consent.

Be that as it may, all sorts of rumors are in circulation, and Free Gold stock, which has been sold during the past week as high as a dollar forty, found few takers at par when Change closed. There has been a considerable speculative movement in the stock, and the speculators are beginning to wonder if there is a screw loose in the company affairs.

Wagstaff's case will come up to-morrow forenoon. A charge of disturbing the peace was placed against him. He gave a cash bond and was at once released. When the hearing comes some of the parties to the affair may perchance divulge what lay at the bottom of the row.

Any fine within the power of the court to impose is a mere bagatelle, compared to the distinction of scientifically manhandling four of society's finest in one afternoon. As one bystander remarked in the classic phraseology of the street:

"Wagstaff's a bear!"

The brokers concerned might consider this to have a double meaning.

Hazel dropped the paper, mortified and wrathful. The city jail seemed the very Pit itself to her. And the lurid publicity, the lifted eyebrows of her friends, maddened her in prospect. Plain street brawling, such as one might expect from a cabman or a taxi mahout, not from a man like her husband. She involuntarily assigned the blame to him. Not for the cause—the cause was of no importance whatever to her—but for the act itself. Their best friends! She could hardly realize it. Jimmie Brooks, jovial Jimmie, with a broken nose and sundry bruises! And Paul Lorimer, distinguished Paul, who had the courtly bearing which was the despair of his fellows, and the manner of a dozen generations of culture wherewith to charm the women of his acquaintance. He with a black eye and a split lip! So the paper stated. It was vulgar. Brutal! The act of a cave man.

She was on the verge of tears.

And just at that moment the door opened, and in walked Bill.

CHAPTER XV.

THE NOTE DISCORDANT.

Bill had divested himself of the scowl. He smiled as a man who has solved some knotty problem to his entire satisfaction. Moreover, he bore no mark of conflict, none of the conventional scars of a rough-and-tumble fight. His clothing was in perfect order, his tie and collar properly arranged, as a gentleman's tie and collar should be. For a moment Hazel found herself believing the *Herald* story a pure canard. But as he walked across the room her searching gaze discovered that the knuckles of both his hands were bruised and bloody, the skin broken. She picked up the paper.

"Is this true?" she asked tremulously, pointing to the offending headlines.

Bill frowned.

"Substantially correct," he answered coolly.

"Bill, how could you?" she cried. "It's simply disgraceful. Brawling in public like any saloon loafer, and getting in jail and all. Haven't you any consideration for me—any pride?"

His eyes narrowed with an angry glint.

"Yes," he said deliberately. "I have. Pride in my word as a man. A sort of pride that won't allow any bunch of lily-fingered crooks to make me a party to any dirty deal. I don't propose to get the worst of it in that way. I won't allow myself to be tarred with their stick."

"But they're not trying to give you the worst of it," she burst out. Visions of utter humiliation arose to confront and madden her. "You've insulted and abused our best friends—to say nothing of giving us all the benefit of newspaper scandal. We'll be notorious!"

"Best friends? God save the mark!" he snorted contemptuously. "Our best friends, as you please to call them, are crooks, thieves, and liars. They're rotten. They stink with their moral rottenness. And they have the gall to call it good business."

"Just because their business methods don't agree with your peculiar ideas is no reason why you should call names," she flared. "Mr. Brooks called just after you left at noon. *He* told me something about this, and assured me that you would find yourself mistaken if you'd only take pains to think it over. I don't believe such men as they are would stoop to anything crooked. Even if the opportunity offered, they have too much at stake in this community. They couldn't afford to be crooked."

"So Brooks came around to talk it over with you, eh?" Bill sneered. "Told you it was all on the square, did he? Explained it all very plausibly, I suppose. Probably suggested that you try smoothing me down, too. It would be like 'em."

"He did explain about this stock-selling business," Hazel replied defensively. "And I can't see why you find it necessary to make a fuss. I don't see where the cheating and crookedness comes in. Everybody who buys stock gets their money's worth, don't they? But I don't care anything about your old mining deal. It's this fighting and quarreling with people who are not used to that sort of brute action—and the horrid things they'll say and think about us."

"About you, you mean—as the wife of such a boor—that's what's rubbing you raw," Bill flung out passionately. "You're acquiring the class psychology good and fast. Did you ever think of anybody but yourself? Have I ever betrayed symptoms of idiocy? Do you think it natural or even likely for me to raise the devil in a business affair like this out of sheer malice? Don't I generally have a logical basis for any position I take? Yet you don't wait or ask for any explanation from *me*. You stand instinctively with the crowd that has swept you off your feet in the last six months. You take another man's word that it's all right and I'm all wrong, without waiting to hear my side of it. And the petty-larceny incident of my knocking down two or three men and being under arrest as much as thirty minutes looms up before you as the utter depths of disgrace. Disgrace to you! It's all you—you! How do you suppose it strikes me to have my wife take sides against me on snap judgment like that? It shows a heap of faith and trust and loyalty, doesn't it? Oh, it makes me real proud and glad of my mate. It does. By thunder, if Granville had ever treated me as it tried to treat you one time, according to your own account, I'd wipe my feet on them at every opportunity."

"If you'd explain," Hazel began hesitatingly. She was thoroughly startled at the smoldering wrath that flared out in this speech of his. She bitterly resented being talked to in that fashion. It was unjust. Particularly that last fling. And she was not taking sides. She refused to admit that—even though she had a disturbing consciousness that her attitude could scarcely be construed otherwise.

"I'll explain nothing," Bill flashed stormily. "Not at this stage of the game. I'm through explaining. I'm going to act. I refuse to be raked over the coals like a naughty child, and then asked to tell why I did it. I'm right, and when I know I'm right I'll go the limit. I'm going to take the kinks out of this Free Gold deal inside of forty-eight hours. Then I'm through with Granville. Hereafter I intend to fight shy of a breed of dogs who lose every sense of square dealing when there is a bunch of money in sight. I shall be ready to leave here within a week. And I want you to be ready, too."

"I won't," she cried, on the verge of hysterics. "I won't go back to that cursed silence and loneliness. You made this trouble here, not I. I won't go back to Pine River, or the Klappan. I won't, I tell you!"

Bill stared at her moodily for a second.

"Just as you please," he said quietly.

He walked into the spare bedroom. Hazel heard the door close gently behind him, heard the soft click of a well-oiled lock. Then she slumped, gasping, in the wide-armed chair by the window, and the hot tears came in a blinding flood.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE AFTERMATH.

They exchanged only bare civilities at the breakfast table, and Bill at once went downtown. When he was gone, Hazel fidgeted uneasily about the rooms. She had only a vague idea of legal processes, having never seen the inside of a courtroom. She wondered what penalty would be inflicted on Bill, whether he would be fined or sent to prison. Surely it was a dreadful thing to batter men like Brooks and Lorimer and Parkinson. They might even make it appear that Bill had tried to murder them. Her imagination magnified and distorted the incident out of all proportion.

And brooding over these things, she decided to go and talk it over with Kitty Brooks. Kitty would not blame her for these horrid man troubles.

But she was mistaken there. Kitty was all up in arms. She was doubly injured. Her husband had suffered insult and brutal injury. Moreover, he was threatened with financial loss. Perhaps that threatened wound in the pocketbook loomed larger than the physical hurt. At any rate, she vented some of her spleen on Hazel.

"Your husband started this mining thing," she declared heatedly. "Jimmie says that if he persists in trying to turn things upside down it will mean a loss of thousands. And we haven't any money to lose—I'm sure Jimmie has worked hard for what he's got. I'm simply sick over it. It's bad enough to have one's husband brought home looking as if he'd been slugged by footpads, and to have the papers go on about it so. But to have a big loss inflicted on us just when we were really beginning to get ahead, is too much. I wish you'd never introduced your miner to us."

That speech, of course, obliterated friendship on the spot, as far as Hazel was concerned. Even though she was quite prepared to have Bill blamed for the trouble, did in fact so blame him herself, she could not stomach Kitty's language nor attitude. But the humiliation of the interview she chalked up against Bill. She went home with a red spot glowing on either cheek bone. A rather incoherent telephone conversation with Mrs. Allen T. Bray, in which that worthy matron declared her husband prostrated from his injuries, and in the same breath intimated that Mr. Wagstaff would be compelled to make ample reparation for his ruffianly act, did not tend to soothe her.

Bill failed to appear at luncheon. During the afternoon an uncommon number of her acquaintances dropped in. In the tactful manner of their kind they buzzed with the one absorbing topic. Some were vastly amused. Some were sympathetic. One and all they were consumed with curiosity for detailed inside information on the Free Gold squabble. One note rang consistently in their gossipy song: The Free Gold Company was going to lose a pot of money in some manner, as a consequence of the affair. Mr. Wagstaff had put some surprising sort of spoke in the company's wheel. They had that from their husbands who trafficked on Broad Street. By what power he had accomplished this remained a mystery to the ladies. Singly and collectively they drove Hazel to the verge of distraction. When the house was at last clear of them she could have wept. Through no fault of her own she had given Granville another choice morsel to roll under its gossipy tongue.

So that when six o'clock brought Bill home she was coldly disapproving of him and his affairs in their entirety, and at no pains to hide her feelings. He followed her into the living room when the uncomfortable meal—uncomfortable by reason of the surcharged atmosphere—was at an end.

"Let's get down to bed rock, Hazel," he said gently. "Doesn't it seem rather foolish to let a bundle of outside troubles set up so much friction between us two? I don't want to stir anything up; I don't want to quarrel. But I can't stand this coldness and reproach from you. It's unjust, for one thing. And it's so unwise—if we value our happiness as a thing worth making some effort to save."

"I don't care to discuss it at all," she flared up. "I've heard nothing else all day but this miserable mining business and your ruffianly method of settling a dispute. I'd rather not talk about it."

"But we must talk about it," he persisted patiently. "I've got to show you how the thing stands, so that you can see for yourself where your misunderstanding comes in. You can't get to the bottom of anything without more or less talk."

"Talk to yourself, then," she retorted ungraciously. And with that she ran out of the room.

But she had forgotten or underestimated the catlike quickness of her man. He caught her in the doorway, and the grip of his fingers on her arm brought a cry of pain.

"Forgive me. I didn't mean to hurt," he said contritely. "Be a good girl, Hazel, and let's get our feet on earth again. Sit down and put your arm around my neck and be my pal, like you used to be. We've got no business nursing these hard feelings. It's folly. I haven't committed any crime. I've only stood for a square deal. Come on; bury the hatchet, little person."

"Let me go," she sobbed, struggling to be free. "I h-hate you!"

"Please, little person. I can't eat humble pie more than once or twice."

"Let me go," she panted. "I don't want you to touch me."

"Listen to me," he said sternly. "I've stood about all of your nonsense I'm able to stand. I've had to fight a pack of business wolves to keep them from picking my carcass, and, what's more important to me, to keep them from handing a raw deal to five men who wallowed through snow and frost and all kinds of hardship to make these sharks a fortune. I've got down to their level and fought them with their own weapons—and the thing is settled. I said last night I'd be through here inside a week. I'm through now—through here. I have business in the Klappan; to complete this thing I've set my hand to. Then I'm going to the ranch and try to get the bad taste out of my mouth. I'm going to-morrow. I've no desire or intention to coerce you. You're my wife, and your place is with me, if you care anything about me. And I want you. You know that, don't you? I wouldn't be begging you like this if I didn't. *I* haven't changed, nor had my eyes dazzled by any false gods. But it's up to you. I don't bluff. I'm going, and if I have to go without you I won't come back. Think it over, and just ask yourself honestly if it's worth while."

He drew her up close to him and kissed her on one anger-flushed cheek, and then as he had done the night before walked straight away to the bedroom and closed the door behind him.

Hazel slept little that night. A horrid weight seemed to rest suffocatingly upon her. More than once she had an impulse to creep in there where Bill lay and forget it all in the sweep of that strong arm. But she choked back the impulse angrily. She would not forgive him. He had made her suffer. For his high-handedness she would make him suffer in kind. At least, she would not crawl to him begging forgiveness.

When sunrise laid a yellow beam, all full of dancing motes, across her bed, she heard Bill stir, heard him moving about the apartment with restless steps. After a time she also heard the unmistakable sound of a trunk lid thrown back, and the movements of him as he gathered his clothes—so she surmised. But she did not rise till the maid rapped on her door with the eight-o'clock salutation:

"Breakfast, ma'am."

They made a pretense of eating. Hazel sought a chair in the living room. A book lay open in her lap. But the print ran into blurred lines. She could not follow the sense of the words. An incessant turmoil of thought harassed her. Bill passed through the room once or twice. Determinedly she ignored him. The final snap of the lock on his trunk came to her at last, the bumping sounds of its passage to the hall. Then a burly expressman shouldered it into his wagon and drove away.

A few minutes after that Bill came in and took a seat facing her.

"What are you going to do, Hazel?" he asked soberly.

"Nothing," she curtly replied.

"Are you going to sit down and fold your hands and let our air castles come tumbling about our ears, without making the least effort to prevent?" he continued gently. "Seems to me that's not like you at all. I never thought you were a quitter."

"I'm not a quitter," she flung back resentfully. "I refuse to be browbeaten, that's all. There appears to be only one choice—to follow you like a lamb. And I'm not lamblike. I'd say that you are the quitter. You have stirred up all this trouble here between us. Now you're running away from it. That's how it looks to me. Go on! I can get along."

"I dare say you can," he commented wearily. "Most of us can muddle along somehow, no matter what happens. But it seems a pity, little person. We had all the chance in the world. You've developed an abnormal streak lately. If you'd just break away and come back with me. You don't know what good medicine those old woods are. Won't you try it a while?"

"I am not by nature fitted to lead the hermit existence," she returned sarcastically.

And even while her lips were uttering these various unworthy little bitternesses she inwardly wondered at her own words. It was not what she would have said, not at all what she was half minded to say. But a devil of perverseness spurred her. She was full of protest against everything.

"I wish we'd had a baby," Bill murmured softly. "You'd be different. You'd have something to live for besides this frothy, neurotic existence that has poisoned you against the good, clean, healthy way of life. I wish we'd had a kiddie. We'd have a fighting chance for happiness now; something to keep us sane, something outside of our own ego to influence us."

"Thank God there isn't one!" she muttered.

"Ah, well," Bill sighed, "I guess there is no use. I guess we can't get together on anything. There doesn't seem to be any give-and-take between us any longer."

He rose and walked to the door. With his hand on the knob, he turned.

"I have fixed things at the bank for you," he said abruptly.

Then he walked out, without waiting for an answer.

She heard the soft whir of the elevator. A minute later she saw him on the sidewalk. He had an overcoat on his arm, a suit case in his hand. She saw him lift a finger to halt a passing car.

It seemed incredible that he should go like that. Surely he would come back at noon or at dinner time. She had always felt that under his gentleness there was iron. But deep in her heart she had never believed him so implacable of purpose where she was concerned.

She waited wearily, stirring with nervous restlessness from room to room.

Luncheon passed. The afternoon dragged by to a close. Dusk fell. And when the night wrapped Granville in its velvet mantle, and the street lights blinked away in shining rows she cowered, sobbing, in the big chair by the window.

He was gone.

Gone, without even saying good-by!

CHAPTER XVII.

A LETTER FROM BILL.

All through the long night she lay awake, struggling with the incredible fact that Bill had left her; trying to absolve herself from blame; flaring up in anger at his unyielding attitude, even while she was sorely conscious that she herself had been stubbornly unyielding. If he had truly loved her, she reiterated, he would never have made it an issue between them. But that was like a man—to insist on his own desires being made paramount; to blunder on headlong, no matter what antagonisms he aroused. And he was completely in the wrong, she reasserted.

She recapitulated it all. Through the winter he had consistently withdrawn into his shell. For her friends and for most of her pleasures he had at best only exhibited tolerance. And he had ended by outraging both them and her, and on top of that demanded that she turn her back, at twenty-four hours' notice, on Granville and all its associations and follow him into a wilderness that she dreaded. She had full right to her resentment. As his partner in the chancy enterprise of marriage were not her feelings and desires entitled to equal consideration? He had assumed the rôle of dictator. And she had revolted. That was all. She was justified.

Eventually she slept. At ten o'clock, heavy-eyed, suffering an intolerable headache, she rose and dressed.

Beside her plate lay a thick letter addressed in Bill's handwriting. She drank her coffee and went back to the bedroom before she opened the envelope. By the postmark she saw that it had been mailed on a train.

Dear Girl: I have caught my breath, so to speak, but I doubt if ever a more forlorn cuss listened to the interminable clicking of car wheels. I am tempted at each station to turn back and try again. It seems so unreal, this parting in hot anger, so miserably unnecessary. But when I stop to sum it up again, I see no use in another appeal. I could come back—yes.

Only the certain knowledge that giving in like that would send us spinning once more in a vicious circle prevents me. I didn't believe it possible that we could get so far apart. Nor that a succession of little things could cut so weighty a figure in our lives. And perhaps you are very sore and resentful at me this morning for being so precipitate.

I couldn't help it, Hazel. It seemed the only way. It seems so yet to me. There was nothing more to keep me in Granville—everything to make me hurry away. If I had weakened and temporized with you it would only mean the deferring of just what has happened. When you declared yourself flatly and repeatedly it seemed hopeless to argue further. I am a poor pleader, perhaps; and I do not believe in compulsion between us. Whatever you do you must do of your own volition, without pressure from me. We couldn't be happy otherwise. If I compelled you to follow me against your desire we should only drag misery in our train.

I couldn't even say good-by. I didn't want it to be good-by. I didn't know if I could stick to my determination to go unless I went as I did. And my reason told me that if there must be a break it would better come now than after long-drawn-out bickerings and bitterness. If we are so diametrically opposed where we thought we stood together we have made a mistake that no amount of adjusting, nothing but separate roads, will rectify. Myself I refuse to believe that we have made such a mistake. I don't think that honestly and deliberately you prefer an exotic, useless, purposeless, parasitic existence to the normal, wholesome life we happily planned. But you are obsessed, intoxicated—I can't put it any better—and nothing but a shock will sober you. If I'm wrong, if love and Bill's companionship can't lure you away from these other things—why, I suppose you will consider it an ended chapter. In that case you will not suffer. The situation as it stands will be a relief to you. If, on the other hand, it's merely a stubborn streak, that won't let you admit that you've carried your proud little head on an overstiff neck, do you think it's worth the price? I don't.

I'm not scolding, little person. I'm sick and sore at the pass we've come to. No damn-fool pride can close my eyes to the fact or keep me from admitting freely that I love you just as much and want you as longingly as I did the day I put you aboard the *Stanley D.* at Bella Coola. I thought you were stepping gladly out of my life then. And I let you go freely and without anything but a dumb protest against fate, because it was your wish. I can step out of your life again—if it is your wish. But I can't imprison myself in your cities. I can't pretend, even for your sake, to play the game they call business. I'm neither an idler nor can I become a legalized buccaneer. I have nothing but contempt for those who are. Mind you, this is not so sweeping a statement as it sounds. No one has a keener appreciation of what civilization means than I. Out of it has arisen culture and knowledge, much of what should make the world a better place for us all. But somehow this doesn't apply to the mass, and particularly not to the circles we invaded in Granville. With here and there a solitary exception that class is hopeless in its smug self-satisfaction—its narrowness of outlook, and unblushing exploitation of the less fortunate, repels me.

And to dabble my hands in their muck, to settle down and live my life according to their bourgeois standards, to have grossness of soft flesh replace able sinews, to submerge mentality in favor of a specious craftiness of mind which passes in the "city" for brains—well, I'm on the road. And, oh, girl, girl, I wish you were with me.

I must explain this mining deal—that phase of it which sent me on the rampage in Granville. I should have done so before, should have insisted on making it clear to you. But a fellow doesn't always do the proper thing at the proper time. All too frequently we are dominated by our emotions rather than by our judgment. It was so with me. The other side had been presented to you rather cleverly at the right time. And your ready acceptance of it angered me beyond bounds. You were prejudiced. It stirred me to a perfect fury to think you couldn't be absolutely loyal to your pal. When you took that position I simply couldn't attempt explanations. Do you think I'd ever have taken the other fellow's side against you, right or wrong?

Anyway, here it is: You got the essentials, up to a certain point, from Brooks. But he didn't tell it all—his kind never does, not by a long shot. They, the four of them, it seems, held a meeting as soon as I shipped out that gold and put through that stock-selling scheme. That was legitimate. I couldn't restrain them from that, being a hopeless minority of one. Their chief object, however, was to let two or three friends in on the ground floor of a good thing; also, they wanted each a good bundle of that stock while it was cheap—figuring that with the prospects I had opened up it would sell high. So they had it on the market, and in addition had everything framed up to reorganize with a capitalization of two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. This all cut and dried before I got there. Now, as it originally stood, the five of us would each have made a small fortune on these Klappan claims. They're good. But with a quarter of a million in outstanding stock—well, it would be all right for the fellow with a big block. But you can see where I would get off with a five-thousand-dollar interest.

To be sure, a certain proportion of the money derived from the sale of this stock should be mine. But it goes into the treasury, and they had it arranged to keep it in the treasury, as a fund for operations, with them doing the operating. They had already indicated their bent by voting an annual stipend of ten thousand and six thousand dollars to Lorimer and Brooks as president and secretary respectively. Me, they proposed to quiet with a manager's wage of five thousand a year—after I got on the ground and began to get my back up.

Free Gold would have been a splendid Stock Exchange possibility. They had it all doped out how they could make sundry clean-ups irrespective of the mine's actual product. That was the first thing that made me dubious. They were stock-market gamblers, manipulators pure and simple. But I might have let it go at that, seeing it was their game and not one that I or anybody I cared about would get fleeced at. I didn't approve of it, you understand. It was their game.

But they capped the climax with what I must cold-bloodedly characterize as the baldest attempt at a dirty fraud I ever encountered. And they had the gall to try and make me a party to it. To make this clear you must understand that I, on behalf of the company and acting as the company's agent, grubstaked Whitey Lewis and four others to go in and stake those claims. I was empowered to arrange with these five men that if the claims made a decent showing each should receive five thousand dollars in stock for assigning their claims to the company, and should have employment at top wages while the claims were operated.

They surely earned it. You know what the North is in the dead of winter. They bucked their way through a hell of frost and snow and staked the claims. If ever men were entitled to what was due them, they were. And not one of them stuttered over his bargain, even though they were taking out weekly as much gold as they were to get for their full share. They'd given their word, and they were white men. They took me for a white man also. They took my word that they would get what was coming to them, and gave me in the company's name clear title to every claim. I put those titles on record in Hazleton, and came home.

Lorimer and Brooks deliberately proposed to withhold that stock, to defraud these men, to steal—oh, I can't find words strong enough. They wanted to let the matter stand; wanted me to let it be adjusted later; anything to serve as an excuse for delay. Brooks said to me, with a grin: "The property's in the company's name—let the roughnecks sweat a while. They've got no come-back, anyhow."

That was when I smashed him. Do you blame me? I'd taken over those fellows' claims in good faith. Could I go back there and face those men and say: "Boys, the company's got your claims, and they won't pay for them." Do you think for a minute I'd let a bunch of lily-fingered crooks put anything like that over on simple, square-dealing fellows who were too honest to protect their own interests from sharp practice? A quartet of soft-bodied mongrels who sat in upholstered office chairs while these others wallowed through six feet of snow for three weeks, living on bacon and beans, to grab a pot of gold for them! It makes my fist double up when I think about it.

And I wouldn't be put off or placated by a chance to fatten my own bank roll. I didn't care if I broke the Free Gold Mining Company and myself likewise. A dollar doesn't terrify nor yet fascinate me—I hope it never will. And while, perhaps, it was not what they would call good form for me to lose my temper and go at them with my fists, I was fighting mad when I thoroughly sensed their dirty project. Anyway, it helped bring them to time. When you take a man of that type and cuff him around with your two hands he's apt to listen serious to what you say. And they listened when I told them in dead earnest next day that Whitey Lewis and his partners must have what was due them, or I'd wreck the bunch of them if it took ten years and every dollar I had to do it. And I could have put them on the tramp, too—they'd already dipped their fingers in where they couldn't stand litigation. I'm sure of that—or they would never have come through; which they did.

But I'm sorry I ever got mixed up with them. I'm going to sell my stock and advise Lewis and the others to do the same while we can get full value for it. Lorimer and that bunch will manipulate the outfit to death, no matter how the mine produces. They'll have a quarter of a million to work on pretty soon, and they'll work it hard. They're shysters—but it's after all only a practical demonstration of the ethics of the type—"Do everybody you can—if you can do 'em so there's no come-back."

That's all of that. I don't care two whoops about the money. There is still gold in the Klappan Range and other corners of the North, whenever I need it. But it nauseated me. I can't stand that cutthroat game. And Granville, like most other cities of its kind, lives by and for that sort of thing. The pressure of modern life makes it inevitable. Anyway, a town is no place for me. I can stomach it about so long, and no longer. It's too cramped, too girded about with petty-larceny conventions. If once you slip and get down, every one walks on you. Everything's restricted, priced, tinkered with. There is no real freedom of body or spirit. I wouldn't trade a comfy log cabin in the woods with a big fireplace and a shelf of books for the finest home on Maple Drive—not if I had to stay there and stifle in the dust and smoke and smells. That would be a sordid and impoverished existence. I cannot live by the dog-eat-dog code that seems to prevail wherever folk get jammed together in an unwieldy social mass.

I have said the like to you before. By nature and training I'm unfitted to live in these crowded places. I love you, little person, I don't think you realize how much, but I can't make you happy by making myself utterly miserable. That would only produce the inevitable reaction. But I still think you are essentially enough like me to meet me on common ground. You loved me and you found contentment and joy at our little cabin once. Don't you think it might be waiting there again?

If you really care, if I and the old North still mean anything to you, a few days or weeks, or even months of separation won't matter. An affection that can't survive six months is too fragile to go through life on. I don't ask you to jump the next train and follow me. I don't ask you to wire me, "Come back, Bill." Though I would come quick enough if you called me. I merely want you to think it over soberly and let your heart decide. You know where I stand, don't you, Hazel, dear? I haven't changed —not a bit—I'm the same old Bill. But I'd rather hit the trail alone than with an unwilling partner. Don't flounder about in any quicksand of duty. There is no "I ought to" between us.

So it is up to you once more, little person. If my way is not to be your way I will abide by your decision without whining. And whenever you want to reach me, a message to Felix Courvoiseur, Fort George, will eventually find me. I'll fix it that way.

I don't know what I'll do after I make that Klappan trip. I'm too restless to make plans. What's the use of planning when there's nobody but myself to plan for?

So long, little person. I like you a heap, for all your cantankerous ways. BILL.

She laid aside the letter, with a lump in her throat. For a brief instant she was minded to telegraph the word that would bring him hurrying back. But—some of the truths he had set down in cold black and white cut her deep. Of a surety she had drawn her weapon on the wrong side in the mining trouble. Overhasty?—yes. And shamefully disloyal. Perhaps there was something in it, after all; that is to say, it might be they had made a mistake. She saw plainly enough that unless she could get back some of the old enthusiasm for that wilderness life, unless the fascination of magnificent distances, of silent, breathless forests, of contented, quiet days on trail and stream, could lay fast hold of her again, they would only defer the day of reckoning, as Bill had said.

And she was not prepared to go that far. She still harbored a smoldering grudge against him for his volcanic outburst in Granville, and his precipitate departure. He had given her no time to think, to make a choice. The fleshpots still seemed wholly desirable—or, rather, she shrank from the alternative. When she visualized the North it uprose always in its most threatening presentment, indescribably lonely, the playground of ruthless, elemental forces, terrifying in its vast emptinesses. It appalled her in retrospect, loomed unutterably desolate in contrast to her present surroundings.

No, she would not attempt to call him back. She doubted if he would come. And she would not go—not yet. She must have time to think.

One thing pricked her sorely. She could not reconcile the roguery of Brooks and Lorimer with the men as she knew them. Not that she doubted Bill's word. But there must be a mistake somewhere. Ruthless competition in business she knew and understood. Only the fit survived—just as in her husband's chosen field only the peculiarly fit could hope to survive. But she rather resented the idea that pleasant, well-bred people could be guilty of coarse, forthright fraud. Surely not!

Altogether, as the first impression of Bill's letter grew less vivid to her she considered her grievances more. And she was minded to act as she had set out to do—to live her life as seemed best to her, rather than pocket her pride and rejoin Bill. The feminine instinct to compel the man to capitulate asserted itself more and more strongly.

Wherefore, she dressed carefully and prepared to meet a luncheon engagement which she recalled as being down for that day. No matter that her head ached woefully. Thought maddened her. She required distraction, craved change. The chatter over the teacups, the cheerful nonsense of that pleasure-seeking crowd might be a tonic. Anything was better than to sit at home and brood.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SPUR.

A month passed.

During that thirty-day period she received a brief note from Bill. Just a few lines to say:

> Hit the ranch yesterday, little person. Looks good to me. Have had Lauer do some work on it this summer. Went fishing last night about sundown. Trout were rising fine. Nailed a two-pounder. He jumped a foot clear of the water after my fly, and gave me a hot time for about ten minutes. Woke up this morning at daylight and found a buck deer with two lady friends standing in the middle of the clearing. I loafed a few days in Fort George, sort of thinking I might hear from you. Am sending this out by Jake. Will start for the Klappan about day after to-morrow.

She had not answered his first letter. She had tried to. But somehow when she tried to set pen to paper the right words would not come. She lacked his facility of expression. There was so much she wanted to say, so little she seemed able to say. As the days passed she felt less sure of her ground, less sure that she had not sacrificed something precious to a vagary of self, an obsession of her own ego.

Many things took on a different complexion now that she stood alone. No concrete evidence of change stood forth preëminent. It was largely subjective, atmospheric, intangible impressions.

Always with a heart sinking she came back to the empty apartment, knowing that it would be empty. During Bill's transient absence of the spring she had missed him scarcely at all. She could not say that now.

And slowly but surely she began to view all her activities and the activities of her circle with a critical eye. She was brought to this partly in self-defense. Certain of her friends had become tentative enemies. Kitty Brooks and the Bray womenfolk, who were a numerous and influential tribe, not only turned silent faces when they met, but they made war on her in the peculiar fashion of women. A word here, a suggestive phrase there, a shrug of the shoulders. It all bore fruit. Other friends conveyed the avid gossip. Hazel smiled and ignored it. But in her own rooms she raged unavailingly.

Her husband had left her. There was a man in the case. They had lost everything. The first count was sufficiently maddening because it was a half truth. And any of it was irritating—even if few believed—since it made a choice morsel to digest in gossipy corners, and brought sundry curious stares on Hazel at certain times. Also Mr. Wagstaff had caused the stockholders of Free Gold a heavy loss—which was only offset by the fact that the Free Gold properties were producing richly. None of this was even openly flung at her. She gathered it piecemeal. And it galled her. She could not openly defend either Bill or herself against the shadowy scandalmongers.

Slowly it dawned upon her, with a bitterness born of her former experience with Granville, that she had lost something of the standing that certain circles had accorded her as the wife of a successful mining man. It made her ponder. Was Bill so far wrong, after all, in his estimate of them? It was a disheartening conclusion. She had come of a family that stood well in Granville; she had grown up there; if lifetime friends blew hot and cold like that, was the game worth playing?

In so far as she could she gave the lie to some of the petty gossip. Whereas at first she had looked dubiously on spending Bill's money to maintain the standard of living they had set up, she now welcomed that deposit of five thousand dollars as a means to demonstrate that even in his absence he stood behind her financially—which she began to perceive counted more than anything else. So long as she could dress in the best, while she could ride where others walked, so long as she betrayed no limitation of resources, the doors stood wide. Not what you are, but what you've got—she remembered Bill saying that was their holiest creed.

It repelled her. And sometimes she was tempted to sit down and pour it all out in a letter to him. But she could not quite bring herself to the point. Always behind Bill loomed the vast and dreary Northland, and she shrank from that.

On top of this, she began to suffer a queer upset of her physical condition. All her life she had been splendidly healthy; her body a perfect-working machine, afflicted with no weaknesses. Now odd spasmodic pains recurred without rhyme or reason in her head, her back, her limbs, striking her with sudden poignancy, disappearing as suddenly.

She was stretched on the lounge one afternoon wrestling nervously with a particularly acute attack, when Vesta Lorimer was ushered in.

"You're almost a stranger," Hazel remarked, after the first greetings. "Your outing must have been pleasant, to hold you so long."

"It would have held me longer," Vesta returned, "if I didn't have to be in touch with my market. I could live quite happily on my island eight months in the year. But one can't get people to come several hundred miles to a sitting. And I feel inclined to acquire a living income while my vogue lasts."

"You're rather a wilderness lover, aren't you?" Hazel commented. "I don't think you'd love it as dearly if you were buried alive in it."

"That would all depend on the circumstances," Vesta replied. "One escapes many disheartening things in a country that is still comparatively primitive. The continual grind of keeping one's end up in town gets terribly wearisome. I'm always glad to go to the woods, and sorry when I have to leave. But I suppose it's largely in one's point of view."

They chatted of sundry matters for a few minutes.

"By the way, is there any truth in the statement that this Free Gold row has created trouble between you and your husband?" Vesta asked abruptly. "I dare say it's quite an impertinent question, and you'd be well within your rights to tell me it's none of my business. But I should like to confound some of these petty tattlers. I haven't been home forty-eight hours; yet I've heard tongues wagging. I hope there's nothing in it. I warned Mr. Wagstaff against Paul."

"Warned him? Why?" Hazel neglected the question entirely. The bluntness of it took her by surprise. Frank speech was not a characteristic of Vesta Lorimer's set.

The girl shrugged her shoulders.

"He is my brother, but that doesn't veil my eyes," she said coolly. "Paul is too crooked to lie straight in bed. I'm glad Mr. Wagstaff brought the lot of them up with a round turn—which he seems to have done. If he had used a club instead of his fists it would have been only their deserts. I suppose the fuss quite upset you?"

"It did," Hazel admitted grudgingly. "It did more than upset me."

"I thought as much," Vesta said slowly. "It made you inflict an undeserved hurt on a man who should have had better treatment at your hands; not only because he loves, but because he is one of the few men who deserve the best that you or any woman can give."

Hazel straightened up angrily.

"Where do you get your astonishing information, pray?" she asked hotly. "And where do you get your authority to say such things to me?"

Vesta tucked back a vagrant strand of her tawny hair. Her blue eyes snapped, and a red spot glowed on each smooth, fair cheek.

"I don't get it; I'm taking it," she flung back. "I have eyes and ears, and I have used them for months. Since you inquire, I happened to be going over the Lake Division on the same train that carried your husband back to the North. You can't knife a man without him bearing the marks of it; and I learned in part why he was going back alone. The rest I guessed, by putting two and two together. You're a silly, selfish, shortsighted little fool, if my opinion is worth having."

"You've said quite enough," Hazel cried. "If you have any more insults, please get rid of them elsewhere. I think you are——"

"Oh, I don't care what you think of me," the girl interrupted recklessly. "If I did I wouldn't be here. I'd hide behind the conventional rules of the game and let you blunder along. But I can't. I'm not gifted with your blind egotism. Whatever you are, that Bill of yours loves you, and if you care anything for him, you should be with him. I would, if I were lucky enough to stand in your shoes. I'd go with him down into hell itself gladly if he wanted me to!"

"Oh!" Hazel gasped. "Are you clean mad?"

"Shocked to death, aren't you?" Vesta fleered. "You can't understand, can you? I love him—yes. I'm not ashamed to own it. I'm no sentimental prude to throw up my hands in horror at a perfectly natural emotion. But he is not for me. I dare say I couldn't give him an added heartbeat if I tried. And I have a little too much pride—strange as it may seem to you—to try, so long as he is chained hand and foot to your chariot. But you're making him suffer. And I care enough to want him to live all his days happily. He is a *man*, and there are so few of them, *real* men. If you can make him happy I'd compel you to do so, if I had the power. You couldn't understand that kind of a love. Oh, I could choke you for your stupid disloyalty. I could do almost anything that would spur you to action. I can't rid myself of the hopeless, reckless mood he was in. There are so few of his kind, the patient, strong, loyal, square-dealing men, with a woman's tenderness and a lion's courage. Any woman should be proud and glad to be his mate, to mother his children. And you——"

She threw out her hands with a sudden, despairing gesture. The blue eyes grew misty, and she hid her face in her palms. Before that passionate outburst Hazel sat dumbly amazed, staring, uncertain. In a second Vesta lifted her head defiantly.

"I had no notion of breaking out like this when I came up," she said quietly. "I was going to be very adroit. I intended to give you a friendly boost along the right road, if I could. But it has all been bubbling inside me for a long time. You perhaps think it very unwomanly—but I don't care much what you think. My little heartache is incidental, one of the things life deals us whether we will or no. But if you care in the least for your husband, for God's sake make some effort, some sacrifice of your own petty little desires, to make his road a little pleasanter, a little less gray than it must be now. You'll be well repaid—if you are the kind that must always be paid in full. Don't be a stiff-necked idiot. That's all I wanted to say. Good-by!"

She was at the door when she finished. The click of the closing catch stirred Hazel to speech and action.

"Vesta, Vesta!" she cried, and ran to the corridor.

But Vesta Lorimer neither heeded nor halted. And Hazel went back to her room, quivering. Sometimes the truth is bitter and stirs to wrath. And mingled with other emotions was a dull pang of jealousy—the first she had ever known. For Vesta Lorimer was beautiful beyond most women; and she had but given ample evidence of the bigness of her soul. With shamed tears creeping to her eyes, Hazel wondered if *she* could love even Bill so intensely that she would drive another woman to his arms that he might win happiness.

But one thing stood out clear above that painful meeting. She was done fighting against the blankness that seemed to surround her since Bill went away. Slowly but steadily it had been forced upon her that much which she deemed desirable, even necessary, was of little weight in the balance with him. Day and night she longed for him, for his cheery voice, the whimsical good humor of him, his kiss and his smile. Indubitably Vesta Lorimer was right to term her a stiff-necked, selfish fool. But if all folk were saturated with the essence of wisdom—well, there was but one thing to be done. Silly pride had to go by the board. If to face gayly a land she dreaded were the price of easing his heartache—and her own—

that price she would pay, and pay with a grace but lately learned.

She lay down on the lounge again. The old pains were back. And as she endured, a sudden startling thought flashed across her mind. A possibility?—yes. She hurried to dress, wondering why it had not before occurred to her, and, phoning up a taxi, rolled downtown to the office of Doctor Hart. An hour or so later she returned. A picture of her man stood on the mantel. She took it down and stared at it with a tremulous smile.

"Oh, Billy-boy, Billy-boy, I wish you knew," she whispered. "But I was coming, anyway, Bill!"

That evening, stirring about her preparations for the journey, she paused, and wondered why, for the first time since Bill left, she felt so utterly at peace.

CHAPTER XIX.

HOME AGAIN.

Twelve months works many a change on a changing frontier. Hazel found this so. When she came to plan her route she found the G. T. P. bridging the last gap in a transcontinental system, its trains westbound already within striking distance of Fort George. She could board a sleeping car at Granville and detrain within a hundred miles of the ancient trading post—with a fast river boat to carry her the remaining distance.

Fort George loomed up a jumbled area of houses and tents, log buildings, frame structures yellow in their newness, strangers to paint as yet. On every hand others stood in varying stages of erection. Folks hurried about the sturdy beginning of a future greatness. And as she left the boat and followed a new-laid walk of planks toward a hotel, Jake Lauer stepped out of a store, squarely into her path.

His round face lit up with a smile of recognition. And Hazel, fresh from the long and lonesome journey, was equally glad to set eyes on a familiar, a genuinely friendly face.

"I am pleased to welgome you back to Gott's country, Mrs. Vagstaff," he said. "Und let me carry dot suid case aletty."

They walked two blocks to the King's Hotel, where Lauer's family were housed. He was in for supplies, he told her, and, of course, his wife and children accompanied him.

"Not dat Gredda iss afraid. She iss so goot a man as I on der ranch ven I am gone," he explained. "But for dem it iss a change. Und I bring by der town a vaigonloat off bodadoes. By cosh, dem bodadoes iss sell high."

It flashed into Hazel's mind that here was a Heaven-sent opportunity to reach the cabin without facing that hundred miles in the company of chance-hired strangers. But she did not broach the subject at once. Instead, she asked eagerly of Bill. Lauer told her that Bill had tarried a few days at the cabin, and then struck out alone for the mines. And he had not said when he would be back.

Mrs. Lauer, unchanged from a year earlier, welcomed her with pleased friendliness. And Jake left the two of them and the chubby kiddies in the King's office while he betook himself about his business. Hazel haled his wife and the children to her room as soon as one was assigned to her. And there, almost before she knew it, she was murmuring brokenly her story into an ear that listened with sympathy and understanding. Only a woman can grasp some of a woman's needs. Gretta Lauer patted Hazel's shoulder with a motherly hand, and bade her cheer up.

"Home's the place for you, dear," she said smilingly. "You just come right along with us. Your man will come quick enough when he gets word. And we'll take good care of you in the meantime. La, I'm all excited over it. It's the finest thing could happen for you both. Take it from me, dearie, I know. We've had our troubles, Jake and I. And, seeing I'm only six months short of being a graduate nurse, you needn't fear. Well, well!"

"I'll need to have food hauled in," Hazel reflected. "And some things I brought with me. I wish Bill were here. I'm afraid I'll be a lot of bother. Won't you be heavily loaded, as it is?"

She recalled swiftly the odd, makeshift team that Lauer depended on—the mule, lop-eared and solemn, "und Gretchen, der cow." She had cash and drafts for over three thousand dollars on her person. She wondered if it would offend the sturdy independence of these simple, kindly neighbors, if she offered to supply a four-horse team and wagon for their mutual use? But she had been forestalled there, she learned in the next breath.

"Oh, bother nothing," Mrs. Lauer declared. "Why, we'd be ashamed if we couldn't help a little. And far's the load goes, you ought to see the four beautiful horses your husband let Jake have. You don't know how much Jake appreciates it, nor what a fine man he thinks your husband is. We needed horses so bad, and didn't have the money to buy. So Mr. Wagstaff didn't say a thing but got the team for us, and Jake's paying for them in clearing and plowing and making improvements on your land. Honest, they could pull twice the load *we'll* have. There's a good wagon road most of the way now. Quite a lot of settlers, too, as much as fifty or sixty miles out. And we've got the finest garden you ever saw. Vegetables enough to feed four families all winter. Oh, your old cities! I never want to live in one again. Never a day have the kiddies been sick. Suppose it is a bit out of the world? You're all the more pleased when somebody does happen along. Folks is so different in a new country like this. There's plenty for everybody—and everybody helps, like neighbors ought to."

Lauer came up after a time, and Hazel found herself unequivocally in their hands. With the matter of transporting herself and supplies thus solved she set out to find Felix Courvoiseur—who would know how to get word to Bill. He might come back to the cabin in a month or so; he might not come back at all unless he heard from her. She was smitten with a great fear that he might give her up as lost to him, and plunge deeper into the wilderness in some mood of recklessness. And she wanted him, longed for him, if only so that she could make amends.

She easily found Courvoiseur, a tall, spare Frenchman, past middle age. Yes, he could deliver a message to Bill Wagstaff; that is, he could send a man. Bill Wagstaff was in the Klappan Range.

"But if he should have left there?" Hazel suggested uneasily.

" 'E weel leave weeth W'itey Lewees word of w'ere 'e go,' Courvoiseur reassured her. "An' my man, w'ich ees my bruzzer-law, w'ich I can mos' fully trus', 'e weel follow 'eem. So Beel 'e ees arrange. 'E ees say mos' parteecular if madame ees come or weesh for forward message, geet heem to me queeck. *Oui.* Long tam Beel ees know me. I am for depend always."

Courvoiseur kept a trader's stock of goods in a weather-beaten old log house which sprawled a hundred feet back from the street. Thirty years, he told her, he had kept that store in Fort George. She guessed that Bill had selected him because he was a fixture. She sat down at his counter and wrote her message. Just a few terse lines. And when she had delivered it to Courvoiseur she went back to the hotel. There was nothing now to do but wait. And with the message under way she found herself impatient to reach the cabin, to spend the waiting days where she had first found happiness. She could set her house in order against her man's coming. And if the days dragged, and the great, lone land seemed to close in and press inexorably upon her she would have to be patient, very patient.

Jake was held up, waiting for supplies. Fort George suffered a sugar famine. Two days later, the belated freight arrived. He loaded his wagon, a ton of goods for himself, a like weight of Hazel's supplies and belongings. A goodly load, but he drove out of Fort George with four strapping bays arching their powerful necks, and champing on the bit.

"Four days ve vill make it by der ranch," Jake chuckled. "Mit der mule und Gretchen, der cow, von veek it take me, mit half der loat."

Four altogether pleasant and satisfying days they were to Hazel. The worst of the fly pests were vanished for the season. A crisp touch of frost sharpened the night winds. Indian summer hung its mellow haze over the land. The clean, pungent air that sifted through the forests seemed doubly sweet after the vitiated atmosphere of town. Fresh from a gridiron of dusty streets and stone pavements, and but stepped, as one might say, from days of imprisonment in the narrow confines of a railway coach, she drank the winey air in hungry gulps, and joyed in the soft yielding of the turf beneath her feet, the fern and pea-vine carpet of the forest floor.

It was her pleasure at night to sleep as she and Bill had slept, with her face bared to the stars. She would draw her bed a little aside from the camp fire and from the low seclusion of a thicket lie watching the nimble flames at their merry dance, smiling lazily at the grotesque shadows cast by Jake and his frau as they moved about the blaze. And she would wake in the morning clear-headed, alert, grateful for the pleasant woodland smells arising wholesomely from the fecund bosom of the earth.

Lauer pulled up before his own cabin at mid-afternoon of the fourth day, unloaded his own stuff, and drove to his neighbor's with the rest.

"I'll walk back after a little," Hazel told him, when he had piled her goods in one corner of the kitchen.

The rattle of the wagon died away. She was alone—at home. Her eyes filled as she roved restlessly from kitchen to living room and on into the bedroom at the end. Bill had unpacked. The rugs were down, the books stowed in familiar disarray upon their shelves, the bedding spread in semidisorder where he had last slept and gone away without troubling to smooth it out in housewifely fashion.

She came back to the living room and seated herself in the big chair. She had expected to be lonely, very lonely. But she was not. Perhaps that would come later. For the present it seemed as if she had reached the end of something, as if she were very tired, and had gratefully come to a welcome resting place. She turned her gaze out the open door where the forest fell away in vast undulations to a range of snow-capped mountains purple in the autumn haze, and a verse that Bill had once quoted came back to her:

"Oh, to feel the Wind grow strong
  Where the Trail leaps down.
I could never learn the way
  And wisdom of the Town."

She blinked. The town—it seemed to have grown remote, a fantasy in which she had played a puppet part. But she was home again. If only the gladness of it endured strong enough to carry her through whatever black days might come to her there alone.

She would gladly have cooked her supper in the kitchen fireplace, and laid down to sleep under her own roof. It seemed the natural thing to do. But she had not expected to find the cabin livably arranged, and she had promised the Lauers to spend the night with them. So presently she closed the door and walked away through the woods.

CHAPTER XX.

AFTER MANY DAYS.

September and October trooped past, and as they marched the willow thickets and poplar groves grew yellow and brown, and carpeted the floor of the woods with fallen leaves. Shrub and tree bared gaunt limbs to every autumn wind. Only the spruce and pine stood forth in their year-round habiliments of green. The days shortened steadily. The nights grew long, and bitter with frost. Snow fell, blanketing softly the dead leaves. Old Winter cracked his whip masterfully over all the North.

Day by day, between tasks, and often while she worked, Hazel's eyes would linger on the edges of the clearing. Often at night she would lift herself on elbow at some unexpected sound, her heart leaping wild with expectation.

And always she would lie down again, and sometimes press her clenched hand to her lips to keep back the despairing cry. Always she adjured herself to be patient, to wait doggedly as Bill would have waited, to make due allowance for immensity of distance for the manifold delays which might overtake a messenger faring across those silent miles or a man hurrying to his home. Many things might hold him back. But he would come. It was inconceivable that he might not come.

Meantime, with only a dim consciousness of the fact, she underwent a marvelous schooling in adaptation, self-restraint. She had work of a sort, tasks such as every housewife finds self-imposed in her own home. She was seldom lonely. She marveled at that. It was unique in her experience. All her old dread of the profound silence, the pathless forests which infolded like a prison wall, distances which seemed impossible of span, had vanished. In its place had fallen over her an abiding sense of peace, of security. The lusty storm winds whistling about the cabin sang a restful lullaby. When the wolves lifted their weird, melancholy plaint to the cold, star-jeweled skies, she listened without the old shudder. These things, which were wont to oppress her, to send her imagination reeling along morbid ways, seemed but a natural aspect of life, of which she herself was a part.

Often, sitting before her glowing fireplace, watching a flame kindled with her own hands with wood she herself had carried from the pile outside, she pondered this. It defied her powers of self-analysis. She could only accept it as a fact, and be glad. Granville and all that Granville stood for had withdrawn to a more or less remote background. She could look out over the frost-spangled forests and feel that she lacked nothing—nothing save her mate. There was no impression of transient abiding; no chafing to be elsewhere, to do otherwise. It *was* home, she reflected; perhaps that was why.

A simple routine served to fill her days. She kept her house shining, she cooked her food, carried in her fuel. Except on days of forthright storm she put on her snowshoes, and with a little rifle in the crook of her arm prowled at random through the woods—partly because it gave her pleasure to range sturdily afield, partly for the physical brace of exertion in the crisp air. Otherwise she curled comfortably before the fireplace, and sewed, or read something out of Bill's catholic assortment of books.

It was given her, also, to learn the true meaning of neighborliness, that kindliness of spirit which is stifled by stress in the crowded places, and stimulated by like stress amid surroundings where life is noncomplex, direct, where cause and effect tread on each other's heels. Every day, if she failed to drop into their cabin, came one of her neighbors to see if all were well with her. Quite as a matter of course Jake kept steadily replenished for her a great pile of firewood. Or they would come, babies and all, bundled in furs of Jake's trapping, jingling up of an evening behind the frisky bays. And while the bays munched hay in Roaring Bill Wagstaff's stable, they would cluster about the open hearth, popping corn for the children, talking, always with cheerful optimism.

Behind Lauer's mild blue eyes lurked a mind that burrowed incessantly to the roots of things. He had lived and worked and read, and, pondering it all, he had summed up a few of the verities.

"Life, it iss giffen us, und ve must off it make der best ve can," he said once to Hazel, fondling a few books he had borrowed to read at home. "Life iss goot, yust der liffing off life, if only ve go not astray afder der voolish dings—und if der self-breservation struggle vears us not out so dot ve gannot enjoy being alife. So many iss struggle und slave under terrible conditions. Und it iss largely because off ignorance. Ve know not vot ve can do—und ve shrink vrom der unknown. Here iss acres by der dousand vree to der man vot can off it make use—und dousands vot liffs und dies und neffer hass a home. Here iss goot, glean air

—und in der shmoke und shmells und dirty streets iss a ravage of tuberculosis. Der balance iss not true. Und in der own vay der rich iss full off drouble—drunk mit eggcitement, veary mit bleasures. *Ach,* der voods und mountains und streams, blenty off food, und a kindly neighbor—iss not dot enough? Only der abnormal vants more as dot. Und I dink der drouble iss largely dot der modern, high-bressure cifilization makes for der abnormal, vedder a man iss a millionaire or vorks in der brewery. Contentment iss a state off der mind—und if der mind vorks mit logic it vill content find in der simple dings."

It sounded like a pronouncement of Bill's. But Lauer did not often grow serious. Mostly he was jovially cheerful, and his wife likewise. The North had emancipated them, and they were loyal to the source of their deliverance. And Hazel understood, because she herself had found the wild land a benefactor, kindly in its silence, restful in its forested peace, a cure for sickness of soul. Twice now it had rescued her from herself.

November and December went their appointed way—and still no word of Bill. If now and then her pillow was wet she struggled mightily against depression. She was not lonely in the dire significance of the word—but she longed passionately for him. And she held fast to her faith that he would come.

The last of the old year she went little abroad, ventured seldom beyond the clearing. And on New Year's Eve Jake Lauer's wife came to the cabin to stay.

Hazel sat up, wide awake, on the instant. There was not the slightest sound. She had been deep in sleep. Nevertheless she felt, rather than knew, that some one was in the living room. Perhaps the sound of the door opening had filtered through her slumber. She hesitated an instant, not through fear, because in the months of living alone fear had utterly forsaken her; but hope had leaped so often, only to fall sickeningly, that she was half persuaded it must be a dream. Still the impression strengthened. She slipped out of bed. The door of the bedroom stood slightly ajar.

Bill stood before the fireplace, his shaggy fur cap pushed far back on his head, his gauntlets swinging from the cord about his neck. She had left a great bed of coals on the hearth, and the glow shone redly on his frost-scabbed face. But the marks of bitter trail bucking, the marks of frostbite, the stubbly beard, the tiny icicles that still clustered on his eyebrows; while these traces of hardship tugged at her heart they were forgotten when she saw the expression that overshadowed his face. Wonder and unbelief and longing were all mirrored there. She took a shy step forward to see what riveted his gaze. And despite the choking sensation in her throat she smiled—for she had taken off her little, beaded house moccasins and left them lying on the bearskin before the fire, and he was staring down at them like a man fresh-wakened from a dream, unbelieving and bewildered.

With that she opened the door and ran to him. He started, as if she had been a ghost. Then he opened his arms and drew her close to him.

"Bill, Bill, what made you so long?" she whispered. "I guess it served me right, but it seemed a never-ending time."

"What made me so long?" he echoed, bending his rough cheek down against the warm smoothness of hers. "Lord, *I* didn't know you wanted me. I ain't no telepathist, hon. You never yeeped one little word since I left. How long you been here?"

"Since last September." She smiled up at him. "Didn't Courvoiseur's man deliver a message from me to the mine? Didn't you come in answer to my note?"

Bill shook his head.

"Great Cæsar's ghost—since September—alone! You poor little girl!" he murmured. "No, if you sent word to me through Courvoiseur I never got it. Maybe something happened his man. I left the Klappan with the first snow.

Went poking aimlessly over around the Finlay River with a couple of trappers. Couldn't settle down. Never heard a word from you. I'd given you up. I just blew in this way by sheer accident. Girl, girl, you don't know how good it is to see you again, to have this warm body of yours cuddled up to me again. And you came right here and planted yourself to wait till I turned up?"

"Sure!" She laughed happily. "But I sent you word, even if you never got it. Oh, well, it doesn't matter. Nothing matters now. You're here, and I'm here, and—— Oh, Billy-boy, I was an awful pig-headed little idiot. Do you think you can take another chance with me?"

"Say"—he held her off at arm's length admiringly—"do you want to know how strong I am for taking a chance with you? Well, I was on my way out to flag the next train East, just to see—just to see if you still cared two pins; to see if you still thought your game was better than mine."

"Well, you don't have to take any eastbound train to find that out," she cried gayly. "I'm here to tell you I care a lot more than any number of pins. Oh, I've learned a lot in the last six months, Bill. I had to hurt myself, and you, too. I had to get a jolt to jar me out of my self-centered little orbit. I got it, and it did me good. And it's funny. I came back here because I thought I ought to, because it was our home, but rather dreading it. And I've been quite contented and happy—only hungry, oh, so dreadfully hungry, for you."

Bill kissed her.

"I didn't make any mistake in you, after all," he said. "You're a real partner. You're the right stuff. I love you more than ever. If you made a mistake you paid for it, like a dead-game sport. What's a few months? We've all our life before us, and it's plain sailing now we've got our bearings again."

"Amen!" she whispered. "I—but, say, man of mine, you've been on the trail, and I know what the trail is. You must be hungry. I've got all kinds of goodies cooked in the kitchen. Take off your clothes, and I'll get you something to eat."

"I'll go you," he said. "I am hungry. Made a long mush to get here for the night. I got six huskies running loose outside, so if you hear 'em scuffing around you'll know it's not the wolves. Say, it was some welcome surprise to find a fire when I came in. Thought first somebody traveling through had put up. Then I saw those slippers lying there. That was sure making me take notice when you stepped out."

He chuckled at the recollection. Hazel lit the lamp, and stirred up the fire, plying it with wood. Then she slipped a heavy bath robe over her nightgown and went into the chilly kitchen, emerging therefrom presently with a tray of food and a kettle of water to make coffee. This she set on the fire. Wherever she moved Bill's eyes followed her with a gleam of joy, tinctured with smiling incredulousness. When the kettle was safely bestowed on the coals, he drew her on his knee. There for a minute she perched in rich content. Then she rose.

"Come very quietly with me, Bill," she whispered, with a fine air of mystery. "I want to show you something."

"Sure! What is it?" he asked.

"Come and see," she smiled, and took up the lamp. Bill followed obediently.

Close up beside her bed stood a small, square crib. Hazel set the lamp on a table, and turning to the bundle of blankets which filled this new piece of furniture, drew back one corner, revealing a round, puckered-up infant face.

"For the love of Mike!" Bill muttered. "Is it—is it——"

"It's our son," she whispered proudly. "Born the tenth of January—three weeks ago to-day. Don't, don't—you great bear—you'll wake him."

For Bill was bending down to peer at the tiny morsel of humanity, with a strange, abashed smile on his face, his big, clumsy fingers touching the soft, pink cheeks. And when he stood up he drew a long breath, and laid one arm across her shoulders.

"Us two and the kid," he said whimsically. "It should be the hardest combination in the world to bust. Are you happy, little person?"

She nodded, clinging to him, wordlessly happy. And presently she covered the baby's face, and they went back to sit before the great fireplace, where the kettle bubbled cheerfully and the crackling blaze sent forth its challenge to the bevy of frost sprites that held high revel outside.

And, after a time, the blaze died to a heap of glowing embers, and the forerunning wind of a northeast storm soughed and whistled about a house deep wrapped in contented slumber, a house no longer divided against itself.

Doctor Henry C. Rowland, whose latest book, "The Apple of Discord," is having a wide sale, has written another fine novel which we have scheduled for publication in the first January POPULAR.

⁂

A SLUR ON A GREAT NAME

VICTOR MURDOCK, the red-headed congressman from Kansas, was talking to a boy in his district, and Murdock, in order to keep the conversation going, asked the little fellow some questions about history.

"You know," said the lad at last, "I don't think much of that fellow Ulysses S. Grant? I'm against him."

"What have you got against Ulysses S. Grant?" asked Murdock in astonishmen.

"He was too dog-gone insincere," said the young student.

"Insincere!"

"Yes, he was," argued the boy. "I was reading in my history last night about a time when he was on the point of capturing a fort. He wrote to the fellow in command of the fort, and said that, if the fort wasn't surrendered unconditionally within the next twenty minutes, he'd blow off the heads of all the men in it. And he signed that letter, 'Your obedient servant.' If that wasn't insincere, you can skin me."

◆

WISDOM AND WIT COMBINED

WHEN Doctor Armistead M. Dobie, of the law faculty of the University of Virginia, studied logic, philosophy, and other highbrowed stuff at that institution under Professor Noah K. Davis, he was a star as a student and a wit. Noah K was old and dignified, and wore a long, snow-white beard. His particular fad was the "association of ideas."

"As soon as you get to the point where one thing quickly reminds you of another," he said one morning to Dobie and the other students, "you have a good brain. This association of ideas indicates highly developed mentality. You should cultivate the habit of letting one idea foster another in your brain."

"Yes, yes!" exclaimed Dobie with enthusiasm.

"Now," said Noah K., "I shall draw this long, curved line on the blackboard, and ask you what it suggests to your mind."

He drew a long, sweeping, curved line. Then he asked:

"Mr. Dobie, what does that remind you of?"

Replied Dobie:

"Noah's ark, sir."

An Incident of the Pacific

By Lincoln Colcord

Author of "The Drifting Diamond," "The Leak," Etc.

Of one of Lincoln Colcord's novels a critic said: "Life is painted upon a big canvas with broad sweep of brushes dipped in vivid colors." An apt description of this "Incident of the Pacific," in which Colcord tells the story of a man who sounded the depths of the worst fate that life can decree.

PROLOGUE.

ALL one summer afternoon we had been rowing along a stretch of our northern coast. An offshore breeze left a strip of quiet water in the lee of the land. We rowed slowly, meditatively, speaking of vanished days and forgotten names. I handled the oars; Captain Alexander Gordon sat in the stern sheets, immaculate, white-haired, and hale with the freshness of unquenchable vitality.

"Be careful!" he cried, as I edged in toward the beach. "You're shaving that ledge too close. You'll be ashore."

"I know it," I answered. "Are you thirsty?"

"Thirsty? Why, I believe I am. Of course—dry as a fish!"

"There's a beautiful spring of water under that tall pine," I explained.

He glanced at the spot, a gully between cliffs of black slate, and suddenly turned to me a pair of wide and amazed eyes. "I can't be mistaken! Look here—does it bubble up through gravel?" I nodded. His eyes gazed into mine a moment, then closed. "My God!" he said softly, reverently. "My God!"

The nose of the boat grated on the beach. Captain Gordon sat for a while without motion. "Once, long ago, I came around this shore, gunning," he said, at last. "I found this spring—drank, bathed my face, and sat beside it, thinking. I was leaving home that week for my first voyage at sea; I had a lot to think about. Well—I never saw the spring again, never have set eyes on it till now. But I remembered it. I remembered it far away, across oceans, across continents, across years. I remembered it when I was thirsty, thirsty——" He stood up. "Come," he said. "Let's drink—while we may."

CHAPTER I.

THE FIRE AT SEA.

"I was mate with Captain Caleb Armstrong in the ship *Equator*. We loaded coal at Cardiff, and sailed for San Francisco one midwinter, on the twelfth of January. The *Equator* was a fast ship, of medium clipper build. We had a fine run off the English coast, picked up the trades in good season, crossed the line in twenty-one days, and were down to the Horn in fifty-three. Rounding the Horn, we furled the royals but twice from fifty degrees in the Atlantic to fifty degrees in the Pacific. Sixty-four days out from Cardiff, we took the southeast trades bound north. Already we began to congratulate ourselves on a fast and easy passage.

"Captain Armstrong had a remarkable dog—a great Dane, that followed him about decks, and slept at the foot of his bunk. No one aboard ever touched or spoke to this dog. The captain himself fed him, once a day. I'd been with the old man five years, and had never crossed eyes with his dog. A weird shipmate; to meet him suddenly in the dead of night, a great, gray animal as big as a panther, was enough to make your hair rise. But he gave no trouble, and obeyed at a look from his master.

"The morning that we took the trades in the Pacific, Captain Armstrong called me aft. 'Mr. Gordon, come below a minute,' he said. I followed him into his room. In the corner by the bunk the dog was scratching and growling. 'Get down and smell in that corner,' the captain said. 'The dog won't touch you.' I did as I was told. A faint odor reached my nostrils—an odor of coal gas, coming in from the lazaret under the partition. When I got up, the old man was as white as a sheet. 'Fire, sir?' I asked. 'I'm afraid so,' he said. 'You smell it, don't you?' While we were looking at each other, the great dog brushed between us, bound for the deck.

" 'Cardiff coal!' the captain broke out, and swore. 'This is the third time—— *He* knows the smell.'

"We were afire. When we took off the mizzen hatch, a puff of foul gas set us back from the coaming. 'On with it again!' cried the old man. 'Calk it down!'

"With the aid of the dog, we sought out and stopped every crack where gas was escaping. Then we sat down to wait, hoping to smother the blaze. We waited three days. The fire gained; we could feel it warming up below decks. It seemed to be mostly aft; we shortened sail on the mizzen, to ease the mast.

"At the end of the third day, Captain Armstrong came forward. 'Mr. Gordon,' he said, 'to-morrow morning you may get ready to scuttle the ship.'

" 'Do what, sir?' I asked, in astonishment.

" 'Pump water into her,' he said. 'Sink her as deep as she'll stand. When the *Mohican* burned up on me in the Bay of Bengal, I swore that if I ever got afire again, I'd scuttle the ship. Men have told me that it couldn't be done. Well—we'll see. Have the carpenter rig up both force pumps.'

"The next morning, we began to pump. Hour after hour we pumped steadily through the main and mizzen hatches, letting in as little air as possible. As she filled, we took in the upper sail. During the night she commenced to grow loggy; but the trades dropped to favor us, and we stripped her down till she barely kept steerage-way. All that night and the next day we pumped the Pacific into her. At last she staggered. She'd roll over on her side, and stay down five minutes at a time. A sickening sensation. We quit pumping, and left her for the night.

"That night the breeze rose again suddenly, kicking up a nasty chop. We had to turn to in a hurry, and pump the Pacific out again. The water hadn't reached the fire; we could see it through the mizzen hatch, burning merrily. I tried to reach it with a hose, but the gas was too much for me. So we battened everything down again, and pumped her dry. It took us two days, working like demons; the decks were growing hot underfoot. Then, with all sail set on the fore and main, we ran before the wind for the South Sea Islands. They were a long way off—some fifteen hundred miles.

"The captain's dog refused to leave the top of the after house. He paced there day and night, like a wild animal in a cage.

"Two days more, and we saw that it would soon be a case of boats. At any moment she might blow up. The captain finally ordered the fore hatch off, though it fed the flames; he'd had experience with an explosion. The mizzenmast, we feared, was growing shaky. We couldn't be sure of the main any longer—had already shortened sail on it. During these two days of grace, we had made every preparation to leave the ship. The equipment of the boats had been overhauled; provisions had been broken out and divided; the boats themselves had been turned over, wet down, and lay ready in the slings. There were two whaleboats and one longboat, for a ship's company of thirty men.

"I'd got my own dunnage together the day before, when we'd been forced to vacate the cabin. It filled a small bag—the longbook, my sextant, compasses, and sliding scales, a ball of twine, another of spun yarn, sail needles, my mother's picture, a ditty box she'd fitted for me, and so forth—a good many useless things, but indispensable to the soul—trinkets, mementos, things that savages used to have buried with them.

"The captain had spent all that forenoon alone in the cabin—for the dog still refused to follow him. At noon, when he came up to get an observation, his face was drawn and white. He was fond of the ship. After that, I noticed that his manner grew more and more abstracted. I realized that he was getting to be an old man.

"With all our preparation, the end seemed to come suddenly. On the morning of the third day, I looked aloft and saw the mizzen truck describe a circle in the sky.

"'Put your helm hard down!' I shouted aft. She came up just in time to send the mizzenmast overboard to leeward. The dog leaped to the main deck and ran forward.

"Captain Armstrong turned aft like a man in a dream—gazed at the wreck of the after house, where the deck had been lifted bodily and a great hole had opened. Thick smoke rolled up, then a rush of sparks, then fire.

"'Get out the boats,' he said softly. 'No place here.'

"The impressions of the next half hour are clearer in my mind than the facts. I recall seeing the boats swing outboard across the lee bulwarks; I suppose I directed the work. I suppose I loaded the boats, as well. I can seem to see them in the wash alongside, dancing and pounding; it was a rough morning, no boating weather. After that came a pause.

"I drifted to the fife rail by the mainmast, where we received our instructions: 'Steer west and by north. You'll strike Tahiti.' There was a compass for each boat—a chronometer, and a battered chart for me—nothing for the second mate but a colored map of the Pacific torn from an old geography. 'Keep together as long as you can. Save provisions.'

"We stood around in a sort of embarrassment, with eyes fixed on the deck. The captain kept shaking his head, dropping it forward above the fife rail. 'Too rough, too rough,' he repeated. 'Overloaded boats. This chop will——'

"A sail was slatting aloft with a sharp, imperative sound. I glanced up at it, and was affected, I remember, at the thought that we must leave all this to burn—sails, spars, rigging, my one-time care and pride—all the gallant top-hamper that had weathered so many gales, that had driven the old ship so far.

"'Water!' cried Captain Armstrong suddenly. 'Did you attend to the water, Mr. Gordon?'

"'Mr. Crowell had charge of the water, sir, and nothing else. I thought it best——'

"'A good idea. Water—of the utmost importance.'

"Crowell, the third mate, spoke up. 'All full, sir,' he reported. He'd been nursing the casks for days.

"The old man's gaze wandered again. 'If the fire had been forward, we might have held on a day longer,' he observed to himself. All at once he straightened up and threw out his arms. 'We should never have started the hatches, Mr. Gordon!' he cried. 'We might have saved her!'

"'I don't believe that made any difference, sir.'

"He paid no attention—I doubt if he heard me. 'Any other spot on the face of the globe!' he burst out. 'A thousand miles from nowhere! Why did they choose——' His voice trailed off into silence, his body drooped against the rail. I wondered what could have broken him up so.

"'Look on the forecastle head!' cried the second mate.

"We all whirled. The dog was pacing there. His step was measured and slow; he passed from side to side deliberately, as if meditating some deep problem.

"Over my shoulder I heard the captain's voice in his beard: 'I never saw him—I can't understand——' The tone was childish, hurt. By Jove, that was it!—his dog had deserted him. Poor old man! He had no family; the dog had been his one companion, his child. I was immensely touched. Tears came to my eyes.

"I put my hand on his arm.

"Well, sir?' He fingered a belaying-pin hole, whirling his thumb around in it with a boring motion. Suddenly he jerked back his hand.

"'Yes,' he said, 'that's all.'

"The next moment we were in the boats. The high, black side of the ship loomed above us, topped by the flames that were now working forward. 'Shove off! Shove off, there! Look out for that channel!'

"My boat crashed against the captain's. I braced myself, and held them apart with the steering oar. We drifted rapidly to leeward. The sea grew rougher. The wind began to strike us, coming over and around the ship. She had given us her last protection.

"'The dog!' some one shouted, pointing forward.

"'Never mind!' screamed the captain. 'We can't wait——'

"Then the dog jumped. He took the water with a clean dive, and struck out strongly. The captain called, whistled, stood up in the longboat and waved his hands. But the dog swam by. Soon his paws came over our gunwale. Crowell, who was with me, grabbed him by the scuff of the neck and helped him in. He sank at my feet, half filling the stern sheets with his bulk, and lay still.

"I didn't care to look toward the old man. No chance, either—the wind had caught us. I bent to the oar, easing her over the seas, and directed the hoisting of the sail.

"A thin voice reached me, trailing down the wind: 'Steer west and by north!' Poor old man! Duty above sorrow—it was his last command.

"I saw at once that the whaleboat had all she could handle. At the end of half an hour, I was afraid. The wind seemed to be rising; the sea was a sharp, vicious chop, the worst possible for a heavily laden boat. The lonesomeness and vastness of the ocean began to grip me. My heart cried out for the deck, for some height to look across the water from, for something besides a cockleshell to work in that wicked sea. We shipped water constantly, the best that I could do; four men were bailing for their lives. Several times we were within an ace of swamping. I thought of the longboat, with her square, heavy stern.

"'Mr. Crowell, can you see the captain's boat?'

"'Yes, sir. She's dropping astern.'

"'What weather is she making?'

"'Bad, sir, I'm afraid. They're doing something with the sail.'

"A breaking sea caught us on the quarter, nearly broaching us to. When I regained control of the boat, she was full up to the thwarts. 'Bail, all hands!' I shouted. They didn't need the order. Suddenly a man in the bow screamed, and covered his face.

"'What is it? What's the matter?'

"'The captain's boat, sir! She's gone under!'

"I turned for a single instant, and saw against the white crest of a distant wave some tiny black arms extended in stiff attitudes. There was no boat. I gripped the oar, and crushed my mind to the task in hand. Far away, a confused crying rose for a moment, an insignificant murmur on the great floor of the deep. Then the wind and the waters drowned it, and we swept on.

CHAPTER II.

THE LEAKING CASK.

"This dog—this uncanny beast, a stranger to all of us—he lay there in the stern sheets, drenched with water, motionless and silent. He had come to us, past his master, disregarding the voice that had been his lifelong control. What did it mean? We got the boat bailed out. The wind lulled, and for a while we traversed one of those smooth areas that lie on the heaviest sea. Then a man forward said: 'He knew.' Another answered: 'We are going to be saved.' My foot touched the dog, and I shivered. Deeper minds than ours, I think, would have taken it for a sign.

"The second mate's boat still floated. He had dropped half a mile astern, and seemed to be holding his own with us. He told me afterward that he had been close beside the longboat when she swamped. He could do nothing, of course—it would have been death for all to try. He said that the sound of that crying was like nothing earthly. He hadn't looked—and his boat's crew had all turned their heads away.

"The ship?—we soon forgot her. We left her burning on the open Pacific. At noon, she was a pillar of smoke on the eastern horizon. Half an hour after, we could see her no longer. For a while a smoky smudge showed against the sky. That, too, faded, and we were alone.

"Toward night, we served out rations, and all hands had a sup of water. The dog refused to eat or drink. 'We'll give him a man's share to-morrow,' I said. No one dissented. There was food enough for a month in the boat. Water wasn't so plentiful, but we had a large boat cask of it lashed against the after thwart, and would probably catch enough rain to keep it full. Crowell sat over the cask, with a loaded revolver in his pocket. We'd been having trouble with the crew.

"Night came on, a relentless shadow. There was no moon, nothing but the faint light of the stars, a cold, somber radiance, a glimmer on the foam. Four heavy squalls burst over us that night. One of them I thought was our last. We flew under bare poles in a smother of rain, spray, and wind. It was a sea that you would never dream of putting a boat into. Between squalls, the wind fell off; overhead, it was calm and clear, hideously clear. It would have been a grand night on shipboard. Then the clouds would pile up again, the blackness would settle down; stealthy shapes of waves would slink by in the gloom.

"I kept her before the wind. I steered instinctively, by the feeling of the sea; and all that I'd learned, observed, imbibed from the air of oceans and from the breath of sails, seemed to come back without effort, run down my arm, and communicate itself to the oar which guided us through the night. We shipped less water than by day.

"As I steered, I thought. I thought of the captain, back there in the empty Pacific, gone to rejoin his ship—a splendid and honorable old man, my sea father, who'd taught me all I knew. I thought of the dog; and suddenly I suffered a strange revulsion of feeling toward the beast. He'd deserted his master, he'd left the old man to die with a broken heart.

"With that revulsion, I lost faith in the miracle, utterly, irretrievably. It signified nothing, that he had come to us. If we were to be saved, we'd have to save ourselves. The ocean warned me along the oar, the boat cried out beneath me, the wind on my shoulder was like a heavy hand. These things I *knew*. And I'd seen the captain's secret. The Unknown, my Unknown, would never have done such a thing. But I saw, too, that I mustn't show the change. The men believed in the dog. I might need him before the trip was through.

"There was little talking that night, but no one slept. We hadn't set watches; it was a time for every man to be on the alert. In the latter part of the night the wind dropped, and the sea lost its kick. Crowell came aft beside me.

" 'Listen,' I said. For some time, in the lulls, I'd heard a dripping sound. At first I thought it was a noise in my brain. But now I heard it plainly. It made me nervous.

" 'What is it?' he asked.

" 'Hear that drip, drip? There!'

"He couldn't seem to catch it. 'Water in the bottom——' he began; then brought up short. 'I hear it,' he said. 'Wait a minute.'

"He lit the lantern, and crouched in the bottom of the boat. The dark bulk of the water cask shut him off from me. He seemed awfully slow—awfully still.

" 'What do you find?' I shouted.

"His face appeared above the thwart. The light striking up from below gave it a ghastly look—like the face of a corpse floating in the air. 'The water,' he said huskily.

" 'What water?'

" 'The drinking water, sir.' I could barely hear him.

" 'What do you say?' I cried. 'What do you mean?'

" 'The cask's been leaking, sir. I've stopped it——'

" 'How much is left?'

"He didn't answer for a moment. 'None, sir—hardly any.'

"I was too stunned to ask any more. I sat back grimly, and watched them. They had unlashed the cask, and tipped it up. A man passed a pail from the bow. They got two-thirds of a pailful of dirty dregs. The rest was swashing around in the bottom of the boat. An end hoop on the cask had fallen or been knocked off—I heard them discussing it. Crowell took the bucket, and came aft. A muttering chorus went on forward. His name was spoken several times.

" 'Stow that talk!' I cried. 'We won't have any more of it!'

"The boat grew quiet. Crowell sat beside me, holding his head in his hands. The sea dropped fast, the sky cleared permanently, a late moon rose in the east and shimmered across the water. Then the stars went out, and daylight crept up the sky. I felt sick, tired, weary in body and mind.

" 'How could this have happened?' I asked. No answer. 'It would have been a handy thing to know a little sooner,' I went on. 'We could have caught plenty of rain.'

"Crowell lifted his face, and looked at me. He was twenty, a fine youth of the old New England stock. I'd known him from a boy. His eyes gazed out at me straight from hell.

" 'For God's sake, sir, don't be too hard on me!' he said.

"When it got light, we looked astern for the second mate's boat. She wasn't there. We'd either separated from her in the night—or she'd gone down. Astern and ahead, the ocean was deserted. It stretched far and blue, an unbroken expanse, lighted brilliantly by the rising sun. I felt as if a lump of lead lay in the pit of my stomach. No water—and every change seemed to leave us more alone.

CHAPTER III.

THE STUFF OF HEROES.

"We were a thousand miles from Tahiti. A thousand miles of open water is hard to see in the mind's eye. It's a long way. But, for the men, the captain's dog sat in the stern sheets—and for me there was hope, which never leaves us. We might fall in with a ship, though we were now to the westward of the beaten track. We could hardly fail to catch some rain, there in the heart of the trades.

"The day was glorious. We flew before a brisk wind, shipping no water. Not a cloud, not a sign of a squall. We might have been on a pleasure sail—except that we were growing thirsty. We felt a dryness in the throat. We began to think of that water in the bottom of the boat. I had Crowell go over the provisions, and put the liquids aside. A few cans of soup, a few of clams—and they would be salt. Most of our grub was beef and pork—salt, too; devilish salt. We had plenty of bread.

"We'd turned the water into a covered can. At noon, I ordered Crowell to serve out a spoonful to each man. After he'd brought me my sup, he put the can aside.

" 'Drink your allowance,' I said.

" 'I'm not drinking,' he answered, and turned away.

" 'Nonsense! What's the matter with you?'

"He whirled on me. 'You don't suppose I'm going to drink any of what's left?' he cried.

"I looked at him. His eyes were bright with an ideal. He wasn't so much younger than I; but I'd stepped over the line, become a man, and that makes a great difference. I was momentarily surprised. I'd forgotten. There is a dream that never dies.

"I looked past him, still wondering, and saw the men. They'd heard. By Jove, it had touched them! Cardiff roughs and jailbirds as they were, the hidden chord had sounded. An old one-eyed pirate, the worst of the lot, opened his mouth, gasped once or twice, and lurched to his feet. 'Take a drink, my boy,' he growled. 'I've had my fling. You drink now, and I'll pass next time.'

"The young fellow shook his head. 'Thank you, Tom,' he said. 'I've had a long drink—a whole cask full.'

"The sailor sat down in silence. After a while, another man said: 'If he won't drink, give it to the dog.' Crowell looked at me. I nodded. So the dog had his drink, and the boy his dream.

"I steered west and by north. The wind held true, and we made good distance. I got an observation at noon. We were nine hundred miles from the island. The sun seemed hotter than the day before. Toward night the men grew restless, and asked for water. 'I can't do it,' I told them. 'Another spoonful all around to-morrow noon.'

"That night a heavy squall came up. We took in the sail and spread it out, ready to catch the rain. Only a few drops fell. The wind and sea were furious. But we didn't mind that so much now.

"At sunrise the next morning, Crowell touched me on the knee. 'Look at the sun,' he whispered. It stood halfway up on the rim of the ocean. Against the northerly limb, the upper sails of a ship were clearly outlined. She passed off the disk as we watched, going north, and we lost her in the glare of the dawn. She must have been ten or a dozen miles away. We said nothing about it to the men.

"I could see that young Crowell was suffering a good deal with the thirst. I tried to reason with him, but he wouldn't listen.

" 'We've got a week ahead of us yet,' I told him. 'You can't hold out that long.'

" 'That doesn't make the least difference,' he answered. 'Maybe I can.'

"It distressed me—and it inspired me. I realized that, whatever came, there was more than the body to be reckoned with. Anyway, I felt that I must quit drinking, too, until it rained.

"When we served out the water at noon, there was trouble brewing. Harry, a big, rawboned bruiser, struck a defiant attitude. 'Give us a square drink, and finish it up,' he said. 'I'm thirsty.'

" 'What'll you do to-morrow, Harry?' I asked.

" 'Sight a ship—or go to hell!'

"I caught his eye, and held it. 'We'll do better than that,' I said. 'Eight days will take us to Tahiti, and we'll spin this out.'

" 'That's all right for you!' he growled. 'You've got the can between you.'

"I whipped out my revolver. 'Harry, you'll go to hell quick, if you don't shut up!' I said. 'Understand me! Another word like that, and I'll put a hole in you. We can't play at this business!'

"He held on a while, but at last I looked him down. By the exchange of glances, I could see that he wasn't unanimously supported. But this was the beginning. They weren't very thirsty yet. Two young fellows couldn't expect fair play from seven hardened and desperate men.

"That afternoon Crowell was busy with paper and pencil on the thwart. 'What are you writing?' I asked. He gave me a sheepish glance. 'A diary,' he said. 'I brought these along—thought it would be good to have——'

"That brought him up. I couldn't help smiling. After he'd become delirious, I took this diary out of his pocket, thinking he might destroy it. I came across it the other day in an old desk. You'd never believe that it had been written in such an emergency. It says that the sun was tropical in its heat, and that we suffered greatly from thirst. The paper is clean, the writing neat and plain. The last words are as methodical as the first. It finishes abruptly, in full swing: 'The calm lasted till midnight, when a light breeze——' He wrote that, and suddenly went out of his head.

CHAPTER IV.

MOCKED.

"No rain fell. Two, three, four, five days went by, and the thirst sank into our bones. It crept insidiously about the boat, a silent and nameless horror. We didn't speak of it, but saw it in each other's eyes. The brackish water was lowering in the can. For the last few days the wind had been lighter; I realized that my estimate of eight days was below the mark. I kept the chart to myself. Crowell steadfastly refused water. Poor chap—the light in his eyes became unearthly, and his cheeks flamed with a high fever. But the men were in a worse way. Their tongues turned black, their lips dried and bled. A spoonful of water a day weighed as nothing to throats burned by liquor, to bodies sick with corruption.

"My own strength surprised me. I hadn't slept since we entered the boat, had hardly dropped the steering car. I didn't sleep until we got in. I had to be on the watch—had to save them in spite of themselves. The spirit kept us two alive—the element forever unfathomable, the one reality in a life of illusion. Few men know what their souls can do.

"I watched the dog, too, ready to shoot him if he went mad. But he stood the thirst without a whimper. Crowell continued to give him a portion of the water; the men insisted on it. He ate little food.

"In the night of the fifth day, I heard an unusual sound. A man was moving. He'd stumbled over something in the waist of the boat. He was coming aft. His attempt at stealthiness was pathetic. I heard him heave a deep sigh.

" 'Stop, or I'll shoot!' I cried.

"A deep roar interrupted me. I saw the bulk of the dog rise at my feet. It was the first time I'd ever heard his voice. The man yelled, and fell with a thud. Something dropped from his hand and clattered on the bottom. The yelling went on. 'Take him off! He's got me down!'

"It proved to be Harry again. No doubt there was a plan—I didn't investigate. Crowell got the dog aft, and the uproar subsided. The man wasn't hurt. I let the night go by, and half the next day, before I judged that the lesson had sunk in. Then I spoke to them.

" 'You see how it is,' I said. 'There are things here that we don't understand. I wasn't asleep. I would have shot you, Harry, if the dog hadn't interfered. Sit tight, take your medicine, and something will pull us through.'

"Then I threw overboard the knife that Crowell had picked up in the stern sheets the night before.

"The day came when the water was gone. We had been in the boat a week, and were still five hundred miles from Tahiti. The thirst consumed us; it gnawed our vitals, it drank up our blood. We sat in our places, and looked dully into the bottom of the boat. We avoided each other's eyes now, afraid of the wildness there. The sun was terrible. My body felt dry, parched, granular, like meal. Long before, we'd broached the liquid provisions, but they'd only increased the thirst. Crowell, it seemed to me, was nearly done for. Unknown to the men, I'd saved a drop of water. I told him of it, and begged him to drink it in the night. He made his lips into a firm 'No!' I could have shaken him.

" 'You fool!' I whispered. 'Who knows? Who cares?'

"He jerked his head astern. 'The old man.' His chin sank on his breast, his eyes closed; he was exploring deep places. 'God. My mother,' he said suddenly. I hadn't realized how completely right he was. He'd left me no answer. For a while I thought of his mother. She and my mother were neighbors at home.

"No rain fell. You might hunt for years through the trade winds for such weather. The breeze was sweet and warm; soft clouds floated above us in a serene and tender sky. The sea grew smooth; it danced and sparkled in the track of the sun; it lapped the side, it swayed the boat with a gentle motion, with caressing hands. The whole world mocked us—a speck on a vast, sunlit ocean, a company of silent and passive mortals dying of thirst, out of sight and out of sound. It was a joke, a ridiculous thing. Hurry up—get along there! chuckled the waves. What, all this for a little water! laughed the Pacific. Man, man, where is your boast? taunted the sky. Can't you see the second mate's boat, passing you to starboard? They have plenty of water. Stand up! Aren't you tall enough? I can see it very plain. The second mate reached Tahiti four hours ahead of us. We made the land within a quarter of a mile of each other, and sailed into the same cove.

"On the morning of the eighth day, young Crowell began to talk wildly. I saw that he'd lost his mind."

CHAPTER V.

WHAT THIRST MEANS.

Captain Gordon paused, and regarded the spring at his feet. "Water!" he said, in a tone of reverence. "Fresh water! Do you think you know what it means? You have been thirsty, never so thirsty in your life, dead with thirst? Ha!—just words. There's always water within reach. The land runs with it. See—it spouts out of the ground at your feet. *Thirst!* The truth lies so far beyond, that there are no words for it, no symbols in the language of man to express it, and no human experience to compare it with. Only a few of us know how really thirsty a man can get, before he dies.

"I know. Death was upon me. It sank in hour by hour, searing and grinding my body in a grasp of fire. It probed my bowels, it reached for my soul—the slowest and most awful torture that hell could have in store. That thirst! Under the stress of it, I changed. My center shifted; I lost sight of the world of my life. I sloughed my entity. A mist enveloped me, taking the place of consciousness. Through this veil only a few thoughts, a few memories penetrated. They penetrated slowly, fitfully; they seemed to come from a long distance, like watery rays through a break in the clouds; they came and went, passed and repassed from the world to my being, keeping their channels open. The ship, my charge, a few scenes of home—and thirst, always thirst, the keen blade that was wearing my life away.

"I steered west and by north. Crowell lay at my feet, curled up beside the dog. They seldom moved. The men had fallen into strange positions; they drooped against the thwarts and the sides of the boat, their arms trailed over the gunwales, their heads bowed and nodded. Now and then one of them turned wearily, and looked at me. He looked at me out of cadaverous eyes, out of a lean and bony countenance lit by the fires of thirst—a countenance that had lost its human cast, and resembled something between a horse and a dog. During those last days we couldn't eat. We were too weak to move about, too weak to change the positions of our legs. We sat like a crew of scarecrows, like bodies without bones. We sat in a fantastic silence, as if enjoying the scene, as if too full for words. I steered west and by north, repeating the course to myself in a loud whisper. No rain fell.

"Then I remembered this spring. I remembered the day that I'd found it—the sky so like the sky above me, the sea so like the sea below. I remembered this pine tree, the cool shadow of it. I remembered the clear water, and the sound it made. I knew that it was still running. I went to it, and bathed my face. I drank. I drank deep, the coolness drenched me, the joy and peace sank into my soul. I plunged, I immersed myself, my body sucked the water of life—— Then I awoke. Oh, God, such an awakening!

"One of those nights, a man began screaming. The sound shattered my vision, awoke every tingling nerve. I shrieked, as if in answer: 'Stop that noise! Stop that noise!' The screaming went on. It held to one note, steady and high. I was desperate—tried to crawl forward, but fell back, exhausted. I was going to kill him. All night he screamed at intervals. In the morning he was dead. He lay across the midship thwart like a sack of meal. There he stayed—we were too weak to throw him overboard.

"That morning, young Crowell lifted his head and looked at me. 'Mosman's Grove,' he said distinctly. You know the place. Perhaps the greatest event of his life had come to him there. Or perhaps the least—perhaps he'd walked through it some bright day, and registered an impression more lasting than all the crowded memories of the years.

"During the forenoon, another man gave up the fight. I was looking in his face when I saw the change. He gasped, something passed, and his body sank into the bottom inch by inch as the boat tossed on the little waves.

CHAPTER VI.

THE NAVIGATING ANGEL.

"On the thirteenth day—I'd lost count, but they told me later—after I'd taken the time in the morning, I passed into a stupor. The thirst seemed to have let up its grip on my vitals. I drifted off—but must have kept on steering. Something steered for me, something which I would call my Navigating Angel. At noon, it tapped me on the shoulder. 'Get a sight—get a sight!' it said. I found my sextant, and screwed down the sun. I worked the observation. I spread the chart, and pricked off our position. I didn't make a mistake. The figures came, and were put down.

"What I failed to do, was to notice how near Tahiti I had pricked us off. I made the mark, a dot and a circle, rolled up the chart, and put it away under the seat. The island itself must have been in plain sight then.

"In the early afternoon, a movement at my feet roused me. Crowell had pulled himself to a sitting position. I remember a trace of surprise—he hadn't moved for a day and a night, and I thought that he'd gone. He sat still a moment; then turned with a start, as if he'd been called. Scanning the horizon briskly, he raised his hand with a jerk. 'Why, there's the island,' he said, and sank back beside the dog.

"I looked, but my eyes were filmed over. Then the Navigating Angel at my elbow, that hovering, watchful shape, told me to look again. I sat up—and suddenly the shape came and melted into me, and I became myself for a brief instant, awake, conscious, alive. I saw the land. I saw a white beach, and a green mountain floating in the sky. I saw a boat close by. A voice reached my ears:

"'Boat ahoy! Mr. Gordon! You're all right now!'

"They told me that I sat in the stern like a wooden image, and refused to give up the oar. They had to loosen my fingers—it didn't take much of an effort. But I remember nothing more. It was weeks afterward when I first heard the rustling of the palms above my head, and knew that we'd been saved.

"Yes," said Captain Gordon, "Crowell lived. He was up before any of us. He had youth and the undying spirit at his command. They all lived, all that came in alive. There were four corpses when they got the whaleboat to land. The dog lived, too. Of course, he was the hero of the exploit. But I couldn't get over my aversion for him. Crowell took him; he lived to be a very old dog. Crowell, wise young fellow, went into steam, served his time on the sea, and now has a shore position with his company. That experience finished him with sailing ships.

"And I lived. I am here. This is the spring I saw in a dream. This is the water of life I drank. This is the tree that overshadowed me. It's gone on growing, this pine—and so have I. Time, and the slow, immeasurable forces, and death! Do I look like a man who's sounded the depths of the worst fate that life can decree? Was I ever as thirsty as that? Or is it all a dream?"

Rolling Ole

By A. M. Chisholm

Author of "The Winning Game," "Precious Water," Etc.

Take the genial Mr. Donovan's summing up of the life history of Ole Swenstrom: "He's a plain boob. Don't have no ambition. Saves his money, goes back home and buys a farm and cows, gets married and works and eats and sleeps and dies. Don't have no fun." A very gray existence indeed, according to the genial Mr. Donovan, and he decided to step in and alter Ole's program a bit. He changed it, but not in the way he expected.

ABOUT half past four o'clock of a late September afternoon, the attention of Mr. William Donovan, who ran the Delta Saloon in High Bend, was attracted to a stranger within his gates. There were two unfailing means of attracting Mr. Donovan's attention: One was to "start something," and the other was to exhibit money in quantity. In the first case, he met whatever started almost before it attained its initial velocity. In the second, he endeavored to acquire the money himself, because that was why he was in business.

Mr. Donovan, as he himself admitted, was strictly "on the make." He prided himself upon the fact that he overlooked no bets. He was not running the Delta for his health; but his health showed no signs of breaking down under the stress of his calling. He was big and beefy, but muscular and quick withal, and his best asset was the assumption of a rollicking geniality with the rough customers who patronized his house. If a man had money and would spend it, Mr. Donovan went in with him with the greatest apparent abandonment, and had a time, too. If, on the contrary, a man had money which he was disinclined to spend, Mr. Donovan endeavored to point the way to paths of prodigality, and if he failed he had recourse to other methods, risky but effective.

In the present case the stranger aforesaid had exhibited no money in quantity, nor had he evidenced any desire to add touches of carmine to the intramural and somewhat fly-specked decorations of the Delta. He had not at all sought to attract attention to himself. On the contrary, his demeanor had been orderly and quiet to the point of self-effacement. He had drifted into the Delta and into a chair, from which he had arisen to buy solitary drinks at half-hour intervals. Between drinks, he had smoked steadily, staring with calm eyes at the opposite wall. In the bunk house, which was run as an annex to the Delta, reposed a battered "telescope" valise, which presumably held his personal belongings. Like its owner, there was nothing noteworthy about it.

Now, in the neighborhood of half past four o'clock, this stranger arose from his chair and approached Mr. Donovan, who happened to be behind the bar. Donovan, seeing him coming, with the intuition of long experience, reached back, and, without the assistance of his eyes, selected with an unerring right hand a plain glass bottle filled with a reddish liquid, termed by courtesy rye, which tasted like a hot file and taken in quantity combined in handy form the effects of mal de mer with those of a clumsily wielded sandbag. With his left hand, likewise unaided by his eyes, Mr. Donovan produced a glass. The bottle and glass he shoved together and forward on the bar, eying the approaching man with professional ennui.

The customer was a man of thirty, strongly if clumsily built, with a quantity of fair hair and a pair of wistful, dreamy blue eyes which held something of bovine calm and stupidity. His clothes were rough and frayed with hard service. On his head was a battered hat of soft, black felt. His coarse tweed trousers were shoved into the tops of boots with broken laces. He walked somewhat heavily with the springless, inelastic step of the man whose muscles have been stiffened by years of hard work. Reaching into his trousers pocket, he produced a two-bit piece, which he laid upon the bar and proceeded to pour himself a modest drink.

It was a very modest drink, indeed. Even Mr. Donovan, intolerant of gentlemen who appeared unable to appreciate the fundamental distinction between a drink and a deluge, could find no fault with it. The entire fluid contents of that bottle had cost Mr. Donovan less than thirty cents. The proportion of the contents poured out by the stranger was about one-thirtieth of the contents. Mr. Donovan's ordinary tariff was two drinks for two bits, which is a very fair commercial profit. But in the present case, having received a two-bit piece, or twenty-five cents, he neglected to make change. Absent-mindedly, he set the bottle back in its appointed place, rinsed the glass in a bucket of dirty water, and set it to drain and dry itself and lit a cigar. He refused to notice the plain interrogation in the blue eyes.

"How mooch you charge for dreenks here, meester?" their owner inquired finally.

"Hey?" Mr. Donovan demanded truculently. "Drinks! Two for two bits. Fifteen cents for one."

"Vell," said the other mildly but steadily, "Ay gif you two bits, meester, and Ay got one dreenk."

"Thought you asked me to have a cigar," said Donovan, who possessed considerable adaptability on occasion, and he set forth the bottle again. "Have one on me."

The other apparently accepted this explanation at par, and poured himself a second modest drink. " 'S a go, meester!" he said courteously, and imbibed it neat without even the suspicion of a shudder, a feat which did not escape Mr. Donovan's experienced eye.

"Have I ever saw you before?" he inquired. "What's your name?"

"Ay ban here two year ago," the other replied. "My name ban Ole Swenstrom."

"Lookin' for a job?" Donovan queried idly.

"No," Swenstrom replied, "Ay ent look for no yob. Ay quit the yob Ay have."

"Belong to the I. W. W.'s, hey!" said Donovan. "All right, Swede. If you won't work, nobody wants you to. Only if you can live without it you're luckier than me."

"Ay work hard since Ay coom to dees country," Swenstrom returned. "Ay mek gude money, you betcher life. Ay ban gude axman, and Ay ban gude rockman Ay ent blow my money. Ay got him all saved Now Ay tenk mebbe Ay skal take leetle holiday."

"You've come to the right place," Donovan assured him enthusiastically. "Funny how things happen, ain't it? I'm feelin' like a little time myself. I'm just the duck can show you one. Have another little drink on me."

"Ay tenk Ay smoke dees time," Swenstrom returned. He lit a long, malodorous roll of leaves, and puffed contentedly. "Dees ban gude cigar, meester."

"That's a special. I have 'em made for me and me friends," said Donovan. The atrocities in question cost him twenty-five dollars a thousand at ninety days, and such value as they contained was principally in the box and the bands. As an insecticide, they might have been useful to a poultryman; but as a smoke they were a crime and a sacrilege. "I only hand 'em out to men like you that know a good cigar. You don't get tobacco like that back in the woods. Who did you say you was workin' for last?"

"Ay work last by Walsh & Foley," Ole answered. "She ban rock work. Ay mek gude money on that yob. Ay tenk now Ay tek holiday."

"Sure! It's comin' to you," Donovan agreed. "A little fun hurts no man. You can have 'most any sort you want right here. I'll show it to you."

"Ay tenk mebbe," said Swenstrom hesitatingly, "Ay skal go back to Sweden. Ay tenk mebbe Ay skal buy me dere a farm. And cows."

"Aw, forget it!" Donovan exclaimed, in disgust. "What does a rockman want with a farm and cows—'specially in Sweden? You ain't got a girl there, have you?"

"Vell," Swenstrom admitted modestly, "me and Hedwig Larsen we used to sit up purty late by each other."

"Huh!" Donovan snorted, "I s'pose she's one of them dames that wears her hair in a braid and her corsets outside her clothes like they do in them parts. I seen 'em once, ringin' bells. Take it from me, Ole, if you was to go back there and see her now after bein' used to the girls in this country; you'd holler for help. You sure would. They couldn't back you into the double harness with no such dresser. I can see in a minute that you're an up-to-date boy, and I can show you girls right here that's got this Hedwig baby with both shoulders to the mat. Why, how long is it since you was back among them Swiss in Sweden?"

"Ay tenk mebbe ten years," Swenstrom replied.

"Well, there it is, you see," Donovan continued. "Anything can happen in ten years. I had a friend, and he wasn't a Swede because his name was Dempsey, and he come from a little dump they call Mallorytown 'way back East. And Dempsey had a girl there, and he was forever talkin' about the he-old time that was waitin' for him in the old town whenever he should make up his mind for a flash at it. ''Course I ain't corresponded with this girl none for some years,' says Dempsey; 'but take it from me she's a peach and I can have her any time I go back. But 'tain't so much the girls I'm thinking of as the old gang of boys. They'll surely meet me with a bar'l and a brass band.'"

Mr. Donovan paused and regarded Swenstrom, who was listening attentively. "That's what Dempsey thought," he continued, "and when he fin'lly goes East and comes back, I asks him how's Mallorytown and all them old boys and girls.

"'Aw, forget Mallorytown,' says Dempsey. 'I don't spend no time there. Most of the time I'm in Chicago.'

"And then Dempsey tells me about the few hours he spends in Mallorytown. He wires ahead to one of the old bunch, but when the train pulls in, there ain't no one at the station but a second growth of young loafers that's sprung up since he come West. So he walks up from the station along Main Street, wonderin' where all the people's got to, 'cause that street as he remembers it is crowded, and about halfway he meets up with a feller in a big hurry.

"'Excuse me,' says Dempsey, 'but ain't you Art Hopkins?'

"'I am *Mister* Hopkins,' says the feller. 'What can I do for you?'

"'I'm Steve Dempsey,' says Dempsey, grinnin' all over his face. 'Art, old sox, how're they comin'?'

"'I heard you was dead,' says Hopkins, and he don't gush to speak of.

"'I'm the livest you ever seen,' says Dempsey. 'Let's go down to Bud's and have a drink. I s'pose he's still at the old stand?'

"'Sheriff's sale a month ago,' says Hopkins. 'I belong to the bar, and I never drink in the daytime."

"'I s'pose you have to go easy on the stuff, handlin' it so much,' says Dempsey. 'Where you tendin' bar? At the old Commercial?'

"And he said he thought Hopkins would of punched him.

"'I belong to the law bar,' says Hopkins. 'I'm a lawyer now.'

" 'Out our way they drink in the daytime,' says Dempsey.

" 'I don't,' says Hopkins. 'It's a case of infra dig.'

" 'Oh, well, I s'pose them stomach troubles make a man careful,' says Dempsey.

"But Hopkins quit him and he went on, and he seen a sign, 'J. Collingwood Barton, Real Estate.' And he goes in, and there's Barton, who was one of the old wild bunch, sittin' at a roll-top desk.

" 'I have come to inquire,' says Dempsey, 'if that sign outside belongs to the Jake Barton I used to know 'bout ten years back. I'm Steve Dempsey.'

" 'Dear me!' says Barton, 'I wouldn't have known you, Stephen!'

" 'Shut up that desk and come and have a drink,' says Dempsey. 'I don't come home every day, and I want to celebrate.'

" 'I never drink,' says Barton. 'I hope the habit has no hold on you, Stephen.'

" 'Don't look like it would get a chance for a hold in this town now,' says Dempsey. 'What's the matter with all you old-time sports? You used to down it like the rest of us.'

" 'I seen my mistake in time,' says Barton. 'I ain't had a drink since I got religion.'

" 'Since you got *what?*' says Dempsey.

" 'Religion,' says Barton.

" 'I thought your sign said "Real Estate," ' says Dempsey.

" 'So it does; but what's that got to do with it?' asks Barton.

" 'Oh, nothin',' says Dempsey. 'I do a little real-estate business myself, out West.'

" 'Don't you have religion out West?' says Barton.

" 'All kinds of it,' says Dempsey. 'We got religions no end. We got 'em from Methodists to Mormons. Why, we had a sky pilot tendin' bar in High Bend one time. Only the religions we got out there don't stop a man from a drink when he needs it.'

"However, he can't do nothin' with Barton, so he says good-by, and on the street he runs into another man he used to know, and this man is sure lookin' sick and mis'rable.

" 'Surely,' says Dempsey, 'I'm gazin' into the face of my old tillikum, Wally Jackson?'

" 'I'm Jackson,' says the feller, 'and you're bigger than me, but I don't allow no man to call me no tillikum—whatever that is.'

" 'Tillikum is Chinook for friend, pal, side-kicker,' Dempsey explains. 'I'm Steve Dempsey, and I'm dyin' of thirst. For the love of Mike, Wally, let's you and me go and have a drink, for old times' sake.'

" 'Not me,' says Jackson.

" 'Holy Mackinaw!' bawls Dempsey. 'Have you got religion, too?'

" 'I got a hobnailed liver, which is worse,' says Jackson. 'Also, I got symptoms of Bright's disease.'

" 'Come and have a cigar,' says Dempsey.

" 'I ain't smoked since a year after I was married,' says Jackson. 'My heart ain't in good shape, and I got asthmy, too. Besides, my wife don't like the smell of it.'

" 'Married, are you?' says Dempsey. 'Did you marry one of the girls here?'

" 'Maisie Upjohn,' says Jackson. 'You used to know her a little, didn't you?'

" 'Lemme see,' says Dempsey, but sorter weak, for that was the girl he had spoke of to me, and her and him had been pretty thick. 'Yes, I think I remember her now. Red hair. Daughter of old Bill Upjohn, the cheese buyer.'

" 'That's her,' says Jackson.

" 'Any kids?' asks Dempsey.

" 'Seven—at present,' says Jackson.

" 'Oh!' says Dempsey, sorter stupid. 'Boys or girls?'

" 'Mixed hand,' says Jackson.

" 'Yes, o' course they would be,' says Dempsey. ' 'Couldn't expect straights, o' course. All doin' well?'

" 'Fair,' Jackson answers. 'Two's got a touch of the measles, and the baby's got the whoopin' cough, and Sam—that's the oldest boy—he fell out of a tree last week and broke his arm. And

Maisie herself ain't very strong right now, or I'd ask you to dinner. But on the whole we're a toler'ble healthy family.'

" 'By gosh,' says Dempsey, 'if I was you, Jackson, I'd come along and have two drinks!'

" 'I ain't got time,' says Jackson. 'I got to be examined for more insurance, and I'm late now.' "

Having reached this climax of his narrative, Mr. Donovan paused, and regarded the solemnly attentive countenance of Ole Swenstrom.

"Dees Yackson," asked the latter, "does he get dees insurance?"

"Oh, rats!" said Donovan, in disgust, "you must be part English. I'm tellin' you about Dempsey, ain't I? Here it is, Ole: You see, he goes home thinkin' he'll find it just like it used to was, and he finds it all on the hog. Same way with Sweden—and then some. You'll go back there, and it'll be all diff'rent. Bet you Hedwig's married right now, and she don't want you buttin' in. There's better girls right here. A good-lookin' feller like you, with money saved up—why, you can take your pick of the bunch. All you want is some one to show you. Forget that Sweden thing. There's a good time due you. I been a workin' man myself, and I know. Yes, sir! Many's the month I swung an ax and dragged a saw for my thirty per and grub. You bet I know how you feel! You just stick round and I'll show you some fun."

But Ole Swenstrom shook his head slowly, the light of the heimweh in his blue eyes.

"Ay don't know," he said. "She's purty gude place, Sweden. Ay tenk Ay skal go back dere, mebbe."

Further arguments, both verbal and liquid, broke against the baffleplates of his Scandinavian determination. To vivid word pictures of the pleasures of High Bend he opposed the vision of Hedwig Larsen—and cows. He mingled drinks and cigars skillfully, and finally resumed his chair; where, shortly afterward, he was pointed out to a slight, dark, keen-eyed gentleman named Wheeler, who was accustomed to assist Mr. Donovan in games wherefrom the element of chance was carefully expunged.

"See that Swede over there in the chair?" said Mr. Donovan.

Instead of turning in the direction indicated, the experienced Mr. Wheeler obtained his view from the reflection in the bar mirror. "Him with the Hereford face?" he asked, having spent some years of a checkered existence in a cow country.

"That's him," said Mr. Donovan. "He's a rockman. Been workin' for Walsh & Foley. He's quit with a roll."

"On his clothes?" asked Mr. Wheeler practically.

"I ain't got a flash at it yet," Donovan admitted. "He digs up two bits at a time; but I guess he's got it cached in his jeans somewheres. He thinks he's goin' to take the boat out to-morrow. He talks of goin' back to Sweden."

"With a roll!" Mr. Wheeler commented. "I guess *not!* The idea of takin' good money out of the country—to Sweden! It's against the extradition laws."

"Sure it is," said Donovan. "Well, I don't want to just plain roll him. He's the kind 'd make an awful roar."

"Start a game," Wheeler suggested.

"Dunno's he'd come in," Donovan informed him. "Don't seem to have no sportin' blood. Claims he don't play cards much."

"I don't like them kind," said Mr. Wheeler, with deep mistrust. "They're apt as not to break up a game with a cold deck. Gimme a wise guy for a boob, every time."

"Oh, he's plain boob," Donovan assured him. "Only trouble is he's a slow-boy. Don't have no ambition. Saves his money, goes back home, and buys a farm and cows, and gets married, and works and eats and sleeps and dies. Don't have no fun. You know that kind. Like a horse—only they ain't got all the legs. They won't take a chance."

"They don't have to," said Mr. Wheeler. "That's what sure things was made for. Lemme see. I guess I'll go over and get acquainted. Drop along after a while."

Mr. Wheeler's method of getting acquainted was peculiar. With a slightly unsteady gait, he crossed the room to a card table near Swenstrom, and began to play solitaire. He failed, however, to attract Ole's attention. The latter sat immovable, pulling at a worn pipe. Mr. Wheeler made an almost imperceptible signal to Mr. Donovan. The latter strolled over to the table. For a moment he watched the run of cards.

"Darned if I see how a man can get any fun out of beatin' himself," he remarked presently.

Mr. Wheeler looked up, as if just aware of his presence.

"There's a lot in solitaire," he observed.

"A lot of cards!" Mr. Donovan agreed. "It's a cheap game."

"Is that so?" said Mr. Wheeler, in tones of offense. "Well, I play it because I like it, and not because it's cheap. Get me?"

"Oh, sure!" said Mr. Donovan. "Comin' down to cases, you ain't got no license to play cards at all. You ain't got card savvy. Solitaire's your game, all right, and I don't blame you."

Mr. Wheeler eyed him balefully. "Oh, I don't know," he said. "I might fool you. I ain't locked down to solitaire. And then, Donovan, you ain't such a card wizard yourself. Couple of weeks ago I saw you tryin' to pick the jack, and it cost you real money."

"It didn't cost *you* none, I noticed," Donovan retorted.

"That'll be all right," said Mr. Wheeler, with dignity. "You think I ain't got card savvy, hey? Now, I can fool you on that game myself."

"I like to hear you talk," said Donovan. "Why, a blind man could pick the jack on you."

"Five dollars says *you* can't," Mr. Wheeler challenged.

"I don't want your money."

"Since when?" sneered Mr. Wheeler. "Looks to me like I ain't the only one stuck on cheap games."

"Oh, well," said Mr. Donovan, drawing a roll of bills from his pocket, "I guess I'll have to call you. Let Swenstrom here hold the stakes. He's a friend of mine."

Mr. Wheeler's expression seemed to say that this was a very doubtful recommendation, but nevertheless he matched Donovan's bill with another. Ole Swenstrom, roused from bovine contemplation by the insertion of real money in his hand, gazed at them inquiringly.

"You faller mek bet?" he asked; and, being informed of the nature of the wager, drew up his chair for a nearer view.

With a few crude preliminary passes, Wheeler threw the three cards. Donovan picked the jack unerringly, and laughed.

"Easy!" he chuckled. "You would have it this way."

"Luck!" Wheeler rejoined sourly. "You just shut your eyes and stabbed. You can't do it again for the same money."

"This is the best-paying job I ever had," said Donovan. And he picked the jack again. "Quit it, Wheeler," he advised. "You ain't cut out for a card sharp. Anybody can get to you. Swenstrom can pick the jack easy as I can, can't you, Ole?"

"Ay don't know," Ole responded doubtfully. "Meester Veeler he's purty kveek. Ay tenk Ay know vich ban de yack, but mebbe Ay don't."

"I'll bet you don't," said Wheeler.

"Well, I'll bet he does," Donovan put in. "Come on, now! Five dollars says Ole can pick the jack two out of three."

Wheeler took him up at once. And Ole made it three straight and grinned.

"Ay bet you now feefty cents Ay pick him!" he challenged boldly.

"What will you do with it all if you win?" asked Wheeler. "Fifty cents! Go and play marbles with yourself, Sweden!"

"Vell," said Ole largely, "Ay make him a dollar."

Wheeler threw the cards in a heap, and rose. "I quit playing for matches years ago, Swede."

"Vell, meester," said Ole Swenstrom, after an obvious internal struggle, "Ay tenk you ban purty easy, and so Ay bet you five dollars!"

Donovan laughed. Wheeler sat down and picked up the cards. And when the three were thrown on the table Ole Swenstrom turned up the jack with knobby fingers.

"You ain't won once, Wheeler," Donovan reminded him. "Quit and have a drink."

"These cards are marked or something!" snarled Wheeler.

"You make another break like that and there'll be more than the cards marked," Donovan warned him. "Marked! You're the mark, yourself."

"Ay bet five dollars again," Ole announced grandly.

"I'm twenty in the hole," said Wheeler savagely. "I'll just go twenty-five on one throw with you, Donovan, or you, Swede."

"Not with me," said Donovan. "I'm through. You can have the money back, if you like. You're a poor loser, Wheeler."

"Ay bet you," said Ole, a greedy light in his blue eyes, "Ay pick dat yack every time, now."

"Like to make it fifty?" Wheeler asked.

"Yaas," Ole assented. "Ay win him just so easy as twenty-five."

He did win, and Wheeler raged finely. Rising, the latter walked to the bar for a fresh supply of matches.

"You got the eye, old man," said Donovan admiringly to Ole. "It ain't every one can pick the jack steady. He ain't got a chance in the world with you. He's mad clean through, and willing to bet his head off." Picking up the jack, he bent back a corner slightly. "Say, if he comes at you for a big bet, take him up. See this corner! You can't miss it when it lies flat on the table. Take him up. Skin him of his wad. So much more to buy a farm in Sweden with. He's got plenty of money, only he hates to lose it. Go to him, and bust him!"

Wheeler's return interrupted his flow of advice. And Wheeler, as his actions had already indicated, was one of those sanguine individuals who seek to "bull" their luck.

"Well, Swede," he said, "you got to me for fifty-five. I s'pose you figure I'm as easy picking as a scalded rooster, hey?"

"You ban purty easy, Meester Veeler," Ole Swenstrom responded, with a friendly grin.

"Oh, I am, am I?" Wheeler returned. "Now, I'll tell you what I'll do: I'll just throw these cards once for any sum you like to name. How strong are you, anyhow? I'll throw 'em once for any part of five hundred."

"Ay tenk Ay don't bet," said Ole.

"Ain't you got the money?"

"Yaas," Ole replied, "Ay ban got her, but Ay ent bet her."

"I thought I heard you say you could pick the jack on me every time."

"So he can," Donovan maintained, and nudged Ole covertly with his knee, indicating with a glance the card with the turned corner.

"Ay tenk if Ay bet five hundred dollars Ay lose, mebbe," said Ole Swenstrom sagely.

"You can't lose!" whispered Donovan swiftly. "Take him up. Take him up quick before he backs down! See how the corner sticks up. I'll tell you which it is if you can't see it. Go after him and get his money!"

"Ay tenk not," said Ole. "You bet him!"

At which vicarious suggestion Mr. Donovan exchanged glances in disgust with Mr. Wheeler, on whose knee, beneath the table, reposed a card with one corner carefully turned up—which was not a jack.

"I'd like to, but there's reasons why I can't," Donovan whispered again. "Running this place, it wouldn't do for me to win a bunch like that. Somebody'd say it was crooked. You got no idea the knockers they is in this town. I got to be careful of my reputation. Now you can win and beat it out on the downriver boat in the morning, and go home to Sweden with the money, and you don't care." And he added aloud: "He'll go you."

"Ay ent bet," Ole repeated.

"Five hundred dollars!" Donovan urged desperately. "Think of it both ways and backward. When you show it to 'em in Sweden they'll make you king. Think how you can doll the girl up. And cows! Why, say, you can buy 'em with self-starters on their milk tanks! Look at the corner of the card! Get it in your eye! It's a pipe! You can't lose! Go to him, Ole, and skin him and hang his hide on the barn!"

"Talk right out in meetin'," said Wheeler suspiciously, as Ole apparently paid no attention to this advice. "I don't like whispers 'round where I am. You let him alone, Donovan. If he wants to bet what business is it of yours? He's got fifty-five dollars of mine, and you got fifteen. Come on, Swede, if you got any sportin' blood at all. Not that I ever seen a Swede that had."

"Ay ent bet," said Ole once more.

"You got cold feet!" sneered Wheeler. "Ain't you goin' to gimme a chance to win my money back? You're scared to take a chance for fear your luck don't hold!" And, so saying, Mr. Wheeler struck the table with his left hand, while his right deftly substituted the card from his knee for the jack on the table. "What do you want? Why, you poor sport, I'll bet you a thousand to five hundred!"

"A thousand!" breathed Mr. Donovan, in a tense whisper. "Oh, how I wisht I was in your place! A thousand that easy! Just for pickin' the jack with the corner! It'd take you ten years to save up that much money. Grab it now!"

"Ay tenk not," said Ole Swenstrom, with finality. "An ban winner feefty-five dollars. Ay tenk Ay quit winner. Ay tenk we have leetle drink now."

And ten minutes later Mr. Wheeler, in the privacy of a small room back of the bar, was expressing himself unreservedly to Mr. Donovan.

"Can you beat them Swedes?" he asked bitterly. "Gives it out cold he's goin' to quit winner. And he quit with fifty-five dollars of *mine!* That's up to you, Bill."

"Likely it is," Donovan negatived. "But we'll get his roll, just the same."

"How?" Wheeler asked practically. "You can't tell by the looks of a Swede what he's thinkin' about; but all the same I b'lieve this bird is *wise.*"

"Wise—nothing," said Donovan. "He just wasn't game enough to bet big money on one turn. We went after him a *leetle* too hard."

"Fifty-five dollars too hard," M. Wheeler agreed feelingly.

"Well," said Mr. Donovan, with resignation, "I guess I got to get him drunk. It's the only thing to do with them kind. Maybe I should have done it before. Stick 'round."

Other matters just then claimed his attention; but at the first opportunity he endeavored to make up for his negligence.

To get a man drunk, it is usually necessary to drink with him. Frequenters of the Delta just then were few, and this duty devolved upon Mr. Donovan, who undertook it with a confidence born of long experience. But unfortunately Ole Swenstrom appeared to possess an alcohol-proof lining. Mr. Donovan, drinking very small drinks himself with every appearance of abandoned good-fellowship, felt a premonitory tightness across his forehead before he could detect any alcoholic symptoms in the recipient of his polite attentions. And he spoke privily to an individual known as Pete, who had served him faithfully on other like occasions.

"Get this Swede drunk, but not too drunk," Donovan instructed, handing him a ten-dollar bill.

"How drunk?" asked the expert, who could follow instructions minutely, but possessed little imagination.

"A little better'n half," Donovan replied. "Get him to where he'll tell you what a wise bird he is and how he knowed more about the work than the boss. When a man gets tellin' how wise he is he's right at the foolish point and can't get no foolisher. And when he takes that edge keep him on it and let me know. And keep sober yourself, because I may want you."

It was over an hour before the agent sought his principal.

"I put a nice li'l' wire edge on him," he announced. "Got him talkin' jus' 's you tol' me. Whadju wan' me do now?"

"Didn't I tell you to keep sober?" said Donovan.

"Sure y' did," Pete admitted. "Also, you tells me t' get the Swede drunk. Which d'you want the worst? Ex—hic!—pect a man t' go in swimmin' 'n' keep dry? You wanna look at things reas'nable, Bill!"

"Well, don't take no more," said Donovan. "Go and get a sandwich and pickles and hot coffee inside you and come back." And, having prescribed these first aids, he sought Ole Swenstrom.

He found him draped across the bar, a cigar between gesticulating fingers, which he waved uncertainly and confidentially in the face of a patient bartender.

"Well, Ole," said Donovan, interrupting what seemed to be a rambling narrative, "havin' a good time?"

Ole turned upon him an owl-like stare, and fastened his right lapel in a mighty grip.

"You ban Meester Donovan," he announced, in recognition through the alcoholic fog. "You ban own dees ho-tel. Vell, she ban gude house. Now we have leetle dreenk. Mebbe Ay ban purty drunk, all right, but Ay got money. Ay mek gude money ven Ay vork. Mebbe Ay talk drunk, but Ay ent no fule. When Ay work by Walsh & Foley Ay ban gude rockman. Walsh & Foley's rock boss he ban dam fule. Ay ban tol' him——"

"Sure, sure!" Donovan interrupted. "I know him, and he's no good. You know more about rock work than him—'course you do. These drinks are on me. And now what are we going to do with the rest of the evenin'? We want to have some fun. What would you like to do?"

"Ay tenk we have moosic," said Ole. He fumbled in his pocket, and produced a mouth organ, which he cleared of tobacco dust and similar débris by slapping it against his leg; and, applying it to his mouth, drew forth a medley of sound which in parts bore a faint resemblance to "The Irish Washerwoman." "Ay play," he announced, thereby creating an intermission. "You dance."

"Fine!" exclaimed Donovan, "but I got a lame foot. That's grand music, Ole—better'n a orchestra. Little later, when some friends of mine come in, we'll have a swell dance. How about a little game just to pass the time till they come?"

"Ay play you checkers!" Ole offered.

"Well, now, that's one game I don't know," said Donovan. "Fine game, too, only I never had time to learn it. How about a quiet little game of draw—gentleman's game—just you and me and Wheeler and Pete?"

"Ay ent play cards mooch," Ole responded doubtfully. "Ay tenk better we sing."

"We'll do that later when we're dancin'," said Donovan patiently. "Just now we might as well win some more money off of Wheeler. Remember how you won off him a while ago? You and me will play together—sort of partners, only he won't know it—and we'll just naturally get all he has."

"If Ay win Ay buy cows," said Ole blissfully.

"Sure!" Donovan agreed. "You'll buy cows no end—the best bunch of cows in Sweden. The king will come to see them, and all the lords and dutches and duchesses and other high rollers. You'll be supplyin' cream delly cream to all the strawberry festivals in the palaces, and cold cream for the complexions of the maids of honor in the ladies' waiting room."

"Ay skal marry Lena Jensen," Ole announced.

"I thought it was Hedwig Larsen," said Donovan.

"Lena ban better milker as Hedwig," said Ole, with decision.

"You got a fine business head," Donovan agreed. "You'll be the biggest man in Sweden yet. I'll bet the king will want to make you a sir or a prince or something, 'specially if you put up liberal toward his election expenses. Maybe you'll get into Congress over there and be president of a milk trust and put a big tax on every cow that ain't yours. You want to have progressive ideas that way. And right here and now is where you're goin' to get your start."

"You ban gude faller, Meester Donovan," said Ole gratefully. "Some time you coom by Sweden you stop and see me!"

"Sure I will!" Donovan promised. "I was thinkin' of goin' over next year. I've always wanted to see them little European countries like Sweden and Dublin and Cairo. I seen the streets of Cairo in Chicago back in ninety-three, after the World's Fair people got moral and moved the show back onto about Sixty-second Street, and I guess the town itself's a hummer if the streets is like that."

"Sweden ban gude country," Ole stated.

"Fine for cows," said Donovan. "Let's go right now and win the price."

"First we have leetle drink," Ole suggested. "You ban fine faller. When Lena and me we have a boy, we call him Meester Donovan Swenstrom!"

Donovan swallowed this tribute and a very small drink with an ill grace, and led the way to a room off the bar devoted during the busy season to various games of alleged chance. Now, but one table was occupied by four or five men, who were playing a quiet game; while at another Wheeler riffled a deck abstractedly, and the faithful Pete, sobered by food and hot coffee, sat on the edge and dangled his legs.

"How mooch skal we skin Meester Veeler for?" asked Ole ingenuously, as they approached.

"For all he's got," Donovan replied. "You're buyin' cows with the winnin's, remember. When you get a good hand you want to bet on it. Wheeler will try to bluff you. Never lay down to him. Make him show his hand. You get what I mean?"

Wheeler and Pete, it appeared, were not anxious to play, but allowed themselves to be persuaded by Ole. The game began with a modest dollar limit, which gradually increased in magnitude on various pretexts advanced principally by Donovan. At first Ole won, then lost a little, and then won more. Several times Wheeler was called on the barest of bluffs and was forced to show his hand. Came a time when Wheeler, who had dealt, raised Ole, who had opened. Out dropped Donovan and Pete with charming unanimity, in obedience to a signal from Wheeler. All was in readiness. The patient was on the operating table. The woolly sheep and the head shearer were alone in the shed.

"A hand like this," said Wheeler, glancing at his cards, "it's a shame to hold in a little two-bit game. However, I'll just uplift her what she'll stand." And he did so.

"Ay ban hold purty good cards myself," said Ole. "Ay tenk mebbe you bluff again, meester, and so I raise you five."

"You're foolish, Swede," said Wheeler. "I give you warning. If you want to see this hand you'll have to go some. *And* five."

Ole came back manfully, and Wheeler swore impatiently.

"What's the use of foolin' along?" said he. "It's just you and me, Swede. Name what you want to bet on that hand of yours, and I'll meet you."

"Ay bet yust so much like you bet," Ole replied cautiously.

"I hate to name big money, because it scares you," said Wheeler. "I s'pose five hundred would send you up a tree like it done this afternoon?"

"Vell," said Ole Swenstrom, "she ban purty good hand, dees. But five hundred dollars ban big money."

"If you ain't afraid to bet it, put it up, and I'll cover it," said Wheeler. "Otherwise, I guess I take in what there is. No chips go. Put up the cash."

"Vell," said Ole once more, with exasperating deliberation, while Donovan and Wheeler hung on his decision, "Ay tenk you ban bluffing. Ay put him up." And he did so in very dirty and crumpled bills, which he produced from mysterious recesses of his garments.

Whereupon Wheeler, doing his best to conceal a cat-and-canary smile beneath an expression of doubt, made good with a like sum, the bulk of which was the property of Mr. Donovan.

"She ban my call," said Ole. "You show me what you ban bluff on."

"And here she is,' said Wheeler. "One, two, three, four little, old queens with the crowns. And I guess, Swede, they're about pretty enough to make you dream nights for a year." And he reached out an eager hand for the stakes.

"She ban gude hand, all right," said Ole; "but she ent gude enough, meester." And on the table he let fall—four kings!

For a moment the three shearers looked at the cards and at the honest, woolly, innocent sheep, and at each other in open-mouthed incredulity. It was unbelievable, monstrous, horrible! It was Frankenstein's monster over again. It was beyond their understanding, and now unfortunately beyond their control. Somewhere in the exceedingly simple mechanism of their calculations there had been a complete breakdown. They were silent; for just then, with others at an adjacent table, there was nothing to be said—at least, nothing adequate. And Ole Swenstrom gathered the money to him with a happy smile.

"Now," said he blissfully, "Ay skal buy them cows!"

Mr. Donovan, with a murderous glance at Wheeler, seized the cards and began to deal. But Ole Swenstrom shoved back his chair.

"Ay guess Ay ent play some more," he announced. "Ay tenk we have now leetle dreenk and some moosic."

"Aw, we'll play a round or two," said Donovan, struggling to command his feelings. "Why, we just got started. Come on! Maybe you'll win some more."

"Meester Veeler he ban purty gude faller," said Ole. "Ay ent want to win no more off of him. Ay ban gude winner now and Ay quit."

"That ain't no good sportin' way, Ole," said Donovan. "You want to give Wheeler a chance to get square. No gen'l'man quits the minute he gets ahead."

"Ay ent no gentleman," Ole replied contentedly. "Ay ban yust poor, drunk Swede lumberyack. You faliers keep right on and play. But if you coom by me Ay skal buy wine dreenk." Which argued a certain sophistication.

Because a continuation of the game under such circumstances would have been worse than "Hamlet" with the melancholy Dane left out, they drank the wine which he purchased. And Donovan whispered to his bartender:

"Keep an eye on that Swede. Don't let him get out of the house. If he starts anywhere, let me know," and, beckoning to Wheeler, he sought the back room. "Well," he said, as the door closed, "you sure made a holy mess now. On your deal, and you ram four little queens up agin' the male quartet! Are you crazy or drunk or what? If I thought you was standin' in to do me——"

"You know better," said Wheeler indignantly. "I deals him openers two jacks, a king o' hearts, and two spot cards. He draws three, so he upholds the jacks and sloughs the rest. On the draw he matches two more jacks and a ace. That's his hand."

"In the dream," said Donovan. "When you wake up his hand's four kings. The only thing you call right is the ace."

"I guess I know what I dealt," said Wheeler.

"And you know what he held," Donovan pointed out. "You *seen* them four kings win, didn't you?"

"Also, I seen what I dealt him," Wheeler persisted.

"Then how do you account for it?"

"I don't," Wheeler replied. "I tell you, I deals him eight cards, the same bein' four jacks, two spots, a heart king, and a club ace. On the show-down he's there with two cards I deals him—a king, ace—and three other kings I don't deal him."

"He don't hold no cards you don't deal him," said Donovan positively.

"If he don't, then I better go to playin' nations with Meth'dist fam'lies," said Mr. Wheeler, with equal conviction. "I tell you I *know* what I dealt. And what do you know about this here Swede, anyhow? You got him sized for a come-on, and he's into us now better'n five-fifty. It don't look good to me."

"You don't think he's a card sharp, do you?" asked Mr. Donovan, with contempt. "He's just a plain boob, and all he's got is the luck to hit the one time you dealt wrong."

"And the sense to quit winner," Mr. Wheeler added. "I didn't deal wrong. And you'll notice he quit ahead this afternoon, too. He's the best quitter I ever saw."

"In about an hour," said Mr. Donovan, "after I've shot a few more drinks into him, we'll hook him up into a game again and take his clothes."

"Not me," Mr. Wheeler asseverated. "I'm lucky to have my watch and my gold teeth. I tell you, Bill, he's a sharp, and we're the marks. I dunno how he done it, 'cause naturally I wasn't watchin' him very close, but he slipped himself a cold hand good enough to beat mine—and he held two of the cards I dealt him in it. That's *class.* Let him alone, or he'll own the house before morning."

"You're crazy!" said Donovan, who was a man of fixed ideas. "He's just a drunk Swede. Didn't you hear him talk about buyin' a farm and cows in Sweden?"

"Bunk!" Mr. Wheeler announced. "And, about his bein' drunk, you can't tell."

Mr. Donovan reflected. The weight of evidence supported his contention. But, on the other hand, he had never known Wheeler to fall down on a crooked deal; and the cold fact was that Ole Swenstrom had over five hundred dollars of his perfectly good money. He winced at the harrowing thought.

"Anyway," said he, "he'll never get away with it. I didn't want to just plain roll him, but now I got to. And what's more, if he hollers, I'll tap him on the head with a lead pipe. But I'm goin' to get him so drunk he wouldn't feel me if I wanted his appendix."

In which charitable resolution he returned to the bar where Ole Swenstrom was buying drinks freely, and apparently approaching that condition which immediately precedes collapse.

"Meester Donovan," said Ole, "you ban fine faller. You stop by me when you coom by Sweden. Ay show you all mine cow. Ay show you gude time, you betcher life! Ay ban purty drunk now, and Ay got too mooch money on me. You skal take gude care of him for me and Ay get him in the morning." He pulled a mighty roll of money from his pocket, and spread it on the bar. "Ay tenk we count him over now, so we know how mooch." Having done so aloud for all to hear, he crowded the bills into Mr. Donovan's unwilling hand. "Ay ban purty tired and purty drunk," he announced, with satisfaction. "She ban purty hard day. Ay tenk Ay go and sleep."

And later Mr. Donovan faced Mr. Wheeler across the crumpled sheaf of money with an expression such as might become a hungry old wolf who watches a fat turkey strut within an impregnable inclosure.

"Can you beat it?" he asked bitterly. "I went through him when he was asleep, and he ain't got nothing but dimes. 'Bout seven hundred strong, he was. And now he's twelve hundred and better—on my money!"

"Fifty-five of mine," Wheeler reminded him.

"Forget the fifty-five!" snapped Mr. Donovan. "And here she is right in front of us, and him dead to the world, and I'll have to cough up every blessed red when he asks for it in the morning. I dassent hold out a ten-dollar bill."

"You didn't give him no receipt," Mr. Wheeler suggested hopefully.

"He don't need one," said Mr. Donovan sorrowfully. "Too many men seen him give it to me and heard the count. I can't do a thing. When I seen him snoozin' back in the bunk house like a basket of pups, I wanted to bash in his head!"

"And we took him for a come-on!" breathed Mr. Wheeler. "Can't you be robbed of it? Put it in the safe and go to sleep, and in the morning it ain't there."

"Too old," Mr. Donovan negatived decisively. "Likewise, too raw. You can't get away with no such play. 'Course, I'd get the money, but everybody'd know it. And with the reputation I got already, I might as well move. I don't see nothin' for it but to stand the gaff."

And so in the morning when Ole Swenstrom, refreshed by a night's sleep and a hearty breakfast, applied for his money, he received it even to the last dollar.

"You ban gude faller, Meester Donovan," he said gratefully. "Some time you coom by Sweden, and I——"

"Choke it!" Donovan commanded. "You're lucky to be alive. You get away with it this time because you got me where I couldn't move. But let me tell you something: If I ever meet up with you again, I'll murder you!"

Ole Swenstrom regarded him with mild surprise.

"You ent ban feel so gude dees morning, Meester Donovan. Mebbe you dreenk too mooch with me last night."

"I oughta poisoned you!" Donovan growled. "Get outa here!"

Ole Swenstrom's shoulders lifted in a deprecating shrug, but he gathered up his battered "telescope" and departed without further speech in the direction of the boat landing. Whence, drawn by a strange magnetism, Mr. Donovan shortly followed just as the big stern wheel of the shallow-draft old tub began to churn the water in departure. From the fore deck Ole Swenstrom waved him a cheerfully forgiving farewell.

"So long, Meester Donovan!" he called. "Some time you coom by Sweden and Ay show you all de cows Ay buy with de money Ay win off of Meester Veeler!"

Donovan swore, and shook a mighty freckled fist; and, turning, found himself beside an acquaintance, a certain Jack Cronk.

"Who you wishin' on?" asked Cronk, as Mr. Donovan's vocabularly showed signs of wear and tear. And the latter extended an index finger unsteady with rage.

"That dish-faced Swede with the grip in his hand," he replied. "If I had him alone I'd kill him slow and painful. I dunno why I ain't done it, anyway."

Cronk, who had just disembarked from the boat, looked and laughed.

"That sport with the grip?" he said. "Why, Bill, that ain't no Swede. That's an Irishman."

"Ole Swenstrom his name is," said Mr. Donovan. "Sounds Irish, don't it —not?"

And Cronk haw-hawed noisily.

"Ole—nothing!" he said. "That's Paddy O'Connel. He used to be in Seattle till they run him out. He's about the smoothest you ever seen, and his imitation of a Swede lumberjack with a roll is the best thing he does."

❦

WANTED—A NEW BASEBALL RULE

WALTER JOHNSON was pitching for the Washington team, and Mr. Jennings, who was trying to pump optimism into his despairing players, sent up an ambitious young man to try to make a hit. He acted briefly. After swinging wildly at two of Johnson's offerings, he made a third wild swing, and, entirely by accident, popped up a little fly to first base.

As he loped down toward first, and was called out, he turned to Jennings, let out a stream of emphatic and picturesque language, and wound up with this observation:

"I'm a son of a gun if there oughtn't to be a rule making that guy hang lights on the ball!"

Jennings, who got his start in life as a miner, smiled grimly.

"Where do you think you're working," he asked softly, "in a coal mine?"

The Long Arm of the Little Boss

By W. W. Aulick

No political "little boss" this, but a little big fellow in the newspaper world. A brisk bit of excitement was in store for the staff when his musings brought him to his determination concerning his reporters: "I'll just teach these fellows a lesson. They're a good hard-working crew and I like them—but they mustn't let themselves be beaten. I won't make the lesson cost them any money, but it must serve as a warning."

AKRON, the little boss of the big sheet, ran a keen, if spectacled, eye over the front pages of the New York *Dial,* in which he had the controlling interest, and the New York *Wire,* in which he had an absorbing interest. After a first comprehensive glance, he carefully laid aside both papers and turned his attention to the grapefruit, the while humming softly and evilly the chorus of "Bobbing Up and Down."

At this correctly interpreted signal of mental distress, Mrs. Akron, at the coffee-urn end of the breakfast table, shuddered unmistakably and spilled several golden drops on the irreproachable morning cloth.

"Don't be cross with the boys to-day, Phil," pleaded the lady; "most of them are married, you know."

"I am willing to believe anything of them after to-day," admitted Akron, with which summing up he contented himself for the rest of the meal.

In the smart motor car which whirled him to the station, he sat staring straight ahead out of eyes that failed to realize the wonders of the young day, the sun and shade on the giant trees that groved the roadway, the cool, inviting lanes that ribboned up and down over the gentle hills, the wide and placid waters reaching out from the shelving shore, and dimpling into little hollows with the touch of the baby breeze. The only things that the little boss could see were the front pages of the *Dial* and the *Wire.*

When his train came along, he got a seat by himself and spread out the rival newspapers for an exhaustive comparison. As he did so, a neighbor across the aisle looked up and smiled. It was really a pleasant smile of greeting and good will, but the sensitive-souled Akron was sure it was called up by his earnest inspection of the two dailies.

"Giving me the laugh, is he?" growled Akron. "Wait till he wants me to print something about that fool local political organization of his!"

He read moodily until he had ascertained the extent of his injuries, then stared truculently out of the window until the conductor called out "New York!" He struck out briskly up the station steps, but another commuter caught up with him.

"See the *Wire* this morning?" asked the neighbor, whose attention had been caught by a timely and local cartoon.

"Never heard of it," said Akron coldly. "Where is it printed?"

His fellow commuter lost himself in the crowd. "That guy's plumb bug," he decided indignantly. "Next time I speak to him, I'll have the performance photographed for the 'Strange and Curious' column."

By the time the little boss reached his office, his mood, apparently, had changed. He was suavity itself. He passed through the entrance just as Nick Carter was knocking together the heads of four Italian counterfeiters, and politely, almost deferentially, greeted the young gentleman in the lookout's chair.

"Interested in the best sellers, eh, Sammy?" he called. "That's right. Familiarity with the literary masters is commendable. If you should happen to reach the end of the chapter within the next half hour, perhaps you would be so good as to ask Mr. Conroy if he can spare me five minutes."

Sammy and Nick disappeared simultaneously—and hurriedly. A distressed Mr. Conroy, city editor of the *Dial*, took their place. There were pleasant smiles and honeyed words for Mr. Conroy. How was Mr. Conroy this elegant, young morning? How was every little thing with Mr. Conroy? Mr. Conroy, if Mr. Akron might be pardoned for remarking it, did not look particularly fit this morning. Perhaps the indoor work, as city editor of the *Dial*, was too confining. If this should be the case, Mr. Akron would willingly adjust matters to Mr. Conroy's requirements. Mr. Conroy might, without loss of time, report for duty on the Harlem police assignment. This would give him a commission more or less roving, and the reverse of sedentary. Young Snoops, the incumbent of the Harlem detail, could come into the office as city editor. Mr. Akron bade Mr. Conroy a cheery good morning, adding the hope that the change might prove of much benefit to Mr. Conroy.

Conroy walked back to the city room in a daze. To Lansing, the news editor, he unfolded his grievance.

"Ain't it just like him?" he wailed. "Never once mentioned what it was all about, though, of course, I know it was because the *Wire* had the Gilman interview, declaring his candidacy, this morning, and we hadn't. That wasn't my fault, and it wasn't the fault of Grover, our political man. Gilman sneaked into town last night in an automobile, instead of by train, and sent for Dwyer, of the *Wire*, and gave him the story. You can't beat personal friendship, if you're the best newspaper man in the world. What makes me raw is putting that young idiot, Snoops, in my place. Why, he can't write his name!"

"Just doing it to humiliate you," said Lansing. "I guess I'll get mine next. My Washington correspondent fell down on the result of yesterday's cabinet meeting. Telegraphed me just now that the *Wire's* correspondent is a relative of the wife of one of the secretaries, and that's why favoritism was shown. I'll get fat handing out that tale to the boss!"

At which point the office boy announced that Mr. Akron would like to see Mr. Lansing. Mr. Akron appeared heartily glad to see Mr. Lansing. He offered the news editor a fat cigar from a silver humidor, and he discussed out-of-town conditions with Mr. Lansing at considerable length. Mr. Lansing fidgeted nervously. He had great difficulty in keeping his cigar lighted, and he made frequent use of his handkerchief, employing it as a mop. Finally, as if in afterthought, the little boss remarked:

"By the way, Lansing, our Washington man is going to take a month's vacation, and I wish you would replace him. Also, I am not at all satisfied with the way our Derby, Connecticut, correspondence is being handled. I wish you would release the local man. I should think that six weeks would be a long enough time in which to acquaint yourself with the Derby situation. We shall have to find some one to look after your desk while you are away."

Then Mr. Akron dictated a masterpiece of a letter to Mr. Grover, the ex-political reporter, other letters to other delinquents, and left the office for a while, with the sense of accomplishment strong upon him. His way led him to the Canvas Back Club, an organization of moneyed male persons, who lived high and played high, their specialties being the table—dining and chancing. The little boss satisfied an excellent appetite with an excellent meal, then strolled into the cardroom, where half a dozen of the members were gathered around a circular board, green-baized as to covering, and grooved all around to hold the players' chips.

The boss took in the scene abstractedly. His thoughts were on the office, and affairs there. The luncheon had been good, the cigar he was smoking was first quality, and the big heart of the little man was expansive.

"I'll just teach those fellows a lesson," he mused. "They're a good, hard-working crew, and I like them. But they mustn't let themselves be beaten. I won't make the lesson cost them anything in money, but it must serve as a warning. My first city editor used to impress it upon me that resignation was the only answer a man could make when he was beaten. Hello, isn't that Parkins over there?"

He adjusted his glasses and stared at the back of one of the poker players. It was a broad back—what the lady fashion writers would describe as an "elegant" back—and the rest of the figure was in keeping. Mr. Ralph Parkins, indeed, was a fine figure of a man. He was tall and slender, and he was graceful, and he was dark. His mustache was fine and silky, and his eyes were a tender brown. His clothing was of the latest cut, and he "paid ten dollars a copy" for his shirts, as he himself explained.

Some time before, Mr. Parkins had been a newspaper man, and a good one, too. But he was, by choice, a gambler first of all. He just naturally loved to bet on the horses, or roll the cubes for accumulatingly fat pots, or sit in a stack of blues on five cards. He was a dashing player at any game, and fortune not infrequently favored him. When he got things running his way, nothing stopped him until he had accomplished a killing. It was in the enjoyment of just such a recent happy consummation that Parkins had resigned from the *Wire,* leaving the reading of copy at forty dollars a week to the less lucky. How he had achieved the Canvas Back Club, the little boss did not know.

Akron watched the game for a while, but did not offer to sit in. He was an enthusiastic player, but shortly he must be back at the office. So long as he lingered, however, he took a quiet but keen interest in the play. When, finally, he arose to leave, he stopped for a minute at the table and gave Parkins' arm a friendly squeeze.

"Haven't seen you much lately," he greeted. "How are they coming?"

"In carriages, thank you," grinned Parkins, scooping in half a dozen blues at five dollars a blue.

"Glad to hear it," said Akron cordially, and continued his way to the street. He was very thoughtful as he left the club, and very cheerful as he entered his office. He did not halt the elevator till it reached the composing-room floor, and then he sought out old John, the day foreman, and drew him over to a linotype machine on the backmost tier. Old John sat down at the machine, started it going, and picked out a number of words from the dictation of the little boss. When the matter was concluded, old John dumped the accumulated type into a long brass galley and carefully carried it to the boss' room. The boss put the galley in the safe and locked the safe.

Next day's mail for Mr. Parkins at the Canvas Back Club contained a brief letter from Mr. Akron, who asked if Mr. Parkins could make it convenient to call at the office of the *Dial* in connection with a matter of interest to both. The note was calculated to arouse Mr. Parkins' curiosity, and it did. On its receipt, the "Dark Adonis," as Parkins was known to certain of his familiars, gave himself over to five minutes of puzzled thought. At the end of this reflection, he hadn't been able to figure it out. Somehow or other, he felt just the least bit apprehensive, but no thought of this was in his manner as he shook the hand of the little boss.

Mr. Akron wasted little time in

formalities. "Out of the newspaper game for good, Parkins?" he asked.

"So long as I keep my sanity," replied Parkins emphatically.

"Because, if you thought of going back," insinuated Akron, "I might put you next to a job."

"I'm through," said Parkins shortly. "It's 'thirty' for me so far as a newspaper sit is concerned. What kind of a job was it?"

"Oh, a good job, a highly creditable job—reading copy at forty per."

Parkins stared incredulously at the emotionless little man back of the flattop desk. "I don't think I quite get you," he said finally.

Akron explained, with infinite patience. "I'm offering you a job on the *Wire* and forty dollars a week," he said kindly. "You will read copy and make yourself generally useful."

"On the *Dial*, you mean," corrected Parkins.

"Do I?" said Akron mildly. "I said the *Wire*, and I usually aim to express myself with a reasonable degree of clarity."

"At that, you'll have to come again," said Parkins, mystified and vaguely troubled.

"Why, then," said the little boss, in a burst of frankness, "you are sufficiently acquainted with conditions to appreciate the value of having a friend at court. You'll be the *Dial's* friend at the *Wire* court. Just before the *Wire's* first edition goes to press every night, you'll go out for a sandwich or something, and will call this office, asking for Jermyn. There is no one here of that name, but the word will immediately connect you with the night editor, to whom you will repeat the principal items of news on the *Wire's* schedule. Any items we're shy, you will go into at length. If anything else big breaks, you are to report it to Jermyn before the next edition.

"You may be wondering how I shall be able to place you in the *Wire* office. This will be easy. I'll offer one of their copy readers a ten-dollar raise to come to work on the *Dial*. I'll tell him to announce his resignation at six o'clock to-morrow evening. A few minutes later you are to stroll into the office and give it out that you have wearied of a life of ease, and would fain return to the harness. They'll be glad to have you back. By the way, I expect to pay you forty dollars a week, in addition to the *Wire's* forty dollars. I suppose you can make any necessary arrangements between now and six o'clock to-morrow."

The little boss paused. Parkins regarded him as he would have regarded an eight-legged horse or a dog with two tails.

"Mr. Akron, sir," he said, and there were pain and indignation in the soft, Southern accents, "pardon me, but are you batty, or am I?"

"A commission in lunacy has no terrors for me," declared Akron stanchly. "It is incredible that your remark should be taken as a refusal of my offer. Personally, I think the offer most fair, not to say generous."

"I've got an engagement," said Parkins, reaching for his hat. "You must pardon me if I run along."

Akron let him get as far as the door, then halted him with a question. "Isn't the money enough?" he asked.

"What do I want to go back to work for?" asked Parkins wonderingly. "Eighty dollars a week! Why, I frequently drag that down in a day. And I live the kind of life I like. Copy reading, ugh! Why, I dream of copy reading when I've eaten a cheese rabbit!"

"Some copy reading is very interesting," said the little boss impersonally. "A copy reader comes across many interesting stories in the course of a night's work. He travels all sections, and meets all grades of society in the journey. I cannot imagine such an occupation becoming monotonous. Something new is always sure to develop. Why, say"—the boss was over at the safe now, fumbling with the combination—"I came across a story yesterday that I'll bet would change your attitude. I had it set up and a proof pulled. I'll show it to you, if you like."

He had the galley of type out now, and a galley proof of the job, and this he tossed over to his visitor. Curiously, Parkins took the rectangular slip, and read:

> A nasty scandal has developed in the Canvas Back Club, and as a result the board of governors has expelled one of the most popular members. A few weeks ago Mr. Ralph Parkins, a brilliant young journalist and sportsman, was elected to membership, and lost little time in establishing himself a favorite.
>
> Mr. Parkins was particularly punctilious in his attendance at the daily sessions in the cardroom, where his unfailing luck became even as the luck of Roaring Camp. It seemed well-nigh impossible for Mr. Parkins to lose—when the pools were of sufficient size.

Then followed specific instances of the Parkins luck. The article went on:

> A recent visitor to the cardroom, sitting smoking an after-luncheon cigar a few feet from where the players were grouped, made a discovery which he considered little less than startling. This was that Mr. Ralph Parkins' hands—his physical hands—were beneath the table oftener than seemed absolutely necessary by the requirements of the game. Carelessly approaching the players, this member, as if by accident, laid his hand on the left arm of Mr. Parkins, making the additional discovery that Parkins' arm was "wired" for the operation of a device described sometimes as a "bug" and sometimes as a "machine."
>
> Parkins was then accused of cheating and forced to remove his coat and shirt. The "machine"—a clip with a spring attached—was found dangling from his arm. By its operation, it was found to be possible for Parkins to withdraw from the pack or from his hand such cards as he wished. The clip ran these up his sleeve, and when he had secreted the desired hand, a touch brought the stolen cards into his palm and whisked away his legitimate hand.
>
> Parkins was promptly expelled from membership. He agreed to make restitution of the money he had "won," and on this condition, the governors decided to take no legal action against him.

"I'm having cuts made of the 'bug,'" said the little boss casually, "and a half-tone of yourself." He puffed carelessly at his cigar and resumed his seat.

Parkins walked slowly to a seat and stumbled into it. He sat silent for several minutes, apparently weighing the prospect. Akron regarded him keenly. "Take plenty of time to think it over," he counseled kindly. "We don't make up the first page until after midnight."

"You going to run that story in the morning?" asked Parkins hoarsely.

"I hope not," said the little boss.

Parkins slowly drew out an elegant cigarette case and mechanically lighted up, mingling the scented smoke with that from Akron's strong cigar.

"I guess I got a yen for the old game, after all," he said, and left the room.

And so the matter was settled.

Parkins took up his work on the *Wire* where he had left it off. It was the same old grind, and practically the same old staff, with a few changes here and there. Parkins looked over the new faces. There were two or three cubs from college, starting at fifteen dollars, Curtin, from the *Gazette*, on the copy desk, Lattimer, from the *Hawk*, and Dempsey, from the *Forum*, on general assignments. Otherwise all was unchanged. There was Frank Merkel, the day city editor, looking as he had looked for the last twenty years, with tight little curls of blond hair covering a splendid head, and in his hand, ready for submitting to the night editor, a schedule of assignments given out, and a tentative make-up of next day's paper—which make-up never once had been followed in a decade. There was Big John Moriarty, the night editor, slovenly in dress, badly in need of a shave, listening with apparent apathy as Merkel ran over the schedule—but mentally alert as a fox, and easily the best man in New York in a composing room at five minutes before press time.

With the freedom permitted an old employee, Parkins picked up the page schedules around edition time, and ran through the accumulation of galley proofs. He unostentatiously copied the front-page schedule, and a little later strolled out of the office for a breath of fresh air. Once on the street, he darted into a near-by drug store, and entered a telephone booth, provided with a slot machine. He called the *Dial's* number, and asked for Jermyn, giving his own name as Duffy, as agreed on. Then he rapidly sketched the front page of the *Wire* for the first edition. Jermyn hurried him over all stories but one which the *Dial* happened not to have got. This was an exclusive shooting scrape, reported from an uptown apartment house, in which a *Wire* employee had rooms. The *Wire* carried the story at length, as befitted an exclusive, and the circulation manager purposed putting out a gang of "bootjackers" to go through the district and call out the "extra" on the still night air. Jermyn took down the notes, and said he would get his own crew of bootjackers there ahead of the *Wire's.*

The Dark Adonis kept close watch on the night's developments, but nothing came into the *Wire* office warranting a second call to the mysterious Jermyn. Parkins, now that he was fairly in the game, found himself taking a certain amount of satisfaction out of the situation. The element of duplicity was not to his disliking, and whenever he succeeded in spoiling an "exclusive" for the *Wire,* he became temporarily resigned to his lot. Parkins delighted in playing the merry game of double cross for its own sweet sake.

This was all very amusing, to be sure, but there were many days when Jermyn dismissed the Parkins report with a brief "Got 'em all." Parkins fell to worrying over his vanishing opportunities. He told himself he'd relish "putting the rollers under the *Dial*" at the same time as he "eased the gaff into the *Wire.*" There would be fine sport in such a program. He devoted considerable thought to the suggestion. But with further thought came the counsel of caution. Scheme as he would, Parkins could come to no way whereby he could throw down the little boss without letting the little boss know who had thrown him. This, Parkins was unwilling to bring about, the consequences being painfully obvious to one so discerning as the involuntary copy reader.

"I'd admire to job the little shrimp," reflected Parkins longingly, "but I guess I'd better not."

Then along came the Beelzebub affair, which increased Parkins' discontent with the life of a slave to a grind. Beelzebub was a black horse, with the temper of a star actress and the speed of a chorus girl. When the star was in the ascendant, Beelzebub wasn't worth a cent of Chinese money. When he took it into his head to run, he was a nonstoppable hydrant. At least, such were the explanations of his owner, Dirty Jack McFadden. The rascal was temperamental, said Jack. This accounted for his running last when he was six to five, and romping home in front when he was held at six to one in the secret marts of trade.

One day Parkins got word from McFadden to mortgage his hosiery and set in the proceeds on Beelzebub. The copy reader did so. It was one of Beelzebub's six-to-one days, the reports having been circulated that the black uncertainty was suffering a complete loss of temper, and more likely to run the wrong way of the track than in the conventional fashion. Parkins was at the course in person. He strolled past a number of prominently featured individuals on the lawn, whispered rapidly, "A century Beelzebub straight," to each, and passed on, while other gentlemen wrote down "Beelzebub straight $600 to $100 R. P.," the record being made under such difficulties as writing blindly in one's outer-coat pocket.

Beelzebub, running as steadily as an eight-day clock that has just been wound, took the lead and was never headed.

Parkins, in the face of prosperity, shuddered at the prospect of the copy desk at the *Wire* office. He left the track after the Beelzebub race, and hastened to the office of the *Dial,* where he sent in his name to Mr. Akron.

"I'd like a couple weeks off," he said.

"Ill?" asked Akron.

"No," said Parkins truthfully; "I got the old fret."

"Sorry," decided the little boss, "but we can't spare you. Your nightly report is most valuable. We're relying upon it."

Parkins, realizing there was nothing

more to be said at the time, beat a sulky retreat. He cursed Akron all the way up in the subway. "This peonage thing is all right in Mexico," he told himself savagely, "but it won't go in New York, U. S. A. I'll make a sucker of that guy if it's the last act of my life."

A week went by, in which Parkins made his plans. He had his passage for Europe booked on a steamer out of Boston, all his private affairs were arranged, and he had given notification to the *Wire* people of his intention to take an indefinite furlough. He said nothing of his plans to any one on the *Dial.*

A good deal of thought was given to his course of procedure his last night of *Wire* service. Finally he arranged a program to his satisfaction. At first-edition time he phoned Jermyn the front-page features carried by the *Wire.* The second edition he passed up, but the hour for going to press with the third edition found him again in the slot booth.

"Got the Mexican story?" he asked over the line.

"What is it?" queried Jermyn.

"The *Wire* has a special from Washington, quoting a cabinet officer as saying the government has decided to intervene in Mexico."

"Gimme every word," burst from Jermyn; "I'll put a shorthand man on this end."

Parkins, out of the fullness of a marvelous imagination, dictated the interview with the cabinet minister.

Jermyn came in on the wire again. "Anything else?" he asked.

"The *Wire* puts a three-column head on Murphy's announcement that he is out of politics, and will sail for Europe next Wednesday. Are you playing it up?"

"Haven't got it at all," snapped Jermyn. "Where did it come from?"

"Kendrick has been down visiting him at Good Ground," said Parkins. "I guess the announcement was exclusive to the *Wire.* We've always treated him right."

"Shoot it pronto," urged Jermyn.

Parkins made Andrew Carnegie figure in a runaway and smash-up returning from the theater, and then hung up the receiver. He danced all the way out of the all-night drug store, to the amazement of a sleepy night clerk. Then he caught a train for Boston, and dreamed delightful dreams of the consternation prevailing in the office of the *Dial,* from the little boss down to the office boy. He was to sail at noon, long before which time the New York papers would be in.

He was waiting impatiently at the station when the papers arrived, and was the first to snatch a *Dial* off the pile.

The first page of the *Dial* was of engrossing interest to Parkins. To be sure, there was no mention of American intervention in Mexico, or Charles F. Murphy's retirement, or even of the wild ride of the Laird of Skibo, but the sheet contained matter even more interesting to Parkins personally. This was run under a neat two-column head:

CLUBMAN EXPELLED FOR CHEATING.

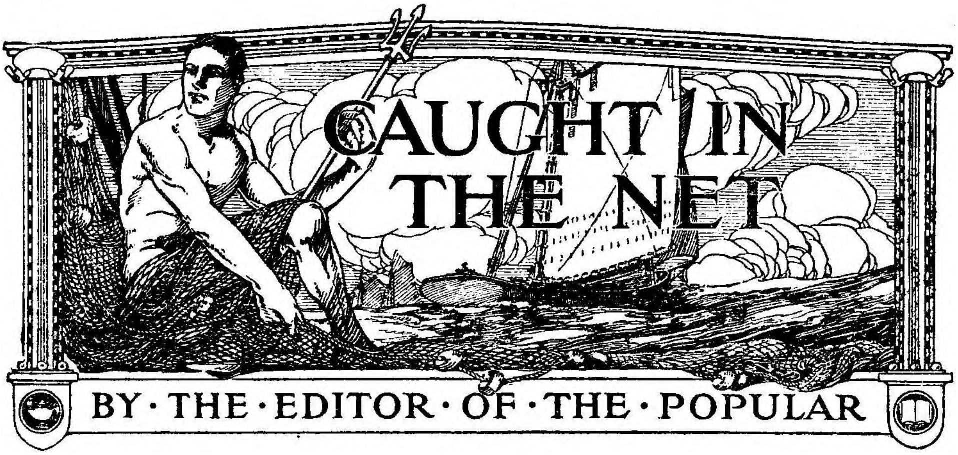
Ralph Parkins Thrown Out of Canvas Back for Employing a Hold-out Machine.

Then followed the story Parkins had read in proof some time before. There was a picture of Parkins, and drawings of the hold-out machine, and detailed descriptions of the manner in which the "bug" was operated.

Parkins read till the letters were a blur. He was about to turn the page for the balance of the story when his eye was caught by a "Personal" given particular prominence by its unusual position on the outside page. Parkins read:

> Is it possible the Dark Adonis failed to notice the curtin?
>
> What did he suppose the curtin was placed there for? A.

"So Akron got Curtin to check up on me, eh?" mused Parkins. Then, in involuntary admiration: "Some depth to that guy! Why, he's deeper than a flock of wells! *Some* depth! Well, it's a good job I booked my passage under another name."



CAUGHT IN THE NET

BY · THE · EDITOR · OF · THE · POPULAR

AMERICAN ABILITY

WHEN the Republican party went out of power last March, after a sixteen-year tenure of public office, the statement was made frequently in every part of the country that it would be impossible for the Democrats to find men big enough to fill with adequate ability the great governmental positions left vacant by the defeated party.

"The Democrats have had no opportunity to develop," was the back-stairs gossip in Washington. "This thing of running a government is dependent largely upon schooling and experience. There are still left some old Democrats who have ideas about how the government should be run, but the party has gone seedy through disuse."

The refutation of such comment has been a striking illustration of the fact that Americans, more than any other people, are able to face any crisis, however great, and to discharge any duty, however heavy. There are many who believe to-day that Mr. Wilson's cabinet has in it more able men than were in a similar service for the Taft administration. The Democrats in the Senate, with an extremely small working majority, have met the demands upon them, up to this writing, with remarkable facility. And the Democratic House, with a previous training of two years, has done its tariff work in admirable fashion under the leadership of Oscar W. Underwood.

As it has been in statesmanship, so it has been in disasters, financial depressions, and war. This note of mastery of circumstance has run through the entire history of the nation. George Washington did his work. Abraham Lincoln, the rail-splitter, handled the most terrific problem the Federal government has ever faced. Always, in every emergency, there has risen from the mass of American humanity the towering strength and powerful soul needed for any special or heroic task.

And it is the greatest tribute possible to the American's confidence and self-reliance, that J. Pierpont Morgan, the titanic financial figure of the country, could die, and yet cause no business disturbance by his departure from the countingrooms. That seems to be the secret of American success—a supreme confidence made effective by unswerving will. More than any other country on earth, ours is an optimist. More than any other country, ours has demonstrated that its optimism is built upon a firm foundation. The ripple of pessimism which struck officialdom and the business world when the Democrats came into power has died away.

For nearly one hundred and forty years our people have been busy proving that Americanism is the real definition of ability. Trying events and great crises have done the one essential thing—developed men bigger than the troubles which confronted them.

THE CHAIN GANG

ON. East Nineteenth Street, New York, one day last summer, many were shocked to see passing along the street a chain gang of six men. They were carrying under their arms the iron balls which were attached to their legs by chains. The guard wore a blue uniform, and carried a gun over his shoulder. On the back of the men's coats were the faded remnants of letters forming the words "Convict Ship." The men were down-and-out specimens. The crowds in the street stood still and gazed after them. Many thought it a group of convicts being transferred from a ship in the East River to one in the North River by short cut across the city. The chain gang was actually an advertising scheme to call attention to the disused convict ship *Success*, which was being exhibited to the public, admission fifty cents. Balls and chains are antiquated, and no longer in use under any circumstances.

A sensitive woman whom we know was shocked and angered by the apparent cruelty, and sent word to us that an injustice was being done. It was not until she made an investigation through the Prison Association of New York that she found an evil joke had been played on the public.

A penalty is needed for business men who dare to degrade a member of the human family. The humiliation of "sandwich" men, of corner Santa Clauses, of giants, of dwarfs, by exhibiting them in their shame as advertising background for shows, cafés, and charities, is an evil as vicious as the old-time use of Bedlam as a comic spectacle for society folk.

THE CANDIDATE WHO EVAPORATED

A "VOICE that is dead" is snugly descriptive of the man who now, broodingly and unobserved, serves his law clients instead of the community. No man ever went flatter, not even the mate's shadow that froze to the deck of the arctic liner. With a Gallic gesture, with an air, he declared his willingness to be the people's choice. But not a ripple did he make who had stampeded the metropolitan city one year before.

He mistook the last ebb ripple of a receding wave for one more of those inrushing tides in his affairs that had twice already swept him into office.

He has a frenzied time of possession when the spirit of wrath, or prophecy, or righteousness flames within him, and he stirs men's souls. Then the mystical moment passes, leaving a foggy trail. He forgets what he has said. He forgets that he has wrought a change on his hearers, who are watching with a kindled hope for the outworking of his impassioned program. He passes on to other remarks, while gradually their hearts turn against him.

All prophets have been spasmodic. But he alone of the prophets is forgetful of his vision. John the Baptist, and Cassandra, and others of the holy troupe lacked for earnest hearers. But this man wins hearers, then runs around the corner to another group with another vision discharged from his overworked temperament. When pulled back to his first platform, he refuses to explain.

A crusade appeals to him only so long as he is under the emotional glow of its opening performance. He grows sulky under punishment. A promise evaporates in the bright beckoning of a fresh rodomontade. He is not a liar, and he is not dishonest, and he is not insincere. He has the temperament of a lyric poet in a business office, and his quiverings and his vagaries are recorded in the ledger.

And the inmost reason for this maladjustment between prophetic frenzy and executive accomplishment is plain to read. This man is the victim of overstimulation. One more modern smokes too much, drinks too much, talks too much. His self-restraint oozes away in an unbroken chain of cigarettes. The cocktail which he celebrates as it mounts to the thought chambers is as out of key with his inspirational make-up as it would have been for Waldo Emerson. He talks too much. He lets himself go in public and private speech, just as the gusts of his overwrought nature propel him. He pounds the table and swears action, then subsides into his winning drawl, and gives a piece of pyrotechnics. The promised action is forgotten by all but his hearers. He is an Alcibiades in New York, rushing on, just rushing on, with a train of applauding convivial youth; but there is no direction to the movement. It is merely a swirl, with the fascination of its own momentum.

He lives in a whirl of words. At his office he is surrounded by a crew of cynical reporters whom he daily stirs with a fresh sensation. He holds them with his bitter and erratic talk about politicians and gamblers, smearing them with sulphur, and passing on to other conversational items. He goes up to his club, and a half dozen men pull chairs about him to hear him pass into the trance state. For his talk is like that of the spiritualistic mediums. He gets "caught up." Then back to his home for an evening with his boy assistants. Again he must be radical. And with each group he feels himself the prophet. There stirs in him the old yearning to set these men on fire for the city's purification. The definite program has slipped from him. Just what to advise he doesn't know. But he sees himself again the Plumed Knight, and he makes them see him so. Each week it becomes more difficult. It grows harder in the tobacco haze and through the blur of the beer to recreate the angel.

There is irony in that the man who used newspapers so cleverly to project himself over the continent into the minds of millions should be slain by them. He sowed publicity, and reaped abuse.

He gyrates over a tiny area. He lacked a medium out into which he could pour his overtones. If a violin could have sucked in his moods it had been well with him. Instead, his conversation has spun around and around on diminishing circles of the eternal ego till the center is in danger of flaring up.

It is still the same man—charming, compelling, with a little of the ineffectual angel about him. But the plumage is disarranged, and the grace notes of his musical drawl have promised large things unperformed.

COMPENSATIONS OF GROWTH

ONE compensation of right living and steady growth is an increasing ability to enjoy life. As the years come a deeper and broader interest in the world develops, until one is able to find something interesting in almost every situation.

People talk regretfully of the lost joys of childhood. And yet one who will compel his memory to be honest must confess the childhood joys were rather meager, and thickly interspersed with bitter disappointments, and were in no way commensurate with those of the well-grown man or woman. In childhood we started in pursuit of the day's happiness with wildly exaggerated expectations—mostly physical impossibilities. We would explore a cave never heard of, track the biggest animal in the world, find a pot of gold, feel an earthquake, build a palace, or command an army. And when this physical expectation failed, we turned home so fretful and disillusioned we generally quarreled with somebody. The boy who starts to the river may start more jubilantly, for he plans to catch the biggest fish ever caught. But when the fish does not bite —when the physical excitement fails or palls, the trip is a miserable failure. But the well-grown man finds increasing joy in the clover by the river bend, in the trees that line the bank, in the sky and water, and the perfect summer days. Even when everything else fails, he gets humor and a good story out of the sudden thunderstorm and a fishless trip. It is this ability to find fresh and increasing interest in places, and events, and people, in music, and art, and books, and work, that marks real growth and keeps the flavor of life sweet.

SKYSCRAPERS AND TERMINALS

IT was Stevenson, who, in an essay on Victor Hugo, and speaking of "Notre Dame," the novel, says: "The cathedral is the hero." The remark is more than clever, for it is true. The presence of the somber church is unfailing, and is the saving grace of a bitter and brutal story. The great modern office building is patiently waiting for the master novelist who will render its brooding power, who will dwell close to the mighty clock, till he falls into step with its endless march; time recorded in terms of space. He will let his imagination be played upon by the frosted lights—that midnight carnival hung aloft. He will show the swinging torch that flames around the compass every quarter hour.

And so with the vast terminal station of a railroad. A hundred fitting scenes will be drawn in here, as if strained through a sunglass to the focal point of flame. It will permit all life to pass the novelist's way, framed in such stately beauty as only the Gothic cathedral and the Greek temple surpassed. Here, ready-made for him, are the cool, green shops of the arcade, and the great white hall. Immigrants, and theatrical troupes, and commercial gentlemen hurry through. Like a call to prayer in the high, clear voice of a mystic adept, the train announcer chants the tale of the cities and the hour of the going. Into this whirl and rout of things under the peaceful dome, the novelist will insert his business of meeting and parting, his brief bits of love and heartache, while the announcer continues intoning the now imminent departure of the Western Flyer.

FRANKNESS

FRANKNESS is not always a virtue. It depends on what one is frank about. That frankness whose specialty is telling women they are getting gray, and men that they look seedy, is more insufferable than a deep-dyed assumption of secrecy. Too many people imagine that frankness consists in the number of disagreeable things they can say to people without getting knocked down. That is not frankness; that is meddlesomeness. Real frankness begins at the other end of the line. It is a quality of sincerity and openness in one's own character. The rightly frank person lives and thinks without pretense or secrecy. When he speaks he says what he thinks without insinuation or circumlocution. But that does not mean he speaks everything he thinks. And it certainly does not mean that he cultivates a habit of thinking disagreeably. The sincerely frank person is frank with himself; with others he uses discretion. When his opinion is sought he gives it honestly; but he does not volunteer disagreeable truths unless the good of a friend or the community demands it. Being frank within instead of without, he may be perfectly honest and sincere, and yet more considerate and tactful than the veriest flatterer.

Easy Picking

By Charles E. Van Loan

Author of "The Crab," "A Penant and a Penance," Etc.

Van Loan's stories of the prize ring, like his baseball tales, are no figments of the imagination, but are drawn from the life. In sending us this story of a small-town boxer he wrote: "This yarn is liable to be widely recognized by the time the boy whips a few topnotchers."

"OLD BIRD" BENNETT was not a prophet, nor in any way related to one; nevertheless, he was considerably without honor in his home town. Worse than that, he was out of a job, and there were those who talked of tarring and feathering him and riding him upon a rail.

His was not a case of talent passing unrecognized. The small matter of a business arrangement with another gentleman of the gloved legion leaked out and became common scandal, whereat the outraged public arose and howled like a wolf in the snow. The Old Bird was at once placed upon the black list until such time as the fight fans should forget that he had allowed "T-bone" Riley to stay ten rounds and take a bloodless decision over him. When a man bets two to one on his excellent judgment and loses because of prearrangement on the part of his favorite, he is apt to recall the circumstances for some time.

"Just my luck!" whined Old Bird, with bitterness. "T-bone has to go and get his nose wet and pull a George Washington on me!"

Old Bird had often feelingly referred to himself as the unluckiest fighter living, and the last turn of affairs had gone far to convince him of the truth of the statement. With just a tiny bit of luck, he might have been the lightweight champion of the world instead of the king of all pork-and-beaners and the toughest trial horse in the Queensbury stable.

Old Bird was a pugilistic fixture. Some years before he had fluttered into town from nowhere, unannounced by any press agent, and carrying his credentials in his right hand.

It so happened that Peter Mulcahey, fight promoter and friend of all deserving battlers who were inclined to be reasonable about money matters, was grooming Tommy Derrick, a promising pork-and-bean performer, for the main-event class. Mulcahey, a shrewd judge of a drawing card, believed that one more hollow victory would put Derrick in line for higher honors, but the local pork-and-bean boys, valuing their health, refused to appear in the rôle of a stepping-stone. At this juncture, Old Bird furled his dusty wings in Peter Mulcahey's outer office, and announced his willingness to "meet any one-hundred-and-thirty-three-pound boy in the world." The odd thing about it was that he meant it.

Peter Mulcahey was relieved. The gods of sport and good business demanded a sacrifice, and here was one, ready to hand, clamoring to be offered up for the nominal sum of twenty-five dollars. Old Bird was elected without a dissenting vote, and the club press agent referred to him hopefully as "a rising lightweight of the Middle West."

Old Bird trained as much as two whole days, and, having been advanced a small sum for living expenses, entered the ring full of mince pie and stern determination. He had never heard of this man Derrick, never seen his picture in the *Police Gazette,* and consequently did not think much of his prowess. Tommy Derrick entertained similar sentiments regarding Old Bird, a condition of affairs ripe for surprises.

The result of that battle was a severe disappointment to Peter Mulcahey, for his local star set with great suddenness, never to rise again. Mr. Nobody from Nowhere waded through Tommy Derrick with a succession of right swings mostly fetched from the hip, and Tommy went direct from the ringside to the hospital, where he remained until his ribs grew together again.

Old Bird was immediately matched with another pork-and-beaner with like result, barring the hospital bill. In six months Bennett established himself as the best third-rater in the West, and Peter Mulcahey graduated him into the main-event class, where men are paid in three figures instead of two.

Old Bird whipped every second-rater whom he could hit with his right hand, and passed on into the first division, where he met what he called hard luck, and the wisest of the ringside critics called "class." He took a few draws because of his aggressiveness, scored one famous knock-out, and lost four decisions on points. The great difference between a first-class fighting man and a second-rater lies in speed; the top-notchers were too fast for Old Bird. He could not hit them; he was a selling plater against stake horses.

Peter Mulcahey stuck to him nobly, and at last secured for him a match with the Old Master, the negro champion, last of that great galaxy of lightweight stars of the nineties. The Old Master no longer had the fire of youth, the vitality which had carried him through one hundred battles, but he retained his marvelous cleverness, and Old Bird's chance for a world's championship disappeared in a blinding flurry of jabs, jolts, hooks, and uppercuts which left him dazed and battered at the end of twenty rounds. From beginning to end, Old Bird never ceased swinging his pulverizing right at that lean, brown jaw; not once had he been able to hit the mark. The Old Master made him miss by a fraction of an inch, and Bennett blamed his luck when he should have given the negro credit for remarkable judgment of distance.

"Yo' pretty *strong,* white boy," the Old Master mumbled to him in the eighteenth round, "but thass all—yes, thass all. Some day yo'll hit somebody with that right swing an' knock him up in the gallery."

That night marked the top of the grade for Old Bird. After that his way led downhill. Before very long, he found himself established as the trial horse for all newcomers—the younger men with championship aspirations. If he whipped them, people said it was to be expected; he got little credit, and less money. If they whipped him, they passed on to better matches. Old Bird Bennett was the official stumblingblock in the lightweight path, and the fate of a stumblingblock is to be kicked by every traveler who passes that way.

It was during the period of his decline that Old Bird made his business arrangement with T-bone Riley. T-bone was no embryo champion, and the match was made as a "filler." Old Bird should have whipped him in three rounds without a minute's preparation, and, this being the general opinion, Bennett ruled the favorite at two to one. His admirers were grateful for the sudden influx of T-bone money, and snapped it up hungrily. Then Old Bird went into the ring, and boxed like an inebriated fishwife. T-bone stabbed him for ten sickening rounds without a return. The referee saw his duty, and did it like a man, the gallery roared murder, and still all would have been well, had not T-bone celebrated his victory in a manner to muddle the intellect and loosen the tongue. He told all he knew. It was not much, but it was enough.

Honest confession is said to be good for the soul, but some people who have given it a trial claim that it is bad for business. The reporters heard about it, of course, and the next day a great moral wave swept over the pugilistic community. Old Bird's picture was in all the papers, together with the announcement that Peter Mulcahey had barred him as an undesirable citizen and a faker.

Old Bird made it his business to hunt up his loquacious friend Riley, and when he found him the ten-round decision was speedily reversed, but T-bone's broken jaw did not mend matters—it only made them worse. It was as if Bennett had pleaded guilty to the indictment.

Having been accustomed to fight whenever he ran short of funds, Old Bird soon found himself in a nasty predicament. He might have gone to work, of course, but no man who has ever fought a champion of the world for twenty rounds is likely to do that sort of thing unless there is no other method of obtaining three meals a day.

After a precarious few weeks, during which time Old Bird learned that the friends of a man's prosperous days seldom follow him into an eclipse, he became a sparring partner, working for board and lodging and fifteen dollars a week. He boxed with men whom he might have beaten in a punch, and the knowledge was gall and wormwood to him. While other boys fought, he squatted in the corner, nursing a towel and telling himself that he could lick "the both of 'em" in the same ring. Sometimes he told himself the truth, for Old Bird had never lost his annihilating right-hand swing, and when he hit a man squarely with it the floor came up and bumped him.

Old Bird went regularly to call upon Peter Mulcahey, but that moon-faced philanthropist had but one answer for him:

"Not yet; the paper boys won't stand for it."

"Aw, they've stood for lots worse frames!" said Old Bird, one day. "You know they have."

"*I* know it, but *they* don't," said Peter. "There wasn't anybody to get drunk and tell 'em. You was advertised by your loving friends, and now you've got to lay dead until it blows over. See?"

"But I can't wait always!" Bennett expostulated. "I'm gettin' to be a *old* guy, and what fighting I do has got to be done pretty quick." (He was almost twenty-seven, which is a green old age for a pork-and-beaner.) "Couple more years and I'm *through*."

"You might go somewhere else and try your luck," suggested Peter.

"A swell chance!" said Old Bird sarcastically. "I ain't got no dough, I ain't got no manager, I ain't got nothing. If I just had a manager now—wit' money—aw, what you laughin' at? Worse fighters'n me has had managers!"

II.

Then, out of a clear sky, the manager with money put in an appearance. Joe Terry, a local sporting man, returned from a campaign through the Northwest, and lost no time in locating Old Bird.

"I understand you're in bad around here," said Terry.

"Worse than that," said Old Bird dejectedly. "Just because I boxed a feller easy and lost a decision on points, they took my cue out of the game. By the looks of things, I'll have to get me a sandbag and start sticking people up on the dark streets."

"I know a better way than that," said Terry. "Perfectly legitimate, too. We can cop all the money in Oregon."

"I never knew they had any money in Oregon," said Old Bird. "That's a farmer State, ain't it?"

"That's why they've got money," said Terry. "Every one of those apple growers has got an automobile and a bank roll."

"Well, go on; go on! Spring it!" urged Old Bird impatiently.

"There's a little place up there called Parkerton," said Terry, "and every man in the town is a sport. They've got a kid named Arthur Cullen—a lightweight—and they think he can lick anybody in the world. He's cleaned all the farmer boys in that section, put out a few mill hands, and licked a few tramp fighters that they brought in for him. I saw him fight a fellow from Seattle last week, and those apple tossers were offering three and four to one on Cullen. I took a little of the short end on general principles, but my man fought like a lobster. The point is this: Why can't you go up there under an assumed name and go to work in a livery stable or something——"

"Me? Work?" There was reproach in Old Bird's tone. "What do I know about horses?"

"Well, of course it wouldn't have to be a stable job," said Terry soothingly. "Anything would do so long as it's work. You couldn't go up there as Bennett, the fighter, because the first thing they'd do would be to look up your record, and then they wouldn't give odds. Maybe they wouldn't even let Cullen fight you. If you should drift in there like a bum out of a job and go to work, they wouldn't suspect anything, and you could get into a few rough-and-tumble fights, just to get the town people to talking about you. They'll do the rest because they are always on the lookout for somebody to fight Cullen. You show up bad in your training—box like a hayseed, and get knocked down a few times—and they'll bet their heads off at two and three to one. I'll come along and grab every dollar in sight, you biff this apple picker once on the chin, and we cut the money even. How does that sound to you?"

"Fair enough," said Old Bird. "How much money will you bet?"

Joe Terry unbuttoned his vest, and brought out a small, black wallet, from which he extracted four one-thousand-dollar bills. He spread them out on the table and looked at Old Bird.

"Where did you say this place was at?" asked the fighter.

III.

The big-town sports are apt to sneer at their brethren in the villages, but nowhere does the sporting spirit burn with whiter, fiercer flame than in the small centers of population. The little-town sports buy the annual record books and study them with great care. Their knowledge lacks the personal element, but it is astonishingly complete from a statistical standpoint. They are familiar with the performances of the athletic idols of the past and present; they know the name of the horse which holds the quarter-mile record; they can tell offhand how many rounds Sullivan and Kilrain fought for the championship, and they can reel off a dizzying string of big-league batting averages. They are not given to betting blindly, but once convinced that they have a "good thing," they produce the bank roll and bet until nothing but the woolen string remains.

Parkerton was a very sporty little town, as the new waiter in Wade's Restaurant observed. He went about his duties with a supercilious air, but, though his nose was slightly tilted, his eyes and ears were alert, and he learned many things of an interesting nature. His proud spirit rebelled against his menial task, but he comforted himself with the reflection that it would not last long. It was hard work to conceal his contempt for these "small-town jays," but he did the best he could, and cast about him for an opening.

On the third day of Old Bird's martrydom, a quiet, clear-eyed youth entered the restaurant, and ordered liver and bacon. The young man wore a small diamond upon his finger, and another one in his tie, and, after he had gone, Old Bird found a silver quarter upon the table.

"You know who that was?" asked the cook, with the air of one about to impart startling information.

"Nah," said Old Bird.

"That was Art Cullen," said the cook, pausing to note the effect.

"What *of* it?" asked Old Bird woodenly. "What did he ever do?"

"You never heard of Art Cullen, the fighter?" demanded the cook, in amazement.

"No; and nobody else ever did," said Old Bird. "Who did he ever lick?"

"He's licked everybody he ever

fought," said the cook. "Fred McGilligan, Johnny Nash, Young Nelson, Kid Dickey, and a whole raft of lightweights. Guess you've heard of Kid Dickey, ain't you? He's from Portland, and a tough boy. Cullen put him out in three rounds.

"Why don't he go and lick some *real* fighters?" said Old Bird. "I never had a glove on in my life, and I'll bet he can't lick me, even."

"Huh!" sneered the cook. "You wouldn't be a mouthful for that boy! He'd just hit you once, and you wouldn't know nothing for an hour."

"Wouldn't I?" said Old Bird, with a grin. "I can scrap a little myself."

"That's what they all say," remarked the cook. "They all think they can fight until this boy gets at 'em, and then they change their minds. He's a hum-dinger, I tell you!"

"He's a farmer, that's what he is!" said Old Bird.

"Well, they're goin' to get a good man to come up from San Francisco to try him out," persisted the cook. "Billy Gillis, or Mike Baldwin, or some of them good boys."

Old Bird, who had knocked out Gillis in one round and Baldwin in five, laughed scornfully.

"You can laugh if you want to," said the cook; "but don't get the idea that this boy Cullen ain't a fighter. Jim Dabney—he runs the pool room, you know—says that Cullen can hit harder than any lightweight he ever saw, and he's seen lots of 'em. Jim used to live in Denver. He ought to know."

An indignant knife-handle tattoo summoned the new waiter to the front of the house and ended the conversation, which was just as well, for he had something to think about. If the local sports were planning another match for Cullen, there was no time to lose. Old Bird had not been favorably impressed with Terry's suggestion that he should take part in a street fight for the sake of the advertising. He had all the seasoned fighter's distaste for giving away that which he might sell. Besides, he believed he knew a better way.

The next day Cullen, accompanied by three friends, entered the restaurant. Old Bird set his chin at an aggressive angle, and sauntered over to the table, fumbling in his pocket as he went.

"What have you got to-day?" asked Cullen of the new waiter.

"This!" said Old Bird, and tossed a twenty-five-cent piece upon the table. "You was in here yesterday and left this by your plate. If you did it by accident, all right; but if you thought you could slip me a measly two-bits on the side, you've got another think coming. See? No apple picker like you can hand me anything!"

Cullen looked up in some surprise, and his friends stirred uneasily in their chairs.

"Why, I didn't mean to hurt your feelings," said Cullen quietly. "I thought——"

"What do I care what you thought?" snarled Old Bird. "Just because you've licked a few tramps, you think you're a big feller around here, don't you? You keep your two-bit pieces, and buy a new hat. You need it. You a fighter! I never had a glove on in my life, but I'll bet I can take you out in the street now and show you up!"

Cullen's face grew red, more from embarrassment than anger.

"Pshaw!" said he. "I'm sorry you feel that way about it. I wouldn't have done it if I had known—honest I wouldn't. You oughtn't to get sore about a little thing like that——"

"What I said goes!" interrupted Old Bird. "I can lick you, bare knuckle, with the gloves, rough-and-tumble—any old way. I'd just like to show you where you get off!"

Cullen looked at his friends, and smiled sheepishly.

"I don't fight for fun," he said, at length. "I quit that a long time ago."

"Backing up, are you?" sneered Old Bird. "I thought so. You don't look like a game guy to me!"

"Hold on!" said one of Cullen's friends. "There's a way to settle this. If you think you can fight, Art here will give you a match and you can have it out in the ring and get some money for it. Is that all right, Art?"

"Sure," said Cullen. "Any time."

"You're on!" said Old Bird quickly. "Gimme two weeks to train in, and I'll knock the swell head off this guy. I got to have that long to get used to fighting with gloves on."

"That's all right," said Cullen. "Take as long as you want."

That night there was but one topic of conversation in Parkerton. The tough waiter at Bob Wade's place had been looking for trouble, and was about to find it. The situation made a strong appeal to Parkerton's sense of humor.

"It was rich!" said Clay Eaton, one of the restaurant party. "This tough guy comes up and bawls Art out about a tip. Wanted to go in the middle of the street with him. Then Frank Pierson suggested making a match of it, and the waiter says he'll have to have two weeks to get used to fighting with gloves on his hands! Can you beat that? Art's pretty mad at this bird, and he's liable to go at him strong. He's never walloped a fellow as hard as he could yet, and what he'll do to this hasher will be plenty! I wouldn't miss it for an acre of apple trees!"

The humor of the situation broadened and deepened when "George Williams"—the new waiter's name—went into active training. His "road work" consisted of a leisurely two-mile stroll, and in the afternoons, clad in a bathing suit and rubber-soled tennis shoes, he plunged about the back room of the town gymnasium, stabbing the air with awkward lefts and swinging his right ponderously.

"Say, what d'you call that stuff?" asked the local sports.

"Shadow boxing!" panted George Williams. "It makes you clever and fast on your feet." To prove it, he gave an exhibition which would have disgraced a bogged hippopotamus, and the sports laughed and winked behind their hands.

Williams announced that he would be pleased to box with volunteers, and Dan Lacey, a bookkeeper, put on the gloves with him, and almost knocked him out in the second round.

"You hit too hard!" puffed Williams, feeling his jaw. "A sparring partner ain't supposed to try and kill a man!"

"You ought to have told me sooner," grinned Lacey. "Come on; I won't hit you hard again."

"I got enough for to-day," said Williams; and that night it was all over town that Dan Lacey had made the tough waiter quit with a tap on the jaw that would not have broken a window-pane.

The next day a well-dressed stranger arrived from the south, and announced that he was in the market for unimproved real estate. Abe Augustine, who dealt in lands, showed the visitor several promising bits of property, and almost sold him ten acres in an adjoining valley. Almost, but not quite.

"What do you do here to amuse yourselves?" asked the stranger, who said his name was Penfield.

"Going to have a prize fight next Thursday night at the opera house," said Augustine. "You ought to stay and see it. It won't be much of a fight because it'll be too one-sided. We got a kid here that can knock the socks off any lightweight in the Northwest."

"You don't say so!" ejaculated Penfield. "I'd like to see him work."

"I'll take you over to his place this afternoon," said Abe obligingly. "He sure can step some."

Penfield watched Cullen go through his stunts with an experienced eye, reserving his opinion until the finish.

"Well," said Abe, "what do you think of him? Ain't he pretty nifty with his hands?"

"Too slow to suit me," said Penfield. "He's wide open all the time, and he has to set himself for every punch. I don't like him."

"I'd like to bet you that he wins," said Abe, with an eye to business.

"I may take some of that after I've seen the other man," replied Penfield. "Almost anybody ought to lick this Cullen."

"Bet you two to one he wins!" said Abe suddenly.

"Show me the other boy first," said Penfield cautiously.

"I guess he's over at the gymnasium,"

suggested Abe. "What say we go there now?"

"I don't mind," said Penfield.

Williams, despite his awkwardness and his other failings, seemed to make quite an impression on the stranger.

"Now, that's my notion of a fighter!" said Penfield heartily. "He hasn't had the experience, of course, and he isn't very clever, but he's determined, and I like the way he swings that right hand. He'll stop Cullen if he hits him."

"Bet you two to one!" said Abe.

"How much?" asked Penfield, reaching for his pocketbook.

That night the news sped about town that there was some easy money at the Parkerton House, and there was an immediate scramble to reach it first.

Penfield did not seem particularly anxious, but it was possible to talk him into backing the short-ender, and that was all Parkerton wanted to know. It was not, Penfield explained, that he regarded Williams as a good fighter, but that, in his opinion, Cullen was a very bad one. Local pride was injured by this argument, and avenged itself by piling up the dollars on Parkerton's pride. Penfield covered it slowly and at times with some show of reluctance.

"You fellows may know more about a fighter than I do," he would remark, "but I think I'm a fair judge, and I can't see this Cullen at all. He didn't show *me* anything."

"Better watch him Thursday night," suggested the local sports. "He may show you something then."

"I'll do that," said Penfield. "And don't you overlook this boy Williams. He may be green, but his heart is in the right place. He looks like a fighter to me."

On Wednesday night Joe Terry issued his orders.

"We've got a barrel of money up," said he, "and I want this Cullen knocked out. On a decision, we'd be sure to get the worst of it. And when you crack him, let it be on the jaw. Give 'em no chance to call a foul."

"What's he look like?" growled Old Bird. "I never saw the sucker except in his street clothes."

"He ain't a bad boy at all," said Terry. "Boxes well, but he's awfully slow. You can time him with that right hand of yours and knock him into the middle of next week."

"Think anybody's onto us?" asked Old Bird anxiously.

"Not a soul!" chuckled Terry. "They think they're putting one over on me, and every time they look my way they have to laugh. Oh, you can trust these small-town boobs to trim you for the last cent you've got! Why, one of 'em was in this afternoon, wanting to bet two hundred against my watch and pin! They think I'm so foolish that I oughtn't to be trusted with money. That hash-house quarrel of yours was a clever stunt. They're all looking for a grudge fight."

"Another thing," grunted Old Bird, "we better be ready to vamp on that midnight train. You never know how these small-town guys will take a trimming. As soon as I cut loose they'll tumble that something has been slipped over on 'em, and they may turn nasty."

"I bought the tickets the day I got to town," said Joe.

IV.

Every sport in Parkerton stood up and yelled when Cullen walked out on the stage and entered the ring. Percy Hoskyns, the leader of the town orchestra, waved his fiddle bow and struck up "Hail to the Chief."

When Old Bird appeared, he was greeted with a generous cheer and a great deal of laughter. He had discarded the bathing suit and the tennis shoes, and was correctly garbed in ring attire. He looked out over the flaring gas jets which served as footlights, and grinned.

"Do your laughin' early, you rubes!" he muttered. "You won't feel so fresh in a little while."

Joe Terry strolled upon the stage and inspected Cullen's bandages and gloves. He explained that as he was backing the other man he could not afford to take chances. A Portland saloon keeper had been imported to act as referee, and Jim

Dabney, master of ceremonies, introduced him in a ten-minute speech which dragged in the climate, the bumper apple crop, the increase in real-estate values, and the glorious future of Parkerton. The true Western booster never overlooks an opportunity for advertising.

"Duke me, kid!" said Old Bird to Cullen, when the two men appeared for instructions. Cullen was plainly surprised, but he smiled frankly and extended his glove.

"No hard feelings," said he. "May the best man win!"

"That's the dope!" said Old Bird.

When the bell rang, Old Bird danced out of his corner with the alacrity of a man going to work at a favorite trade. He feinted three times with his left, skipping in and out, and then lunged forward behind a straight jab aimed at Cullen's nose. The apple picker jerked his head aside without moving his feet, Old Bird's left lead whistled between shoulder and ear, and he floundered, wide open and helpless, into a terrific smash over the heart. Old Bird clinched, grunting with pain and astonishment. The men who can "slip a punch with the head" are scarce; a one-armed man might almost tick them off on his fingers. Still, it might have been an accident. Old Bird decided that it could not have been design; no apple picker ever learned Kid McCoy's tricks!

Again Old Bird circled cautiously and lashed out with a straight left; again Cullen whipped his face out of the way, and this time the trip-hammer right buried itself to the wrist in the soft roll of flesh just below the rib line. It was a savage blow, and for an instant Old Bird was very sick. He tried to hang on for a few seconds, but Cullen drove him into the open with half a dozen rasping rights and lefts which sounded like the drum solo in a Sousa march.

Old Bird hopped ten feet away, and prepared to box at extreme long range. He wanted time to think, time to readjust his opinion of this rube fighter. He had expected to surprise Cullen; Cullen had surprised him. More than that, Cullen had hit him as hard as he had ever been hit in his life, and Old Bird remembered, with regret, that he had done very little real training for this rural picnic. He was in no condition for a long, hard battle. Infighting seemed to be the rube's specialty; Old Bird decided to continue the engagement at full-arm range. He had no stomach—or, rather, too much stomach—for any more of those short smashes below the rib line. A man in first-class condition could not hope to survive many of them; a man untrained and soft about the midriff would find them plain murder in the first degree.

Old Bird made up his mind to pin his hope on the big trump which had taken so many pugilistic tricks—the one-way ticket to dreamland. He would feint the farmer open to a tremendous right swing, and knock him through the ropes and into the orchestra pit.

Old Bird began to spar carefully, endeavoring to draw Cullen into position. The apple picker's eyes twinkled; he noted that Bennett was carrying his right hand low and well back toward the hip.

"What you got there?" asked Cullen. "Why don't you shoot your sixteen-inch gun once and let's see if it's any good!"

"Come on and fight!" growled Old Bird.

"Anything to be obliging!" said Cullen, and came in like a sunbeam.

Before Old Bird could get his deadly right into action something extremely solid bumped him under the chin, and he felt the soles of his feet leave the floor. The next point of contact was the back of Old Bird's head. He was not knocked out, but for an instant it seemed that the milky way had moved into the Parkerton Opera House. It was the third time in his life that Old Bird had been knocked flat with a single blow and the first time that it had been done with a punch which he did not know was coming. The bell ended the round at the count of eight, and Old Bird rocked back to his corner.

"What did he do that with?" mumbled the veteran, as he nosed the green bottle.

"A little short left hook," said Terry. "It didn't travel more than ten inches.

For the love of Mike, watch out for this guy. He ain't as soft as he looks."

"Tell me something I don't know," muttered Old Bird. "I never even saw him start that last one. It was a beaut!"

"He's got a bad body punch there," cautioned Terry. "You ought to stop those."

"You didn't see any of 'em get by me, did you?" retorted Old Bird. "Help me out of the chair now; I'm going to stall that I'm hurt, and cop him with my right."

The bell rang, and Terry fairly lifted Old Bird to his feet and pushed him into the ring. He did not seem to want to go, and the apple growers shouted with laughter at the spectacle which Old Bird presented as he wabbled toward the center of the ring. His hands were open and swaying at his sides, his head rocked drunkenly on his shoulders, and his shoes dragged along the floor. It was a trick which he had learned from the Old Master, who in turn had learned it from Bob Fitzsimmons. Cullen, waiting for him in the middle of the ring, dropped his guard and looked appealingly at the referee. As he did so, the Old Bird led his big trump and led it from his hip. Out of the corner of his eye Cullen saw it coming and ducked his head. A matter of two inches saved him from annihilation. The big trump would have taken the trick had it not been for the sudden downward movement of Cullen's head; as it was Old Bird's glove caught him squarely on the cheek and sent him head over heels into a corner of the ring.

The Parkerton sports came up with a howl of rage.

"Foul! Foul!"

"What kind of fighting do you call that?"

"He hit him when his hands was down!"

"Dirty work! Rotten! S-s-s-s! Bo-o-o-h!"

The Portland saloon keeper knew his business. He began counting at once, walking toward Cullen as he did so. At three that young man was sprawling on his back; at four he began to collect his arms and legs; at seven he was waiting, both gloves and one knee on the floor. The referee marked the seconds with his right arm, while with the left he repulsed the impetuous charges of Old Bird, who was dancing about like an angry fox terrier, ready to dash in with the finishing blow the instant Cullen should come to his feet. At eight the local warrior turned his head toward his corner and his left eyelid flickered perceptibly. Had Old Bird seen this, perhaps he would not have rushed in so recklessly as his opponent straightened from the floor; perhaps he might have remembered that there is no copyright on a "stall."

Old Bird charged with his right hand drawn back like a scythe, head forward and chin jutting well out over his chest; Cullen came from the floor with one bound, and a left hook came with him all the way. It stopped under Old Bird's chin, a skyrocket exploded in his brain, once more the stars passed in swift review, and then came thick, black darkness, impenetrable and enduring.

Light and reason returned simultaneously. Old Bird found himself reclining on a sofa in the star dressing room and a mild-faced old gentleman was putting some bottles back into a black satchel.

"Feel better now, son?" asked the doctor kindly.

"I feel worse!" mumbled the veteran. "What's the matter with my mouth?"

"You've got four broken teeth," said the doctor; "but it might have been your neck, so you can't complain."

"But I had him licked!" protested Old Bird. "He was down, wasn't he? And I went in to clean him, and——"

"And he hit you with one that he fetched from China!" snapped Joe Terry. "You're a wise guy, you are! He wasn't hurt at all; you copped him away up on the cheek bone, and he worked the stall right back. Only he got away with his, and you didn't. If this guy is a sucker, I don't know where you get your wise ones!"

There was a commotion at the door, and the victor entered, followed by Jim Dabney, the Portland referee, and as many of the local sports as could find standing room. They seemed very cheerful.

"How are you, Bennett?" asked Cullen, offering his hand.

Old Bird stared at the farmer fighter with open mouth, and Joe Terry drew in his breath with a whistling sound.

"Huh?" gurgled the defeated warrior. "What's that?"

"Oh, we smoked you out," grinned Dabney. "I had my suspicions you was a fighter the minute you hit town. When you started training I wasn't so sure, but when your friend here began to bet, I thought there was a nigger in the woodpile somewhere. This afternoon a few of us boys began comparin' notes and countin' up bets, and then we knew that there was something doing. I got the files of the *Police Gazette* for five years up in my place, and we pawed through 'em until we found out what we was up against. Turned out all right, though, and I guess the odds were about right, eh, boys? What do you think of our little rube fighter? Pretty good, ain't he?"

"If he'll sign a contract with me," said Terry, "I'll make him the next lightweight champion; that's how good I think he is."

"You're a little bit late, friend," said Jim Dabney. "We may be hayseeds up here in Parkerton, but we know a fighter when we see him. I've got this boy tied up for ten years, and as soon as the apple crop is in I'm going to take him down to San Francisco and get a chance to bet some money on the short end for a change."

"Apples!" sniffed Terry scornfully. "I wouldn't monkey with all the apples in the world if I had a fighter like that on my staff!"

Old Bird said no more until he was hoisting himself into an upper berth on the southbound train.

"Hey, Joe!" he whispered.

Terry grunted in reply.

"A feller told me once," said Old Bird, "that all the wise guys in the cities came in from the small towns. He sure said an armful then, didn't he?"

❧

ADMIRAL DEWEY'S SHIP

IN September we published a letter from the captain on a ship bound for Algiers and Odessa. He mentioned that he had seen Admiral Dewey's ship, the *Olympia,* with the Turkish fleet. Our friend must have been mistaken, for from several quarters we have heard that the good ship that did such splendid work at Manila is still in the active service of Uncle Sam. Here is a letter we have received from Charles P. Messenger, U. S. N., Camp Elliott, Canal Zone:

Editor POPULAR MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: I sincerely trust you will accept this letter in the spirit in which it is sent. Inclosed you will find an article which was on page 127 of the September 1st number of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE, issued August 7th, 1913. Being a member of the service and feeling that my countrymen who read the inclosed article would not like to feel that Admiral Dewey's flagship, the *Olympia,* had come to such an inglorious end, I beg to state on authority that the U. S. S. *Olympia* is still in active service of the United States and stationed at Charleston, S. C. Sincerely trusting you will publish this fact, I remain, respectfully yours,

CHARLES P. MESSENGER.

❧

AT THE SAME TRADE ALL THE YEAR

BENZ, a pitcher for the Chicago White Sox, is a butcher when the baseball season is not on. One afternoon early last season, when he was holding the Detroit Tigers runless, Hughie Jennings remarked:

"That bone-headed Benz butchers summer and winter."

The Time That Was

BEING A TALE OF THE LOST LEGION

By Francis Whitlock

Author of "Stokeyne of the Lost Legion," "In Quest of the Fountain of Youth," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF OPENING CHAPTERS

To Jabez Cooper, boss of the famous Lost Legion, comes Jones-Morgan, young millionaire New Yorker, who has learned that he is "entitled to all the habiliments, embellishments, and appurtenances appertaining to him as Hereditary Sublime and Grand Perpetual Pretender to the throne of Albania." He offers Cooper a big sum to make him king of the country. Cooper selects "Runt" Rankin from among the Legioners, and Rankin and Jones-Morgan start for the Balkans. In Salonica Rankin meets Natalika, a beautiful Albanian, who wishes to return to her country but is prevented by international complications. Jones Morgan listens eagerly to her stories of the Albanians and avers that he is no longer a New Yorker but an Albanian. The two men and the girl start on on a three-days journey and have almost reached the promised land when they are attacked by Montenegrins. Natalika and Rankin are captured and taken before King Nicholas. Jones-Morgan is left for dead. A little later some Albanian skirmishers come upon his body, and find on it the sacred cross of Zatriejebac (placed there by Natalika, who is the daughter of the chief of the Zatriejebac clan). The men are struck by Jones-Morgan's likeness to the national hero, Skanderbeg, and they bear his body reverently to the blockhouse.

CHAPTER V.

THE SURRENDER OF NICHOLAS.

NICHOLAS of Montenegro was in no pleasant mood when Captain Buto brought his prisoners before him in the squalid headquarters in front of Scutari. Since early October the little Montenegrin army had invested the Albanian capital, losing hundreds of men in desperate and unsuccessful assaults upon its defenses, and more hundreds from disease which followed exposure in the investing trenches during the bitter Balkan winter. The assistance which the Servians had given to him after the fall of Salonica had been withdrawn just when it was of the most value; for Austria was as determined as the Turkish commander that King Nicholas should never enter Scutari, and had mobilized an army corps on the Servian frontier as a gentle hint to King Peter that it would be wise to break the Montenegrin alliance.

The other Balkan states, which had obtained all that they could hope to gain by fighting, and far more than they could hope to retain when the diplomacy of the Powers had revised the treaties, were willing to negotiate peace. Only Montenegro had been unsuccessful, and now, when the starvation of the Turkish garrison was bringing victory almost within his grasp, King Nicholas had been notified by the foreign ministers in Cettinje to stay his hand, and the Powers had strengthened their demands by blockading his one pitiful little seaport on the Adriatic. If they could prevent it, he was to gain none of the nine points of advantage which the possession of Scutari would give him when it came to a division of the spoils of Turkey in Europe; for High Albania alone would be a pitiful prize for an ambitious pretender, while Scutari might be made an agreeable capital for some one of the impecunious relatives of a ruling sovereign.

Secluded as High Albania had kept

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itself, King Nicholas had still been able to obtain much information of its troubled internal affairs, and he was quick to realize the value of the prize which had fallen into his hands. Bairaktar, the father of Natalika, was the feudal chief of the most powerful highland clan, the tribe of Zatriejebac, which, tradition asserted, owed its origin to a band of crusaders who had sought the refuge of the mountains when their ship was wrecked on the Dalmatian coast. Foiled in their attempt to rescue the Holy Sepulcher from infidel hands, they had carried with them the fanaticism which had led them to follow the banner of the Cross to Palestine, and for centuries their descendants had obstinately defied the authority of the Crescent, and had continued to practice pretty much the same kind of Christianity which prevailed during the Dark Ages; a religion in which there was little of turning the other cheek, and an abundance of smiting hip and thigh.

In an alliance with Bairaktar King Nicholas could discover almost as great an advantage as in the possession of Scutari when the cards should be finally laid on the table. Alone the clan of Zatriejebac was not strong enough to dictate the choice of the future ruler of so much of Albania as would be created an independent principality; but it was sufficiently powerful to resist successfully the imposition of a distasteful ruler who might be selected by any other means.

It was evident that it was the policy of the Powers to permit the Balkan allies to drive Turkey for good and all to the Bosporus, and it was equally evident that mutual jealousy would prevent them from permitting any one member of the Concert to send an army to support the claims of a pretender to the Albanian throne.

Nominally they might prevent the annexation of Low Albania to Montenegro; but, with the help of Bairaktar, King Nicholas might acquire a practical possession, and in return furnish assistance which would enable the Zatriejebacs to subdue the other highland clans, and make their feudal chief the ruler of all Albania beyond the great plain of the Zeta. Entirely Oriental in his despotic methods of rule, Nicholas had become an adept in intrigue during his long reign over the tiny kingdom of the Black Mountains, and in intrigue a woman, especially a beautiful one, can always be used to great advantage.

And, in spite of her costume, travel-stained and worn in their hard journey, there was no denying the beauty of Natalika as she stood defiantly before him. She had been nurtured in rough and tragic surroundings, and schooled in too stern a creed to betray her private griefs, and there was nothing of fear nor agitation in the eyes which met his. Nicholas had curtly dismissed Captain Buto and his men after listening to a report of the capture, and turned to her with a simple and unaffected courtesy.

"These are but poor quarters; but we can at least offer you a seat," he said, smiling as he lifted a rough stool from beside the map-strewn table at which he had been seated. "Simple refreshment, too, if you are hungry."

Natalika remained standing and shook her head.

"I can accept nothing, sir, which is not offered also to my good comrade," she answered quietly.

Nicholas frowned; for even petty royalty is intolerant of opposition; but he was sufficiently wise to hide quickly any trace of irritation.

"The daughter of Bairaktar is my guest; not my prisoner," he answered. "I understand that your companion is a foreigner, an American, and what we have to say to each other is of interest only to your people and to mine. I assure you that he is safe, and it shall be my pleasure to see that he is given such comforts as our camp affords; but I prefer to speak with you alone." He waited; but Natalika ignored the proffered seat.

"And is my comrade, too, a guest; free to go when he will?" she asked.

"Unless he has offended against the laws of Montenegro, he will be taken to the frontier and deported as soon as the blockade is raised," answered the king.

"Until then we must necessarily restrict his liberty; but enough of him. It is of you and of your people I would speak with you, Natalika. I can offer that which your father will be glad to receive; the assistance which will make it possible for the clan of Zatriejebac to subdue his Moslem rivals, an alliance which will banish Islam from every foot of the Balkan peninsula which it has too long defiled."

Natalika smiled as she glanced at the map on which he had been working when she was brought in. A heavy pencil mark delimited the very least of Albanian territory which he was willing to accept as his portion of the spoils, and included every foot of the fertile lowlands.

"And this would be all that you would ask in return, sir?" she said interrogatively, placing her finger tips over the portion which his ambition coveted.

The king's face flushed. With more or less reason he had always regarded his fierce neighbors as barbarians. They were absolutely illiterate, and it had never occurred to him that this daughter of a savage chieftain could have the slightest knowledge of cartography.

"The rectification of the frontier would have to be a matter of negotiation," he said evasively; but a new light came suddenly to his dark eyes, as the face of the girl stood more plainly revealed by the reading lamp on the table.

The royal house of Albania was of a rugged race; physically its members were without exception fine, human animals; but—also without exception—they lacked that subtle quality of fine breeding which stamps the thoroughbred in man and beast. But Natalika, although as magnificent a specimen physically as the Montenegrin princess whom Italy had selected to infuse new blood into the heritage of the house of Savoy, and to restore the stature of men to its future kings, was as thoroughbred in feature as the unfortunate Marie Antoinette and the unhappy Mary of Scotland. In her face he saw all that his own race lacked, and, perhaps, the lack of that one quality of ruthless brutality which had contributed to his own success in the troubled political sea of the Balkans.

Almost roughly he reached over and grasped the hand which still rested on the map. Instinctively the girl's free hand went to the sash where her faithful dagger had rested for so many years, and it was well for Nicholas of Montenegro that one of his thieving subjects had filched it from her. But a woman's instinct had given Natalika more knowledge in some things than all she had learned in all her tutoring at Salonica, and after one glance at his face the hand which she had half raised to strike it fell to her side. His fierce eyes were blazing; but not with the lust to possess her, and she knew that in her he saw only an instrument to further his ambition.

"By San Constanzo, there will be no frontier!" he exclaimed passionately. "Nicholas, the Bear of the Black Mountains, and Bairaktar, the Eagle of the Albanian Crags, will defy Europe, and one day their grandson shall drive the Austrians from Dalmatia, and unite Bosnia and Herzegovina to his empire! Within the week Scutari will be in our hands, and so warily shall I play upon the jealousies of the Powers that we shall gain time to perfect our alliance!"

A little of compassion came to Natalika's eyes as she listened; for she knew how hopeless of realization was the ambitious dream of this old man. Nicholas was truly "The Bear of the Black Mountains" in his age; but in his youth he had incurred the lasting enmity and hatred of the clan of Zatriejebac by employing the cunning of the fox. Long before the Treaty of Berlin had led to the sealing of the passes to Gusinje and Plava, the father of Nicholas had committed the one sin which was unpardonable in the eyes of the clan. Then the intercourse between High Albania and Montenegro had been freer, and the Montenegrin king had brought dishonor to the household of one of the clansmen.

In the stern code of the Zatriejebac there was no forgiveness for such a wrong. Close on the heels of discovery the king had paid the debt of dishonor with his life. The next day the men who had killed him rode into the courtyard of a medieval castle high in the mountains, and their leader threw a bloodstained bundle on the stone pavement. Within an hour there was another stain upon those stones; for the woman paid her share of the debt as well, and over her coffin was stretched the skin of her royal lover. For the men of Zatriejebac the account was squared; but not for the son of the man they had killed. Never could the clansmen find direct proof of the new king's complicity; but within three years not a member of the woman's family was left alive. Neither man, woman, nor child was spared, and by poison, bullets from ambush, and the daggers of unknown assassins a noble family of eighty people was annihilated.

Had Nicholas himself led his men to the castle of the Dukasanji, and put every living thing within its walls to the sword after a fair fight, the men of Zatriejebac would have held nothing against him; but, while they were unable to bring the guilt of the murders home to him, they hated him as their secret instigator. Never while the blood debt remained unsatisfied could there be an alliance between Montenegro and her clan, and with a few quiet words Natalika reminded the king of that unbridgable gulf.

Nicholas released her hand and shrank away from her; for her words had brought up a grisly memory which for many years he had fought to forget. He believed that he alone of living beings knew the secret of that ghastly post-mortem indignity to his father's corpse. The mere fact of the assassination had been given to the world; the cause of it had been common knowledge throughout the kingdom; but only Nicholas and a couple of old retainers of the royal house had looked upon that flayed body. Those men had long since gone to their graves and taken their secret with them, and not a man of the Dukasanji had been left alive to boast of their vengeance. And now, in the eyes of this girl, he read the truth; that all of the fierce reprisal had been useless; that the humiliation he had done so much to conceal was a matter of common knowledge to the entire clan.

"You can see how futile it would be to make such a proposition to my people," she continued quietly, disregarding the burning hatred which had come to his fierce eyes. "We have not learned to forget. It is nearly four years since I left Gusinje; but I know that when I return I shall find it unchanged. But we know that things must change, sire; that we can no longer hope to maintain our isolation. A ruler we must have, and that ruler must come from without our boundaries; but he can never be chosen from your house so long as the clan of Zatriejebac remembers the Dukasanji—and that will be for so long as the clan exists. When I return I shall do my——"

"Return!" exclaimed Nicholas furiously. "You shall return to listen to the terms which I shall dictate to your people—or what is left of them when my army has marched to Gusinje!"

"I am the *guest* of Nicholas of Montenegro!" she reminded him; but it was to the Oriental despot whom savage memories had aroused that she was speaking, and he turned to her with a cruel smile on his lips.

"You are in the clutch of the Bear of the Black Mountains!" he retorted angrily. "Before this your people have felt his claws, and now, by San Constanzo, they shall feel the weight of his paws and be crushed in his embrace! Essad Pasha is gnawing at his ten finger bones behind the walls of Scutari; but to-morrow I shall grant him the terms for which he has asked when in another ten days I might dictate my own. The men who have taken Scutari will laugh at the defenses of the Zatriejebac, and Bairaktar, if he refuses an alliance, will be made to sue for mercy. Within the hour my messenger will be on the way to the frontier to offer him his choice."

"It will be a brave man who carries such a message to Bairaktar while his daughter is held prisoner!" said Natalika defiantly. "The Zatriejebac do not war with women. As you know, they kill to avenge them; but the poorest peasant woman in your kingdom would be safe in the hands of the worst man of the clan. They are men!"

Nicholas laughed scornfully as he strode to the door of the hut. A moment later Captain Buto, hopefully expectant of reward, entered and saluted.

"Captain Buto, you have deserved well of Montenegro, and I do not forget," said Nicholas grimly. "You shall have the privilege of serving as my ambassador; you shall carry for me a message to Bairaktar, chief of the Zatriejebac."

The look of greedy anticipation died in Buto's eyes.

"God send that Bairaktar's men did not recognize me, your majesty!" he ventured to object. "It is an ill matter to lay hands on one of their hell cats of women, and then speak face to face with their men. And then there is the matter of the dead man whom we left there to be explained. A courier has just come from Cettinje, and he says that every hilltop of the Highlands is ablaze with beacon fires."

"And if harm comes to you I promise that every hovel from the Zeta to Plava shall become a beacon of flame!" answered the king savagely. "What of this dead man; I understood that you had taken the woman's companion alive?"

"But there was another, sire; a wild devil who was fool enough to resist," explained Buto, his hand unconsciously caressing his bruised throat. "He would not give in, and Achmet cracked his skull with his rifle butt." Nicholas turned inquiringly to Natalika.

"I knew nothing of this; who was this man—an Albanian?" he demanded.

"Yes, for he died for Albania; but he was from America," she answered. "Think twice before you send this man to certain death, sir, and think deeply before you disregard the warning of those beacon fires. Bairaktar knew that his daughter traveled from Salonica with two Americans, and before this he knows that one of those men died for her, and that she is in your power. The blood feud for the death of the man lies on the head of Buto; but the beacons are blazing to rouse the country to save the honor of a woman."

Inch by inch she had drawn nearer to Buto as she spoke. Warned by the expression in Nicholas' eyes that he had almost transgressed the limits in venturing an objection, the captain had come to attention, and stood rigid, his hands at his side. From his broad sash projected the long-handled knives and the ornate revolvers which form part of every Montenegrin's armament; but between them her sharp eyes had seen the butt of the very serviceable magazine pistol which Jones-Morgan had given to her and taught her to use. Like a flash her hand extended and snatched it from its holster, and before either of the men realized what she had done she had vaulted lightly over the table, and across its broad surface she looked at them triumphantly.

Buto was no coward, and without a moment's hesitation he jumped to shield the king with his own body; but Nicholas imperatively pushed him aside, and faced the menacing pistol unflinchingly.

" 'To-day to me, to-morrow to thee,' " she quoted in mockery. "Don't finger those weapons in your sash, Captain Buto, or there will be no to-morrow in your future. Softly, gentlemen; for I have no wish to kill either of you! Your majesty, am I the guest of Nicholas of Montenegro, or in the clutch of the Bear of the Black Mountains?"

The king smiled grimly.

"My dear lady, I should say that you are playing the part of bear tamer—and playing it effectively," he answered. "You may lower your guard; I pledge my word for your safety. You are not my prisoner; but I ask you to remain with me as an honored hostage until my messenger returns. I am an old man, Natalika; I have learned that a bad peace is better than a good war. You have reminded me of much that I would have forgotten, and all of that I shall remember in framing my proposals to Bairaktar. Captain Buto shall carry those proposals, and with them any message that you may wish to send. You may assure him that whatever his answer may be, his daughter's honor is as safe as if she were under his own protection, and that upon the return of my messenger she will be restored to him unharmed."

Natalika smiled; but she relaxed nothing of her vigilance.

"I believe that for the moment I am in a position to impose conditions," she said quietly. "I do not hesitate to accept your pledge, sire; but you are facing the enemy, and accidents happen. I will remain here as a hostage upon my own terms. Mr. Rankin, my companion, must be set at liberty, and his arms returned to him. You will instruct your people that we are both hostages; that the honor of their king answers for our safety. In return I will give Captain Buto a pass which will insure his safety."

The king bowed.

"I am overwhelmed by the generosity of my victor," he said, with a touch of sarcasm in his manner. "I make an unconditional surrender, and suggest a cessation of hostilities. Captain Buto, you will immediately liberate your other prisoner, restore the weapons which you took from him, and conduct him here."

Buto saluted; but it was not until Natalika had confirmed the king's order that he left the cabin.

Natalika still maintained her post of vantage, and when Rankin entered the hut the look of anxiety in his eyes quickly gave way to a twinkle of amusement. King Nicholas looked him over critically before he acknowledged the American's respectful salute.

"From what I have learned of this young lady's ability to care for herself, it seems superfluous to have selected a man of your stature to care for her," he said grimly. "I have lived a long life, sir; but this is the first time that Nicholas of Montenegro has ever surrendered."

"It is never a disgrace to surrender to a woman, your majesty," said Rankin, smiling.

Nicholas shrugged his broad shoulders.

"It is plain that you are not of the Orient," he said. "Here we should slightly amend that statement. It can be no disgrace to surrender to such a woman."

CHAPTER VI.

"WHEN WE DEAD AWAKE."

The spark of life is a curious and an erratic thing. Oftentimes it is extinguished in the strongest men by the most trifling of causes, more frequently it persists with surprising obstinacy in the most fragile of human beings in spite of the gravest injuries, and occasionally it lies dormant and unsuspected, to flicker back into recognizable activity in the most startling manner; as witness the many authenticated instances of supposed corpses interrupting their own funeral services with strenuous objections to the proposed interment. In every book dealing with medical jurisprudence there is a chapter devoted to the description of the most delicate and intricate tests to demonstrate its presence or absence; but—so subtle and elusive a thing is life—in the final analysis all of the authorities are forced to admit that the advent of putrefactive change is the one absolutely conclusive proof of death.

Inhibition of the heart's action and suspension of respiration to the ordinary lay mind are sufficiently convincing, and it is hardly surprising that, finding Jones-Morgan pulseless and breathless, Rankin had mourned him as dead, especially as he had seen him receive a blow which would have put a period to the ruminative career of an ox. And, to all intents and purposes, Jones-Morgan was dead; for that terrible impact on his skull had for the time being abolished every vital function. In those troublous days casual dead men were the recumbent, motionless figure, with its limbs disposed in the conventional post-mortem manner, and with a crucifix lying on the breast, Kuc and Lasso were not tempted to go behind the returns and search for latent signs of life which were not obvious to the naked eye.

It was an inert and apparently lifeless lump of clay which the Albanians raised shoulder high on their rifle barrels; but the inevitable jolting and swaying of their burden in their progress up the rough mountain trail was probably the exact stimulus which was needed to fan that slumbering and dormant vital spark which it retained to renewed activity, and to recall the cardiac and respiratory apparatus to a measure of their interrupted functions. In any case, Jones-Morgan gave unmistakable signs of life when the bearers deposited his alleged corpse upon the floor in the guardroom of their little fortress. The eyelids which Natalika had so tenderly closed fluttered, a moan came from the blood-flecked lips, and the fingers clutched convulsively at the cloak on which he had been stretched.

Now the topography of a large part of High Albania is so precipitous that it is almost perpendicular, and its tribesmen are hot-headed and addicted to the giving and taking of shrewd blows. The medical profession is conspicuous only by its absence; but serious accidents and grievous wounds are so common, that most of the mountaineers are adepts in a crude but usually effective surgery, and especially skillful in treating cranial injuries. In his favor Jones-Morgan had a naturally strong and rugged consituation, and a record of clean living, and under the rough and ready ministrations of Kuc and Lasso the feeble flicker which remained in him was roused to a vigorous activity in a surprisingly short time. His soiled and blood-soaked garments were removed and replaced with spare articles from the garrison slop chest, and when he returned to sufficient consciousness to be aware of his surroundings, he differed nothing in costume, and but little in appearance, from his new companions.

And it was in a weirdly picturesque environment that consciousness returned to him. There was nothing of luxury or softness in that frontier fortress which was devoted only to the stern purposes of war. The rough walls of masonry were pierced by narrow loopholes which admitted but a dim light on the brightest day, and the low, vaulted ceiling of the guardroom was blackened by the smoke of the torches of resinous wood which were thrust in crude iron braziers on the walls.

Facing him as he sat propped up on a rough bench in an angle of the massive wall was a semicircle of the rugged defenders of the fortress; sturdy men of large stature, and with fierce visages, with eyes like hawks, the large teeth of carnivorous animals, and skins tanned to the hue of saddle leather by exposure to the winds and fierce sunshine of the mountains and highland plateaus.

They were dressed in the white fustanella woven on hand looms by their own women from the wool of their own flocks; the jackets bordered with a zigzag pattern of black braid, which marked the clan of Zatriejebac as a Scottish Highlander is distinguished by his plaid. Their head covering consisted of long strips of white cloth of the same material, but a lighter weight, wound deftly into turban form, with the ends brought down on either side, and wrapped loosely about their necks. Their tight breeches were ornamented with black braid in the same pattern as that on the jackets, and about their waists bandoleers of gayly ornamented leather were stuffed full of cartridges and supported an assortment of ancient daggers and ornate pistols. In his personal armament each man seemed to be guided by his own taste; but the clan pattern of the braid gave a certain uniformity to their costumes, and destroyed a little of the suggestion of banditti.

Curiously enough, there was no sense of strangeness in his surroundings when Jones-Morgan slowly returned to conscious life. He looked slowly about without evincing the slightest surprise at finding himself in the vaulted, medieval fortress, and he recognized nothing of menace in the faces which were grotesquely fierce in the lurid glow of the flaring torches. In fact, the mountaineers were far more surprised than he; for they were certain that he was not of their land, and yet, when Kuc muttered as he readjusted a bandage about his head, he answered him fluently in their own peculiar dialect; a tongue unknown even in the neighboring lowlands.

They stared at him incredulously, and more than one of them furtively crossed himself; for with speech had returned that curious facial resemblance to their national hero, Skanderbeg; a resemblance which was now heightened and intensified by the costume of the country which was essentially unchanged since that warrior's deeds had been chronicled, and his likeness perpetuated in tapestry by the deft fingers of contemporary needlewomen.

In ordinary circumstances, such a blow as Jones-Morgan had received from the butt of the sturdy Achmet's rifle might have been expected to annihilate memory even if it spared life; but those circumstances were decidedly out of the ordinary.

Flippantly as the young American had spoken of the results of the investigations of the genealogists when he was enlisting the good offices of Jabez Cooper, there still existed in his mind a little faith in their accuracy, and more than a little pride in that faith. He had found nothing but boredom in the life which his family connections and fortune practically dictated to him in America; he had known the full flavor and measure of living only since he entered the portal of adventure in Salonica. The romance of Natalika's stories had fallen on a mentality carefully followed by many summers and winters of practicality, and, although he had been absolutely unconscious of it, her fascinating personality had played no small part in making his progress on the Road to Yesterday alluring.

So complex a thing is the human brain that no neurologist could hope to explain the effects of that savage blow; but as Jones-Morgan recovered consciousness, he remembered in the minutest detail everything which had occurred from the moment Natalika had commenced her first tale of the history of Albania in that luxurious apartment in the Salonica hotel. But he remembered things in the personality of the Albanian he had laughingly proclaimed himself to be when he was presented to her; for his life up to that instant was a perfect blank in his memory. Of New York and of his identity as Sturtevant van Winkle Beekman Stuyvesant van Twiller Jones-Morgan he retained not the faintest recollection, while the whole history of Albania, its traditions, its prejudices, its present difficulties, and the future ambitions of so much of it as the clan of Zatriejebac controlled was at his very finger tips.

Natalika's stories had been detailed, and her descriptions so vivid that both the characters which she described, and the scenes of their activities, had been impressed upon his mind with photographic exactness and fidelity. They had been so completely illuminating of the life and customs of the isolated High Albania that he had come to know why the Canon of Lek decreed that a bachelor should wear the weapons in his sash with the handles inclined to the right, while those of the married men slanted to the left—and when one understands that, there is little left for one to learn of the inner life of the Highlanders.

So minutely had she described the mysterious hidden city of Gusinje that he seemed to know the names of the very pariah dogs that scavenged it, and so often had he visited with her in imagination the great feudal castle which her father held as chief of the clan that he could have threaded the maze of its stone-vaulted passageways from the lowest subterranean dungeon to the top of the highest battlemented tower with his eyes blindfolded.

Therefore, he found nothing to surprise him in his surroundings, and nothing to terrify him in the fierce aspect of his companions when consciousness returned. True, he was decidedly muddled and confused as to the events of the past few hours, but that he attributed to a very severe pain in his head.

Once he had spoken in the language which he had learned from Natalika he was overwhelmed and almost deafened by the eager outbreak of questioning; but before he could gather his wits to answer the simplest of the queries, the clamor was suddenly hushed.

Above it all had floated in through the doorway of the guardroom—the only opening toward High Albania—the clear notes of a bugle call, and every one of the mountaineers had sprung instantly to attention.

The American had recognized that peculiar call as quickly as they; for a hundred times at least he had heard Natalika hum or whistle it during her stories. It was the hereditary bugle call of the chief of the clan; the summons to which every door of the Zatriejebac must open; the signal that the chief approached.

Grasping torches from the wall, a half dozen of the tribesmen sallied out, and Jones-Morgan had not the slightest doubt as to the identity of the man who returned with them. In height he was no taller than his escort; but there was something in his bearing which gave the impression that he towered above them. His costume was as simple as theirs; but he seemed cast in a finer mold, and bore the unmistakable stamp of race. He was lean and muscular, and without a superfluous ounce of flesh on his graceful, well-knit figure, and his strong, stern face was the face of a natural leader of men, who practiced his natural vocation. He could be none but Bairaktar.

"Well met, O brothers!" he said, as he entered, employing the universal salutation of the clan. "I have come a long journey; from the border of Dalmatia; and I bring great news from our spies at Cattaro. Jannina, Salonica, and Adrianople have fallen, and the sultan's nazims have been driven from Thrace and Macedonia. None of the allies has dared so much as cast an eye toward our Highlands, although the Turkish garrisons at the borders have deserted their posts, and the roads lie open. But, best of all, Natalika has accomplished that for which she has striven so long at Salonica. She has gained knowledge of the plots of all the Powers against our independence; she knows the identity of every pretender to the throne, and just what secret influence is back of the pretensions. And nearly two months since Natalika set out from Salonica under safe escort, and we can look for her any hour at our outposts. What is it, Kuc? You have my permission to speak."

Kuc had taken a pace forward and saluted, and at the permission he held up the crucifix which Natalika had laid on Jones-Morgan's breast.

"It is this, O chief!" he answered. "All day we watched from these walls, laughing at the Montenegrin dogs who had kenneled in the rocks below, believing that they were hidden from our eyes, and planning to snap at our heels when we descended in the night to raid the baggage train from Cettinje, as is our custom. We had planned a nice little surprise for them, and there would have been a fine slitting of dogs' throats; but everything was spoiled by three horsemen who rode among them. There was a chance of plunder which those lowland brigands could not resist, and they betrayed themselves. We could not see just what happened from here; but there was some small scrimmage, and when we sallied down to whip the dogs back to their master, they turned tail and ran, carrying their prisoners with them. When we reached the place where they had planned their ambush we found only a dead man, and him we carried back."

Bairaktar looked at him impatiently. Kuc was a brave and faithful retainer; but he was not noted for cleverness.

"What child's talk is this?" he demanded. "You go down on foray, and when you return burden yourselves only with strange carrion?"

"That's just it, O chief!" answered Kuc, scratching his head with one hand, and with the other bringing the crucifix more plainly into the torchlight. "Those ignorant dogs can't even kill a man properly, and when we saw that he had the face of Skanderbeg, and that this crucifix lay on his——"

With a cry Bairaktar interrupted the confused narration and, jumping forward, he snatched the crucifix from his hand.

"By St. John of Medua, it is the sacred crucifix of Skanderbeg!" he exclaimed. "With my own hands I hung this about the neck of Natalika when we devoted her as a sacrifice to Albania's freedom. What of this dead man; what manner of man was he? Speak, Kuc! Was he an American?"

Kuc scratched his head more vigorously and shifted uneasily.

"We did not know, O chief," he answered. "He was too large a man to be of the Osmanli. A giaour we believed him to be; but then his face bore the likeness of Skanderbeg, and when he talked we found that he spoke our own tongue as well as I do."

Bairaktar stamped his foot and, grasping Kuc by the shoulders, he shook him vigorously.

"You speak the language of a fool!" he said angrily. "What fairy tale of Skanderbeg's likeness, of dead men talking, are you trying to impose upon me? Is there no man among you with a straight tongue who can give me the truth of this?"

Silently the ranks of the tribesmen parted. Standing shoulder to shoulder in front of Bairaktar, they had hidden Jones-Morgan—who had been quite content to remain seated after one effort to rise—from the chieftain's eyes.

"I told you that those lowland dogs could not even kill a man properly," grumbled Kuc. "They smashed his head, and then never troubled to——"

Bairaktar pushed him roughly aside, and in two great strides stood before Jones-Morgan. His fierce eyes were blazing, and eager questions trembled on his lips; but he was suddenly mute, and stood as if spellbound, gazing down on the face which was lifted to his. There was nothing of fear in that face, nor was there a suggestion of defiance. Feature for feature, and line for line, it was the face of Skanderbeg, and in the eyes which met his own so frankly Bairaktar read a friendly and sympathetic understanding. There was not a sound in the guardroom as they looked at each other long in silence, and Bairaktar could hardly recognize his own voice when at last he managed to gasp out a question.

"W-who—wh-what are you!" he stammered. "A ghost; a spirit?"

The American shook his head, and the movement brought a little grimace of pain to his face.

"Not unless a spirit is sufficiently substantial to have a rip-roaring headache," he answered, with a wry smile. "Perhaps it is that which makes me hazy as to my own identity. Skanderbeg, your men call me, and for want of another that name will serve. It sounds familiarly in my ears, as if I had always borne it."

Bairaktar held out the crucifix.

"And this; how came you by it?" he demanded eagerly.

Jones-Morgan took it from him, and a smile of perplexity came to his lips, as he turned it over and over in his hands.

"But why not—why should I not have it?" he asked, after pressing it to his lips. "It is the sacred relic of St. John of Medua; the Zatriejebac are its guardians, and I—I——"

He paused, bewildered.

"And you; and you!" prompted Bairaktar eagerly.

The semicircle of tribesmen had narrowed about them. None but the men of Zatriejebac knew the history of that sacred relic, and they listened breathlessly for his reply.

"Why, I have come back to help the Zatriejebac in the hour of their need, and I suppose that it is a sign," he went on slowly. "It seems to have called me; it has left Albania; but I have brought it back to the keeping of the Zatriejebac."

As if the touch of the relic had suddenly restored his strength, he rose to his feet and held it reverently aloft. And then, on the stone-flagged floor of the guardroom, every man of the Albanians knelt as if swayed by a common and irresistible impulse.

For a moment Bairaktar stood as if undecided whether to cross himself in reverence or cross his fingers as a protection against the evil eye; but there could be nothing of the fiend in one who held aloft such a sacred relic, and surely so kindly a face never contained the *jettatura.* He, too, knelt and muttered a prayer; but parental anxiety fought with reverence and patriotism, and he quickly rose to his feet.

The ruling of the turbulent tribe of Zatriejebac was no child's play, and Bairaktar, while he would have been shamed in book learning by an American high-school graduate, had inherited a native shrewdness, and acquired a knowledge of human nature which many of his contemporary rulers lacked. He had made a guess which pretty closely approximated the truth. There was no denying the remarkable resemblance to the face of Skanderbeg, and never before had he known any one not of his own people who possessed such a command of their peculiar language. Had this man appeared mysteriously in his own closely guarded castle, a stronghold which Skanderbeg himself had once held, and where his mortal remains had been interred centuries ago, he would have accepted him as a reincarnation of that leader whose likeness he bore; for the demonism of the Dark Ages had persisted as a part of the creed of the still-primitive Highlanders.

But in the light of Kuc's narrative he found a suggestion of the truth, and he knew that in his proper person and identity this must be one of those chivalrous Westerners who had volunteered to escort Natalika from the Ægean coast to the Albanian Highlands. He had believed that she would come by sea to Cattaro, and had waited for her at the Dalmatian border, and there news had come to him of the manner of her setting out from Salonica, and the personnel of her small escort. From the blockhouse it would have been impossible to distinguish sex, and it was undoubtedly Natalika and her two cavaliers who had ridden into that ambuscade within sight of their goal.

Bairaktar realized that the man before him was absolutely sincere; he was no impostor playing a carefully rehearsed part. It was natural that he should be mentally a little confused after such an injury as he had received; it was impossible that any human being should regain consciousness after such a blow and successfully carry out a planned imposture. And, most convincing proof of all, it was inconceivable that a man whom Natalika had so implicitly trusted, and who had received from her hands the sacred relic of Skanderbeg, would betray her confidence and play the fool.

"Skanderbeg we may call you this night; but yesterday, when you rode through the lowlands, you were another," he said quietly, after a long silence. "And you did not ride alone, O brother! What of your companions; of the woman you had sworn to protect?"

The American hesitated for a moment, very evidently struggling to bring accurate memory from confusion.

"Yes; your daughter, Natalika, O Bairaktar," he answered slowly. "It was she who called to me and brought me back; she told me of your need; she guided me to the very portal of our country when I was lost afar off."

He met the stern gaze of the Albanian chieftain without faltering, and in his eyes Bairaktar read the truth; that his confusion was an honest one; that he was like a man trying to describe things which he could see only dimly through a puzzling mist.

Very gently he helped to lead him on, and, after he had made Lasso tell of so much of the details of that last fight as the Albanians had seen from their battlements, the American caught the connecting thread which he had lost.

"Yes, she called on me; she called me Skanderbeg, and I turned and fought for her," he said slowly. "I was wounded, I think; I can't seem to remember exactly; for everything became dark so quickly. But I know that Natalika is safe, O Bairaktar. She is with Rankin, and no harm can come to her while he lives."

"Rankin? Your friend, your companion? Who is he—what is he?" demanded Bairaktar eagerly. In the mention of the name he believed that he had discovered the stimulus which would arouse the dormant memory of the past in the confused brain.

"Why, Rankin is just Rankin," replied Jones-Morgan, and again his eyes were puzzled. "He is a giant in mind and body. He is not of our people; but he came with me when Natalika called me back. One day you shall know him, O Bairaktar. Now he protects Natalika while we carry fire and sword to the tribe of Malissora and the clan of Mirdites. When we have dismantled their castles, and brought them to subjection, she will return under his protection, and we shall do him honor. Together we rode from Salonica, and together we should have ridden to Gusinje but for that accursed ambuscade. But in God's good time he will come and bring your daughter in safety, O Bairaktar; just as I have come back at the appointed time, when the men of Mirdites plot to take Gusinje, while Zatriejebac guards the frontier, and the false Moslem traitors of the Malissora take Ferdinand's gold to open the passes from Macedonia that the Bulgars may give our land to his cousin of Orleans to rule. And now, O brothers, I would sleep; for I am very weary."

Bairaktar and his retainers watched in silence as the American stretched himself on the rude bench. He had spoken like an inspired oracle, and his words had confirmed their suspicions of the rival clans, suspicions which only the men of Zatriejebac could be supposed to harbor. It was uncanny, and Bairaktar had no explanation to offer when his followers turned to him with that simple and blind faith in his superior wisdom which was part of the inheritance of feudalism.

"I know no more than yourselves," he acknowledged in answer to their mute inquiry. "We all know that in the body he is a man of different race; but in spirit he is one of us. Perhaps it is a miracle worked through the intercession of our patron, St. John of Medua; but in the body of this man the likeness and spirit of Skanderbeg have come back to Zatriejebac. On the morrow we may know more; but although this may be a sign that the God of our fathers still protects us, we must not forget to protect ourselves and our own. I shall await his awakening; but with the dawn we must be prepared to act. A daughter of Zatriejebac is in the hands of those lowland dogs, and they must be reminded of our power to avenge an injury. Captain Balsha, you will kindle the beacons and watch for the answering flames. By dawn every man of Zatriejebac must be with the banners. Kuc and Lasso, you answer to me with your lives for the safety of the sleeping—Skanderbeg!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE NEW LEADER.

Under the watchful guard of Lasso and Kuc the American slept as peacefully as a child, while beacon answered beacon from the watch towers and blockhouses which guarded every practicable trail which gave access to the Highlands from the great plain of the Zeta. Never left unguarded in the most peaceful times, the volunteer garrisons of those small outposts had been strengthened on the outbreak of the Balkan war, and such of the Albanians who followed their usual avocations at home were constantly upon the alert for the signals which would summon them to the banners of their feudal chieftains. And so it happened that Jones-Morgan was the only man who slept in the territory of the Zatriejebac that night; for over the rough mountain trails every fighting man of the clan was hurrying to his hereditary leader, roused by the flaming beacons which blazed on every hilltop.

It was broad daylight when Jones-Morgan awakened, if under that name he could be said to have awakened at all; for the sleep which had refreshed him physically had restored nothing of the vanished memories, and save for the appellation which the clansmen had bestowed upon him, he was still nameless. By the strange disorganization of the cerebral cells which had resulted from the blow it was only his identity and personality which was lost, however; for, while he remembered nothing of the incidents of his life before he met Natalika, he retained a full knowledge of the things which that life had taught him.

That Bairaktar discovered as they breakfasted together; for the chief maintained a certain state, and Kuc and Lasso served them deftly at the simple but abundant meal. During the night the Albanian ruler had pieced things pretty well together in his own mind, and while he still marveled at the curious likeness to Skanderbeg, and the still more curious instinctive knowledge of the personality of the old hero which the American possessed, he was shrewd enough to realize that it might be turned to the tremendous advantage of his clan. From the garrison of the little fortress he had dispatched messengers to all of the minor chieftains who gave him a nominal feudal allegiance, and he knew that the tales which those couriers would tell in the halls of the medieval castles would strengthen the fidelity of such leaders as had been tempted by personal ambition to question his authority.

Superstition played no small part in the lives of the illiterate and primitive people whom he ruled. Stories and chronicles which were handed down from generation to generation replaced the printed word in preserving their tribal history, and in the course of centuries those tales had become interwoven with myths which bordered on the supernatural, and prepared the simple-minded mountaineers to accept this trance-controlled stranger who had appeared so strangely among them as a veritable reincarnation of that Skanderbeg whom legend and tradition had invested with personal invulnerability and a miraculous invincibility.

If Bairaktar himself accepted him, the last wavering doubt of his followers would vanish. In such fighting as lay before them with the rival clans, fanaticism would add tremendously to their chance of success, and with a reincarnated Skanderbeg as their nominal leader, that fanaticism would spread through the tribe like a conflagration. A half hour's talk with his guest convinced him that this strange changeling would play the part to perfection; for from the dim medieval past he had brought a purer patriotism than animated Bairaktar himself; a fierce longing to reassert the lost supreme power of the Zatriejebac in the Albanian Highlands which betrayed no tinge of personal ambition.

As a first test, Bairaktar summoned the entire garrison of the fortress to the courtyard, and there, in the bright sunlight, he solemnly presented this scion of the Knickerbocker burghers and the Welsh tin-plate manufacturer to his retainers as Skanderbeg, miraculously restored to his people in the hour of their need to lead them to victory in the inevitable conflict with their hereditary enemies, the Moslem and renegade tribesmen.

Without the slightest hesitation the men of Zatriejebac accepted him; a proceeding which the American took quite as a matter of course, receiving the allegiance which they swore on the crucifix of Skanderbeg as his right.

Neither of them felt undue anxiety for the safety of Natalika. Jones-Morgan had implicit confidence in the ability of Rankin to care for her, and Bairaktar knew that the Montenegrins must have seen the beacon fires, and that in them they would read a warning which would make them think many times before offering her the slightest indignity. Time pressed; for couriers from the other outposts were constantly arriving with news of unusual activity on the part of the Malissora and the Mirdites, and, despite his wound, the pseudo Skanderbeg announced that he was quite able to travel to Gusinje.

And so, as a result of the blow from a Montenegrin rifle butt, the American rode to the forbidden city; not as a desperate adventurer seeking to appropriate the crown of Albania; but as the acclaimed leader of the powerful clan of the Zatriejebac, descendants of the nobles and men-at-arms who had followed Richard the Lion-hearted to Palestine, and with whom the English genealogists had given him blood kinship.

At his right hand rode Bairaktar, outwardly rendering homage and deference; but mentally planning to use him as a tool to further his own aims, and make his feudal chieftainship secure. He knew that he could never himself become the King of Albania; for such a selection would end only in perpetual dissension among the clans; but he was determined that he would be a Warwick, and dictate the choice of a ruler; one who would choose Natalika to share his throne, and acknowledge her father as the power behind it.

As they neared the great, old castle, which the crusaders had commenced when they decided that they would remain in the land which had given them refuge in time of need, a smile of satisfaction came to his lips. Above the great donjon in the center of the pile waved the banner of the Zatriejebac, a cross of white in a field of blue, which he as the chief of the clan was entitled to use as his own; but from the outer towers and battlements the fluttering bannerets of the lesser nobles announced that their owners had obeyed his summons, and hastened to receive his commands.

The tale of Skanderbeg's reappearance must have been effectively told by his couriers; for he knew that the loyalty of more than one of the nobles had been wavering in the balance; for gold had been poured into Albania in the interests of more than one of the pretenders, and many of the nobles were poor.

Bairaktar was a little startled to find that his companion was entirely aware of his suspicions, and he looked at him in amazement as he called the names of the different nobles from their bannerets as accurately as a medieval herald would have read the identity of jousting knights from the blazonry of their shields.

Skanderbeg, of course, had been familiar with them all; for they were the original colors which the knights had worn in the crusades; but it was uncanny to hear those names come so readily from the lips of this foreigner, who had been less than twenty-four hours in the Highlands which those banners and pennons had not left for centuries. And when they rode together across the lowered drawbridge and beneath the ancient portcullis, he was more than startled; for this impostor, whom he had planned to use as a pliable instrument, spurred ahead into the great courtyard, and arrogated to himself the fanfare of trumpets which saluted the arrival of the chief of the Zatriejebac.

Gathered together in that courtyard were most of the nobles of the clan, men who ruled absolutely in the territories which their individual strongholds dominated in time of peace; but each owing allegiance to the hereditary chief in time of war. Behind each of them stood a sturdy body of their personal retainers; the number of fighting men fully armed and equipped which each noble was bound to furnish under the feudal tenure by which he held his lands.

Bairaktar had planned to receive the homage of the assemblage, and had even planned in his mind the speech with which he would present his companion as the resurrected Skanderbeg; but so thoroughly was the American imbued with the spirit of his rôle that Bairaktar was forestalled, and his plans went sadly agley.

Waiting for no introduction, he rode before them, reining his active little mountain horse back on its haunches as the ringing "Well met, O brothers!" came from his lips.

For a moment Bairaktar suspected treachery; for no answer came from the silent ranks. Every man stood as if spellbound, gazing in amazement at the face which was that of a man come back from the dead.

The American waited confidently, and when the answering salute came it made up in intensity for the delay; for the "Well met, O Skanderbeg! Well met, O Lord of the Zatriejebac!" echoed and reëchoed from the massive walls of masonry. And then most courteously he pulled his horse aside and waited until Bairaktar had given and received the salute which was his due before dismounting. Side by side they stood as the nobles advanced and pledged allegiance for themselves and their retainers, Bairaktar introducing each by his full titles; many of them quaint appellations recalling that age of chivalry which died so long ago in the great outside world.

None questioned his identity or authority, and those who had so much as wavered in contemplation muttered thanks to their patron, St. John of Medua, that no treachery to the clan had been consummated; for there was something in the eye of the man who presented to them the crucifix of Skanderbeg before extending his own hand which warned them that the hand they kissed in token of allegiance would fall with crushing force upon a traitor or a coward.

Bairaktar smiled grimly as the last of the nobles rose after kneeling before them; for the imposition had worked almost too well; so thoroughly that this stranger before him could have deposed him at a word. And in the great banquet hall to which they adjourned for council it was to Skanderbeg that the nobles made their reports, detailing the defensive condition of their individual strongholds which dotted the hilltops and dominated the passes, enumerating the forces which they had brought with them, and numbering those who would come during the night.

Deducting from the total, the men who would be required to garrison the castles and the frontier forts there remained a force of some four thousand men, less than either the Malissora or the Mirdites could put in the field. The clan of the Malissora was fanatically Moslem, and of late years it had grown tremendously from the addition of recruits who refused to remain in Bosnia and Herzegovina when those provinces were seized by Austria.

For centuries the clan had carried on a border warfare with the Christian clan of the Zatriejebac; but for two generations there had been a truce between them; for it was necessary to form an alliance which divided the defense of the Highland frontier between them to protect High Albania from invasion by the tax-gathering troops of the sultan.

But while the Malissora and Zatriejebac hated each other with the hereditary hatred of Cross and Crescent, they both despised the Mirdites; a mongrel clan which had become powerful through the constant accession of renegades from every Balkan state and all the provinces of the Turkish empire.

In the fastnesses of the most inaccessible mountains, the Mirdites had their strongholds; for neither of the other powerful clans would have trusted a foot of the frontier to their guardianship; and from these strongholds they swooped down in fierce forays on the lands of their rivals. It was fear of them which had kept the feudal system alive in the Zatriejebac, who would listen to no treaty with the renegades; but Malissora had bargained for a certain immunity for itself; giving in return free passage through the passes which they held when the raiders ravaged Macedonia and Thrace for treasure and women. So far they had been in alliance, and now if they made that bond tighter and combined against Zatriejebac the Christians must choose between submission and annihilation.

Much of this internal history the young American had gathered from Natalika's stories, and in the council of nobles he had applied that knowledge with a force and directness which gained their immediate and enthusiastic support for his plans.

Since the abdication of Abdul Hamid the fanaticism of Mohammedanism which he had fostered had declined. Even for the Armenian massacres he had found it necessary to send Kurdish bashi-bazouks to carry out his bloody commands, and now that the Balkan allies had driven the Crescent to the confines of Europe, the scattered Moslems who remained were not strenuous in their allegiance to the tenets of their ancient faith. Tempted by Bourbon gold, the Malissora were already bargaining for a secret alliance with

Ferdinand of Bulgaria, which would enable him to place his cousin, the Duke of Montpensier, on the Alabanian throne, and they held off from treating with the Mirdites for a combination against Zatriejebac only because they feared that as allies they would claim a share of the price of treachery.

The nobles would never have consented to follow Bairaktar in such a campaign as this reincarnation of Skanderbeg proposed and had accepted. Possibly in other surroundings they would not have given such enthusiastic assent; but in the great banquet hall the face of the speaker was reflected from the tapestries which covered the rough stone walls as from a mirror. Those tapestries furnished a pictorial history of the great Skanderbeg's achievements. There was Skanderbeg, single-handed hurling a whole company of attacking Moslems from the battlements of that very castle; Skanderbeg, at the head of a dozen men-at-arms, chasing a large army of Turks across the plain of the Zeta; Skanderbeg and his esquire, successfully defending a Highland pass against a countless host of Saracens.

Each one of the series represented a deed of Homeric prowess, and the man before them might have posed for the central figure in each picture. Perhaps hero worship had led to a certain exaggeration of those deeds; but there was no denying the evidence which hung above their heads; the tattered remnants of innumerable banners bearing the Star and Crescent which he captured from the forces of Islam. The armories of the castle were filled with his trophies; the richly ornamented horse trappings of Turkish pashas, the damascened armor and weapons of emirs and stand after stand of arms long obsolete. The faith that was in him, that same faith and confidence which shone from the eyes of this man who spoke to them in his likeness, had enabled him to conquer against vastly superior odds, and what man has once done, man can do again.

This modern Skanderbeg advocated immediate attack on the Malissora. Unimportant castles and fortresses were to be abandoned and their garrisons concentrated at important strategic points for defense against incursions of the Mirdites, while he marched with every available man against the far greater numbers of the Moslem clan. At all hazard they must wrest from them the defenses of the passes which they were planning to betray to the Bulgarians. Then, insured against treachery at the frontier, they would fill the dungeons of Castle Gusinje with hostages from the Malissora, and attack the banditti of the Mirdites in their robber castles in the mountains.

And at that council, presided over by a man who three months earlier had been a commonplace, twentieth-century American millionaire, was inaugurated that savage medieval war which decided the destinies of High Albania. No more of the details than are related in this narrative will ever figure in the history of nations; for the archives of Jabez Cooper are not available for public inspection, and war correspondents are even less popular in that isolated country than with the general staff of a modern army. But from the gates of Castle Gusinje at dawn the following morning marched four thousand men, each and every one of them inspired by as fanatical a faith as that which Peter, the Hermit, had aroused in their ancestors when he inflamed the chivalry of Europe to attempt to wrest the Holy Sepulcher from the infidels' grasp.

At their head rode the ci-devant Skanderbeg; beside him Bairaktar; immediately behind them a half dozen of the greatest nobles. Following them in the order of precedence rode the minor chieftains, each at the head of his own quota of retainers.

Untrammeled by knowledge of the theory and science of war, the American leader rode at the head of his determined little army with the most sublime confidence. Unwittingly, he was following the experience of that mind which a rifle butt had knocked into subconsciousness; the experience gained on the polo field and in the amateur prize ring. That experience had taught him that the defensive game always lost. In the primitive soldiering of Albania there was none of the red tape with which humanity had surrounded the war game. A few bullocks and a flock of sheep on the hoof represented the entire commissary train, a score of hardy little mules carried the reserve supply of cartridges.

There was not even a suggestion of hospital equipment, and in a country where most of the roads were little better than goat paths the employment of field artillery had never been thought of. Save for the uniformity of the modern rifles which they carried, it was as elemental a fighting force as that which entered the Holy Land under the banner of the Cross; but it was far more dangerous; for with equal fanaticism was combined the knowledge that every man was fighting for the protection of his own hearth and home.

Rapidly as that mobile army marched, it was two days before they reached the strip of neutral ground which lay between the boundaries of their own territory and that of the Malissora, ground which in the old days had been constantly reddened with the blood shed in a guerrilla warfare between the tribal outposts.

There they encountered the first opposition, and under the leadership of Bairaktar it would have taken days to overcome it; for since the introduction of modern arms the mountaineers had fought only at long range, and from behind the shelter of rocks.

At the first shot his army melted from sight with a rapidity which suggested at least exaggerated caution; for, while not a man retreated, they waited for no command to seek such shelter as the broken country afforded. Only the American stood erect and in plain view of the concealed enemy; a piece of temerity which brought a hail of bullets whistling about his ears, but at the same time served to reveal the location of the riflemen.

Knowing from bitter experience the expert marksmanship of their hereditary foes, it seemed to the Zatriejebac a miracle that he stood unscathed by that leaden hail, and with that proof of invulnerability before their eyes the last lingering doubt of him died. Therefore, when their leader violated all the canons of Albanian Highland warfare and charged forward, instead of seeking shelter, every man within hearing of his voice sprang from concealment and followed, rushing against a sheet of flame and a storm of bullets.

Bairaktar was close at his heels, and around him were perhaps fifty of the nobles and their immediate followers, while twice as many red fezzes bobbed above the rocks a hundred yards away, as their owners half rose from shelter to empty their magazines at the oncoming Christians.

It was only a small outpost of the Malissora; but by the usual Albanian methods it would have taken hours to dislodge it; a feat which that mad charge accomplished in as many minutes. The Moslems were not cowards; but the absolute disregard of conventions on the part of their adversaries bred a panic among them. They pumped cartridges from the magazines until their rifles were too hot to hold; but not a man fell from the ranks of the charging enemy, and when their leader, a man who seemed to them of gigantic stature, and whose face was illuminated by the fierce joy of battle, was within a dozen yards of their shallow intrenchments, they broke and fled.

There was no pursuit; but, resting in the position they had won, the Albanians fired their first shots, bringing down the fleeing tribesman whenever a scarlet fez betrayed its owner dodging through the broken ground. Not a score of them escaped to carry the news to Malisorra, and the peculiar casualty list of that first skirmish settled for all time the faith of Zatriejebac in the invulnerability and invincibility of Skanderbeg.

A half dozen Albanians had been killed and twice as many wounded; but every man of the actively attacking force had escaped without a scratch. Forced by surprise into volley firing instead of the leisurely sharpshooting to which they were accustomed, the marksmanship of the Moslems had been so wild that their bullets found human billets only in the very rear ranks of the Zatriejebac. Those who had responded to the medieval battle cry of "To me! To me! With God and Skanderbeg for Albania!" had won the day in such a charge as their forefathers had known; and, unimportant as the skirmish seemed, it resulted in fanning the flame of fanaticism and inspiring such a blind faith in their leader that at the next call the men of Zatriejebac would unhesitatingly follow him into the very jaws of hell.

He wasted no time in bestowing praise or inflicting rebuke; but within a half hour the army was again on the march; stronger because of the manner of winning that first skirmish than it would have become had its number been doubled without faith.

TO BE CONCLUDED.

The third installment of this story will appear in the first January POPULAR, on sale December 7th.

❧

SALUTATIONS!

SOON after Oliver P. Newman was appointed by the president last summer as one of the commissioners of the District of Columbia, he and his fellow commissioner, Mr. Siddons, went to the Gettysburg reunion.

As the two men came into sight of the soldiers, cannon began to go off. The noise was ear-splitting. Every time a gun popped, Newman jumped at least a foot in the air. He was gun-shy. Finally, the fuss was too much for him. He glared at the artillery, frowned at the officers, and scowled at the privates. Then he turned to Siddons, and asked angrily:

"What in thunder is all that dad-blamed noise about?"

Later somebody explained to him that, as a commissioner of the District of Columbia held the rank of a governor of a State, he was being given the governor's salute of seventeen guns.

"Then," he said, with evident relief, "I was being honored instead of annoyed."

❧

WHEN THE JUDGE WAS HACKED

JUDGE ISAAC JOHNSON, of Media, Pennsylvania, was holding court one day in a port town, where the labor unions had organized a big strike and walk-out. The mayor of the city had issued an order that the police should seize, throttle, grab, and arrest all men who either loitered in the streets or appeared intoxicated.

There was brought before the judge on that bright and peaceful morning a gentleman whose Irish accent was as thick as the flaming locks that crowned his head. He had been arrested as a troublesome striker.

"Well, my man," said the judge kindly, "why did you want to make trouble?"

"Begorra!" responded the astonished Irishman. "Oi wint for no throuble. You think Oi'm a sthriker. Oi'm a sailor."

"Don't joke," counseled Judge Johnson. "Tell the truth. Where are you from?"

"Ireland," replied the sailor.

"Oh, I don't believe you ever saw a ship," the judge insisted. "You're no sailor."

"How d'you think Oi cr-r-rossed the ocean?" demanded the Irishman, now in a rage. "D'you think Oi came over in a hack?"

Special Delivery

By Clarence L. Cullen

Author of "At the End of the Cruise," "Treasurer and Cracksman," Etc.

The purser of the Pacific mail steamer *Colima* gets his biggest surprise when one of the newspaper bags in his office takes on life

ON that day you could have scoured the world, land and sea, without coming upon a man-o'-war's man so rebellious in spirit—and justifiably—as Chub Kenny, chief boatswain's mate, United States navy. This is not, by way of saying, that he was either a sea lawyer or a service knocker. He knew that the pounding he was getting was not intentional or deliberate—was, in fact, unavoidable. But that consideration was of little avail in cooling him out. It is the circumstance that we cannot control that gruels us most. Chub, preyed upon by such a circumstance, was sore in his heart.

Something—the first something of its kind—was due to happen at Chub's trig little home in Vallejo within a week or ten days. And here was Chub standing at a limp "attention" before the executive officer of the receiving ship *Independence*—that ancient housed-over guardo, anchored alongside the Mare Island navy-yard dock across the stream from Vallejo—and being brittly notified that he must go to sea again on the day after to-morrow!

Chub stared speechlessly at the faultlessly trimmed beard of the executive officer. It was one of those absurdly well-balanced, perfectly pointed Vandyke beards that commonly have an irritating effect upon close-shaven men. But, for the moment, Chub was too startled and overborne by this sea order even to be irritated. Go to sea again? So soon? Framing the thought in unspoken words brought him out of his amazed trance. Suddenly a brick-red flush overspread his bronzed features, and a new consternation, as of something poignantly recalled at that instant, appeared in his shock-widened eyes.

"But see here, Mr. Phelps," broke out Chub with husky eagerness; "next week, or maybe the week after, something's going to happen at——"

He stopped short and gazed broodingly at his warped, work-blackened finger nails.

"Well, Kenny?" said the executive officer, comfortably spraddling his legs and smothering a yawn. "What's going to happen?"

"At my house, over the creek, sir," said the flustered boatswain's mate, jerking his starboard thumb in the general direction of Vallejo. "Next week, the doctor figures, or anyhow the week after, so——"

"Oh, that's it, eh?" took up the executive officer, his beard crinkling over a smile. "Well, that's hard luck, of course—your being at sea when it happens, I mean. But pshaw! man, we all have that to face. I ought to know. Two of my children were born while I was at sea."

"Not your first, though, I hope, sir," said Chub dismally.

"Well, no, not my first," admitted the officer, thrusting up the point of his beard and glancing downward at it for split hairs. "This going to be your first, Chub?"

Chub had put in four three-year cruises, which entitles a man-o'-war's man to have his nickname used by easy-going officers.

"My first," replied the boatswain's

mate, swallowing hard. "Married five years, and this will be the first. And a man wants to be at home when his first boy is born, doesn't he, sir?"

The executive officer laughed. "So it's going to be a boy, is it, Chub?" he asked.

"I'm going to ship him as 'prentice in this man's navy on the day he's old enough," replied the boatswain's mate, dead serious, in a tone of complete conviction. "And for months now I've been rooting my head off to be home when he spins along."

"Too bad, Kenny," said the executive officer. "But it can't be helped. There's a bad row on down in Salvador, and the *Spokane's* under immediate orders for La Libertad to protect Americans there. You're the only chief bos'n's mate I've got on the guardo to send to the *Spokane* in the place of that ship's chief bos'n's mate; his cruise was up last week, and he scuttled off to the East to ship over. So I've got to send you to the *Spokane*." His tone was kindly, but it was also businesslike.

Chub shifted his weight to the other leg.

"Of course I've got to go, sir," he said hoarsely; "but look at the deal I've been getting! Married five years, and I've spent exactly four months and fourteen days with the wife since we were married. We were spliced in Vallejo; I was on this old guardo at the time. Two months later to a day I was chucked off to the China station. A three-year cruise there, and when I got back here to the guardo and shipped over they told me they'd let me stick for a while on this Pacific station, me being married. Well, sir, I'm home for less than a month, and then that joke revolution busts out in Colombia, and I'm hustled to a jumpy little hooker of a gunboat that wallows and sweats off Buena Ventura for months. Back here to the guardo again for a little while, and then I'm fired aboard a ship that, for months, patrols the raw Aleutians for seal poachers. Now I'm back here on the guardo for less than a month, and what's going to happen just about due at my shack over in Vallejo, and here I am nabbed at two days' notice for a ship that'll be wallowing off La Libertad for months—and me hardly knowing yet if the wife's eyes are brown or blue!"

It was the longest speech of Chub's man-o'-war life. He set forth the indubitable facts with a certain eloquence. But sea orders are sea orders, rarely revocable, and he was fairly caught in the web of mischance. The executive officer listened patiently. Then he said:

"I'm sorry, Kenny, but there's no way out of it. Probably the rumpus down in Salvador won't last long, and when the *Spokane* returns, I'll get you a ship on this station. But you'll have to consider yourself booked for the *Spokane*." He spoke in a tone of finality. "You can go home now, if you like, and stay there till you report aboard the *Spokane* to-morrow afternoon."

Chub went forward, his shoulders rounded with disappointment. Up in the eyes of the receiving ship a gloomy group of chief petty officers awaited his return from the talk with the executive officer. All of them had been Chub's shipmates at one time or another. Now they were to be his shipmates again. They, too, had been ordered to the *Spokane*, to their profound disgust. When Chub joined them they had only to glance at his set jaws to discern that his kick to the executive officer had been unavailing.

"Did you spin him the yarn about what's coming off at your house, Chub?" a chief gunner's mate of the group asked him.

"I did that," barked Chub in reply. "I served out a chaw about it as long as from here to Benecia. And all he did was to grin behind his Galways and tell me that two of his own kids were born while he was at sea."

The chief gunner's mate, an untrappable bachelor, sighed deeply.

"Hard luck," he said drearily. "If you had got by with it, Chub, I was going to hand that one to the first luff myself."

Chub, pretty touchy now as to the

dignity and responsibility of fatherhood, glared at the gunner's mate.

"You!" he snapped reprovingly. "And since when have you had a wife?"

"I don't remember," was the rogue's reply; "but I might've remembered if you'd got away with your increase-in-the-family argument to the first luff."

Caught upon the raw by this unseemly jesting upon such matters, Chub quit the group and got into the steam cutter, which for a moment before had been called away for Vallejo. He made a brisk, but far from cheerful, walk of it from the Vallejo dock to his little green-painted frame house on the outskirts of the town. His wife's triple-chinned mother opened the door for him. Chub slapped his cap on the rack, walked through the hall to the little sitting room where his wife was, and plumped into a chair.

His wife, a pretty County Mayo type of woman with a glowing, fresh skin, masses of blue-black hair, and long-lashed, good-natured gray eyes, darted inquiring glances at him.

"What is it now, Chub?" she asked him, seeing that he was not going to speak first.

"They're chasing me off to sea again—and I won't be here when the boy is born; that's all," replied Chub bitterly. His wife smiled at his "boy."

"When Eileen is born, you mean—it's Eileen we're going to call her," she said with her pronouncedly pretty brogue, smiling. But the worried look came soon enough. "Sure, and you're not off for a full cruise?" she asked him. Already, on one cruise, he had been away from her for three long years on end.

"Long enough to keep me from chucking the gossoon, and his name is going to be Pat, under the chin when he makes his bow and scrape," replied the embittered boatswain's mate. "It's the *Spokane* they've grabbed me for—that toy washtub! She gets up her mudhook day after to-morrow and makes for La Libertad. And me plotting, and scheming, and contriving for months to be here with you when that Patsie of ours steps on deck and declares himself!"

His wife, seeing his dejection, sought to put a cheerful face on the situation. But Chub went to sea with a sore heart; and sore hearts are not good for the morale of ships' companies.

II.

Rumor on a man-o'-war has more tongues than there are colors in a kaleidoscope. The *Spokane* hardly had steamed through the Golden Gate, before the entire ship's company forward had the word—started by that solemn, straight-faced humorist, the marine orderly on duty at the skipper's door—that the ship, after merely pausing for a little while at La Libertad, was to keep right on down the West Coast, pass through the Straits, and then steam up and across the Atlantic for a three-year cruise on the Mediterranean station.

The marine orderly swore that he had overheard the skipper say this to the first luff. The credulity of men-o'-war's men, even of the ancient shellbacks who hark back to the days of "the old *Ticon*," is as pathetic as it is proverbial. Long years of experience with exploded ships' rumors do not cure them of reposing the most childish faith in the most grotesque ships' yarns. This yarn was as foolish as the general run of them. The *Spokane* was for La Libertad and for nowhere else.

But Chub Kenny, with his mates, swallowed the ship's canard. It threw him into a caldron of misery and resentment. He felt outraged, trapped. Three years more away from the side of a wife whose very foibles and femininities still were new to him—and then on his return to find a breeched Pat who would look upon him as a stranger and probably cling to his mother's skirts, howling, at the very sight of him! Chub gulped and stewed over this picture. Not for him! He would jump ship at La Libertad first. He had always loathed ship jumpers as a side cleaner hates barnacles. But the revolt in his breast now gave him a different view of the men who take French leave of a ship. They would never get him to the Mediterranean station on that cruise unless they took him there in double irons—and he was not for the irons, either!

In the man-o'-war spirit of whimsy Chub's mates on deck, seeing his passion to be back home and knowing the reason why, wrought upon this hankering. The old married men and fathers among them, exchanging winks, discoursed alarmingly upon the evil luck that invariably befell a man-o'-war's man who happened to be away from home when his first young one was born. By the third day out the boatswain's mate was a haggard remnant of the former Chub Kenny, a man-o'-war sailorman known throughout the service for his unquenchable good humor. The homing instinct was rioting in him as if it had been something he had drunk out of a bottle.

His temptation and his chance came to him at the same time, both propelled by the same head of steam. The steam was in the boilers of the Pacific Mail liner *Colima*. On the *Spokane's* fifth night out the gunboat was off Cape San Lucas, which is at the end of Lower California's great toe. It was near the hour of pipe down, the smoking lamp was lit, and the boatswain's mate, basking uneasily at the gangway in the bright glow of the sub-tropic moon and brooding on progeny that would refuse to recognize him, saw his ship's signal lights begin to blink at the signal yards. He read the message. The *Spokane* was hailing the Pacific mailer *Colima*, which, upbound from Panama for San Francisco, had been sighted a few knots ahead.

A steamer plunging along on her way to San Francisco! Chub sped to the topgallant foreastle to feed his eyes on that happy spectacle. Sheer longing caused his heart to thump against his ribs with the thud of a racing piston, when his swift glance caught the lights of the upcoming steamer still some knots off the port bow, but slashing ahead with a bone in her teeth. To be on board that steamer! A series of alluring pictures swept through his mind with more than kinetoscopic swiftness.

The *Colima's* signal lights were going in reply to the message of the *Spokane*. Chub could not read the steamer's signal talk without a marine glass, but he turned to face his own ship's signal yards to find out what was being said by the man-o'-war. Suddenly, as he worked out the *Spokane's* twinkling message to the passenger steamer, the boatswain's mate's squat sea-hardened figure became taut with the physical rigidity that accompanies surprise and swift planning. The *Spokane* was asking the *Colima* to heave to when she got alongside the man-o'-war. The warship had on board three bags of American newspapers for the passenger steamer. The *Spokane* would send the bags of newspapers on board the *Colima* when the ships drew alongside of each other. The liner replied with her thanks and said that she would heave to.

The boatswain's mate, the blood pounding at his temples like the dash of a heavy sea under a small boat, raced below to the berth deck. He had noticed, only a few hours before, those long, loosely stuffed canvas bags of newspapers lying in a berth-deck locker alcove, and had wondered vaguely what steamer they were destined for. The transfer of newspapers, and at times of United States mail, from warship to liner, and vice versa, was at that time one of the West Coast courtesies of the sea.

In the dim-lit berth-deck alcove Chub found two men preparing to manhandle the three big bags of newspapers and carry them above to the gangway. One of the men was Jim Quill, the coxswain of the dinghy, and the other was Spike Mulvihill, A. B. Both of them were not only old shipmates and sworn sea buddies of Chub's, but far more; the three of them had been piled up, half dead, on the beach of Apia from the wreck of their ship, the *Vandalia*, in the great warship disaster at Samoa. Thus they were linked together for life by a bond that was created through the loss of hundreds of their shipmates, and that the flowing years only served to tighten.

Chub, standing rigid in the middle of the little locker alcove, his jaws locked, and his eyes alight with a purpose not to be turned aside, gazed steadily into the faces, first of one, and then of the other of his old mates in a sea catastrophe, before he spoke. Hands on hips, they blinked at him inquiringly.

"I'm going to get into one of those bags," said Chub huskily, but making his tone matter-of-fact.

The two stared wonderingly at the boatswain's mate's set features and his eyes blazing with determination. They knew of the situation as it was rigged back at Vallejo. But this was madness.

"What's ailing you, Chub?" asked Quill, in a low tone.

"Stow the questions, matey," Chub answered hoarsely. "Nothing's ailing me. But I'm going to get into one of those bags."

"But these bags are going aboard the *Colima,* shipmate," said Spike.

"I know that," said Chub, with a click of the teeth. "That's why I am going to get into one of them. I'm through with this hooker. Look alive, now, buddies, and break out one of those bags you can stuff the papers into these lockers here."

Still Chub's two mates hesitated.

"But it's jumping ship, matey, and that's not your dish," said the dinghy's coxswain, fearing that worry had driven the boatswain's mate off his head.

"That's as it may be," snapped Chub. "I don't know that a man can jump a ship that's at sea—I've never seen it done, unless the man intended to make a finish of it, which I don't. Anyhow, that's something for the sea lawyers aft to chaw about. Whatever it is, I'm quitting this frigate in one of those bags. So take a shake at yourselves and empty one of them. There go the astern bells in the engine room now, and the *Colima* will be alongside in five minutes!" He was speaking truth; already his two bluejacket mates had cocked their ears to the muffled clangor of the engine-room bells from the bridge, and the engines were being reversed.

Quill and Mulvihill glanced at each other.

"Chub can't ask me nothing that I won't do for him," said Quill.

"That goes for me, too," said Mulvihill.

"Get busy, then, mateys," said Chub, a bit choked.

Their loyalty took him by the throat. They, too, would be taking a big chance. To be nailed at the job would mean their dishonorable discharge from the service, after their long and faithful records as men-o'-war's men, and probably terms in a naval prison besides. But here the two fine old devils were, ready to serve him at any cost when the hour for friendship struck! So Chub had to brush at his eyes with the sleeve of his coat.

The bags were tied, not locked. Quill, picking out the one that looked the largest, untied the loop and dumped a great litter of San Francisco newspapers on the deck. Mulvihill yanked open half a dozen of the wire lockers, and began to thrust the papers into the lockers with terrierlike industry.

"If we get away with it, buddies, keep your tongues back of your teeth—that's all that'll be needed," Chub said to them, in a low tone, as this work proceeded. "When I'm missed, and the hands are mustered, all you've got to do is to stare at the stars to see how the night's holding up. It'll be supposed that I've done the Dutch act and splashed over the side for a chaw with Davy Jones. Let them think it. Say nothing. I'll say that I slipped and fell over the rail and that the *Colima* picked me up."

"Over the rail is right," said Quill, grinning.

"There'll be no chaw from us, Chub—you can bet your pay day on that," chimed in Mulvihill.

The boatswain's mate got out his knife, and cut two slits in the bag so that he would have air. Then he stretched out on the alcove deck, and his two mates pulled the bag up over him—not too snug a fit, for the bag was large—and tied it at the top as before.

They finished the job not a moment too soon. On deck they heard the dinghy being called away by the ship's bugler, and immediately after that came a swift, springy tread along the berth deck from aft. The young ensign picked by the first luff to board the *Colima* with the newspapers popped into the alcove.

"Those bags ready, men?" he asked alertly. "Manhandle them, now, and get them on deck—the *Colima's* nearly alongside."

The ensign, aglow with the young boarding officer's anticipation of posing in his white uniform before the women passengers of a liner, raced aft to the wardroom then to buckle on his sword, and Quill and Mulvihill carried the bags to the deck. They first lugged the two bags of newspapers, depositing them in the dinghy, which was ready to be swung outboard from the davits and lowered away. Then they returned for Chub. The boatswain's mate stuck a hand through one of the slits he had cut for air.

"So long, mateys," he said, the bag muffling his voice.

"So long, Chub," they said, shaking the hand. "Here's to the kid—and the mother."

They carried the bag holding Chub on deck, and placed it in the dinghy alongside the others. A few men, lounging and smoking at the gangway, watched them at the job without curiosity. Most of the men forward were in their hammocks.

The *Colima*, her bridge brasses glittering mellowly in the moonlight, came to a fine handy stop on the unruffled millpond of a sea about three ships' lengths on the *Spokane's* port, the steamer's interested passengers lining the rail. The man-o'-war's dinghy was lowered away, Quill and Mulvihill and two other seamen at the oars, and the young officer steering. It was but a brief pull on the glassy sea to the side of the steamer. One of the *Colima's* forward middle-deck ports had been opened to receive the bags. Quill, as soon as the boat hooks had caught, scrambled nimbly through the port to receive the bags.

"You be the other man with Quill, Magnusson," sang out the ensign, who was halfway up the sea ladder which he had grabbed for the climb to the main deck—where the admiring women passengers were.

Mulvihill smothered a gasp. It was a dangerous moment. Magnusson was a Swede who talked too much, and he had the reputation of being a man-o'-war spy on the crew for'ard. Mulvihill, thinking like a flail, knew that if Magnusson got the feel of Chub in the bag, the job probably would be all off, and himself, Quill, and Chub as good as in double irons—for Mulvihill, knowing his man, could not put it past the Swede to squeal the instant he made the discovery.

Magnusson unshipped his oar and half rose to take hold of one of the bags—the very bag in which the boatswain's mate was huddled! But Mulvihill, sitting behind the Swede, stepped right over Magnusson's head, and when he got forward of the too-talkative Scandinavian, he contrived to give that seaman a backward poke with his elbow of iron that sent Magnusson sprawling from his seat. Then Mulvihill, a man with a gorilla's strength, stopped and picked the bagged Chub in his arms as if the boatswain's mate had been a sack of table salt—and Chub weighed a hundred and eighty! He passed Chub to the ready Quill on the *Colima*—and a grave peril was averted. The outraged Swede rose angrily from his seat.

"Ay tank Ay hear boarding officer say Magnusson for go aboard," he began to splutter, "and Ay am——"

"G'wan, ye squarehead!" Mulvihill, turning, cut in on the Swede. "He said Mulvihill. Dig some o' the sauerkraut out of your ears and ye'll hear better!" and he lifted the remaining two bags aboard the steamer and clambered aboard himself.

The assistant purser was there to direct Quill and Mulvihill to carry the bags to the purser's office, which was for the moment empty. This done, and when the assistant purser's back was turned for an instant, the two faithful buddies of Chub each gave a couple of swift, stealthy pats at the boatswain's mate's bag where they knew one of his shoulders was, and then they hustled below and got back into the dinghy.

The ensign, flushed over the havoc he knew he had created among the women passengers, slipped down the sea ladder and stepped back into the dinghy. The oars splashed, and when the dinghy was a decent distance away from the suck, the liner's engines began to throb. A minute later the dinghy was alongside the man-o'-war, the two vessels exchanged hoarse whistled salutes—and the U. S. S. *Spokane,* cruiser, third rate, continued on her way toward La Libertad, minus a chief boatswain's mate.

An hour later, the chief master-at-arms went aft to the poop where the officer of the deck sat contemplating the moon.

"I can't find Kenny, the chief bos'n's mate, anywhere, sir," said the master-at-arms, in a voice of genuine trouble.

"Can't find him?" exclaimed the officer of the deck. "Why, what could have——"

"I've searched the ship for him, sir, and he's not to be found—he's not aboard," said the master-at-arms.

The aroused officer of the deck clambered down the poop ladder and knocked on the executive officer's door. The master-at-arms was called into the talk. The skipper was sent for, and appeared at his cabin door. He listened, and then said:

"Pipe all hands."

The pipe of the gangway boatswain's mate shrilled, and the men forward tumbled out of their hammocks and, in their sleeping gear, ranged themselves in their mustering places. The roll was called—a mere formality, for already it had been seen that the chief boatswain's mate was not present on deck. While the men stood at rest in their places, the ship was raked fore and aft for Chub, of course with no result. The hands were dismissed. But they cluttered about the gangway, buzzing in low tones of the missing man.

"He's done the Dutch act—gone over the side from worry over not being home when his first comes along," was the consensus of opinion. A few of the old-timers, husbands and fathers, huddled by themselves and said guiltily to each other: "And we were joshing the poor old bug about the kid only a few hours ago!"

Quill and Mulvihill took no part in these post-mortems, but crawled into their hammocks and continued right on attending to their own business.

III.

Chub's mates had upended his bag in a corner of the purser's office, so that he stood on his feet, with his mouth and an eye at one of the air slits, when the purser entered the office a few minutes after the *Colima* had got up speed again after the stop. The purser—a huge, flaxen-bearded, good-natured-looking Englishman—switched on the electric lights, and plumped into the swivel chair before his desk, whistling plaintively.

Chub considered. He did not want to take a chance on startling this officer of the merchant marine out of his skin; for all of his bigness there might be something the matter with his heart which the sudden coming to life of a swaddled mummy in a corner of his office would not help any. So the boatswain's mate tried an experimental sigh, watching the purser attentively through the slit. The purser did not hear, but went on with his whistling and writing. The steamer was in a warm latitude and the bag was becoming stuffy. Chub emitted a very slight, yet unmistakable cough.

The purser looked up from his desk pad and peered into the corner, less alarmedly than wonderingly. It was a bit dim in the corner, and the glare in the purser's eyes of the desk droplight over his head prevented him from making out Chub's eye at the slit in the upended bag. The boatswain's mate, seeing that the purser's attention had been attracted, felt that he could now reveal himself without incurring the risk of frightening the purser into a cataleptic trance.

"Steady has it, now, Mr. Purser—I'm stowed in the upended bag in this corner," said Chub, in a tone which he succeeded in making reassuring.

The purser was no sea chicken. He had no means of knowing that he was not being addressed by a ghost. It would have made no difference to him if it had been a ghost. He rose with deliberation from his swivel chair, and made three strides of it to Chub's bag. Chub pulled the slit wide and showed his whole face at the opening. The purser stopped right in front of the bag, thrust his hands into his trousers pockets, and gazed with tranquil speculation at the bronzed, character-marked face of the boatswain's mate.

"And who the devil might you be, Mr. Face-in-a-Bag?" asked the purser good-naturedly enough.

"I'm Kenny, chief bos'n's mate of the cruiser *Spokane,* which now by the grace of God is hull down astern of us," Chub reeled off patly. "And if you'll be good enough to lend a hand and break me out of this bag I'll be obliged to you."

The purser, with a tug at a loose end of one of the loop strings, undid the bow, and Chub, spick and span in his chief petty officer's uniform, which was not unlike that of the purser, stepped out of the bag.

"Well, by the blessed god of storms, this calls for a drink," said the purser, and he reached into a locker and produced a whisky, a carafe of water, and glasses. "This is my twenty-seventh year at sea, and if you are not the first stowaway I ever saw picked up four days out of a port and thirty knots from a cape, then I'll be blowed. Drink hearty, mate, and then you can spin me your yarn. It ought to be a good one!"

Chub refreshed himself. Then he told the purser the facts exactly as they were.

"Three years ahead of me on that blasted parley-voo Mediterranean station, and me already putting in one three-year cruise on the China station since I was spliced, and our Number One due to come along any day now—I couldn't see it," he concluded eloquently.

"By the eyeballs of the Buddha of Japan, I'll be hanged if I blame you!" roared the gnome-bearded purser, banging his desk pad with a huge fist. "Where d'ye suppose my first was born—and me in Singapore on a P. & O. ship? Why, b'gad, in a place called Pottawatamie, Kansas, where the wife's folks lived, and the blooming little beggar was four years old and stared at me as if he'd been a sultan and I a scullion when first I clapped an eye on him, and blowed if I didn't have to knuckle to him for weeks on end before he'd so much as consent to play horse with me! Blame you? Why, man, I admire your bloody pluck!" and he thrust out a great hand, and clasped Chub's in a Harveyized grip as a token of his understanding and sympathy. The purser was English, and Chub was Irish. But both were men. This was one of those human situations that obliterate racial antipathies.

The purser went to report the matter to the *Colima's* skipper, as was his duty, and presently he returned to the office with the steamer's captain, a bluff sea dog of the old-fashioned sort, bearded almost to the waist, and with a wise, jovial smile beneath the beard. He greeted Chub with a cordial handshake, for the boatswain's mate wore the brass buttons that rated such a greeting from an officer of the merchant marine. The purser had acquainted the skipper with Chub's story and his unique method of getting aboard the *Colima;* and the captain, for all his love for discipline among ships' companies, had caught the human angle of the thing and was for the boatswain's mate.

"But you're in a bit of a hole over quitting your ship, Kenny," said the captain toward the end of the talk. "How are you going to get clear of that?"

"There's only one way, sir," replied Chub, "and that's to tell them that I fell overboard and was picked up by the *Colima*. In a way of speaking I did fall overboard—at least my mates tossed me overboard into the dinghy as if I'd been a keg of salt horse. And certainly the *Colima* did pick me up."

The skipper smiled and stroked his beard.

"All right, Kenny—tell them that, and if any questions are asked of me about it I'll back you up," he said. "As like as not they'll take your word for it. What else can they take? How can they prove anything else? You were four days out from San Francisco, and now in four days more you'll report back on board the receiving ship. What the devil else can they suppose but that you were picked up at sea by my ship?" Then the skipper went back to the bridge.

"I'll be settling now for my passage up," said Chub to the purser after the captain had gone, and he brought out his bluejacket's neck pouch filled with double eagles.

"And have me get my cabin accounts all balled up? I guess not; you go up as my guest," pronounced the purser.

Half an hour later Chub Kenny, steamer passenger, was sprawled comfortably on a good, wide, yielding bunk, with a cabin to himself on a crack liner that with every turn of her propellers was carrying him nearer home—and her—and maybe him!

IV.

On the fifth morning the *Colima,* having groped her way past the Farallons in a driving mist, was stopped outside the Gate by a billowing yellow fog that seemed to have the woof of saturated cheesecloth. The pilot expressed the placid opinion that the fog would last through the day and perhaps through the next. Meanwhile the steamer would have to stand still and sweat inboard fog. Too many good ships had twisted their noses on the rocks, sometimes with the loss of all hands after safe voyages from the ends of the world, in trying to feel their way through the Golden Gate fogs. The quarantine officer in his cutter located the *Colima* by her foghorn, boarded her, made his inspection, and vanished in the saffron billows of fog. The immigration officer did the same. Each had other incoming ships to wait for. The passengers, swaddled in heavy wrappings, slid along the fog-greasy deck and accused Destiny of double-crossing them.

Chub Kenny knew Gate fogs as he knew the parting of his hair. This one had the taste and feel of one that would lift only when it got good and ready. And meanwhile, at Vallejo—— To have taken the chance of his life by transshipping at sea in a bag, and then to be baffled at the very Gate by a slimy, soiled fog—the boatswain's mate almost felt that actual sinister hands were pushing him back from his desire and his destination.

At ten o'clock in the morning, Chub was leaning over the after starboard rail exchanging desultory talk with the purser about the various kinds of meannesses of fogs in many ports, when a Greek fisherman's boat, skidding along briskly enough under her small taut lateen sail, emerged from the sepia mantle of mist. The little boat was headed straight for a collision with the steamer amidships, but the Greek fisherman, with a smart touch at the helm, brought her around so that she stood parallel to the steamer, and the sheet slackened away.

"Hey, there, Poupanoulos!" Chub hailed the Greek. The fisherman glanced up at Chub on the rail with a look of smiling inquiry. "Reef your rag and lay to there for a minute—I'll be below for a bit of a word with you," Chub added.

The Greek nodded, and his sheet dropped.

"What's up, mate?" the purser asked Chub.

"I'm going to get the Greek to ride me through the Gate," replied Chub. "It sets me off my block to be dished here now in this reek of fog."

"Bully for you, matey," said the purser. "Speed is your middle name—I know how that is myself. Here's hoping—for the laddie and the mother."

The two gripped hands. Chub left his respects for the skipper, and then raced to the mid deck forward. He called to the Greek through an open port, and the fisherman deftly sculled his craft alongside the port.

"There's ten bucks in it for you for getting me to the Clay Street wharf," said Chub to the Greek. "You're inbound, ain't you?" Chub was holding a bright new ten-dollar gold piece between a thumb and forefinger.

The Greek grinned and nodded. He had a limited knowledge of English, but the connection between "Clay Street wharf" and the gleaming gold piece was obvious. Chub quickly rigged a sea ladder, threw it over the side, and descended into the boat, the bottom of which was heaped with the fisherman's catch. Two minutes later the triangular sail was up and swelling, and the businesslike little craft leaped forward, leaving the looming steamer behind in a jiffy.

The Greek had a good sense of feel in a Gate fog, but this fog was like thick wool, and he came near blundering on to a sea bowlder at the eastern end of Alcatraz Island, that bleak, gaunt army post perched on a high seven-acre rock in the middle of the harbor. The little craft missed the rock by mere feet. Then there came the bawled hail of an Alcatraz sentry.

"Hey, what in blazes are you doin' so close in here?" the sentry bellowed through the mist. There was a military prison on the rock of Alcatraz, and there was a military regulation that no fisherman's boat should be allowed to come within two hundred yards of Alcatraz. Military prisoners had made their escape from the rock in fishermen's boats. One had got away by that method only a short time before, despite the watchfulness of sentries.

The Greek and Chub, heading now out into open water again, kept still. Then came a shot. Alcatraz sentries had been empowered to use ball cartridge for such repelling. The bullet, fired more to scare than to hit, buried itself in the low-forward freeboard of the little boat, which sped right on.

Chub laughed somewhat bitterly.

"They'll be getting me yet before I make home if I don't watch out," he muttered; but the Greek, not understanding him, laughed cheerily and set his craft's nose up the bay; he had got his bearings from the position of Alcatraz.

The noon whistles were going when Chub stepped out of the fisherman's boat at the Clay Street wharf. He made ferry and train connections as if they had been waiting for him, and stepped into the brilliant sunshine of Vallejo at two o'clock in the afternoon. Here his years of discipline kept him up to his chalk. He would report on board the receiving ship before going home—hungry as he was to get home—if only to find out what his standing thenceforth as a man-o'-war's man was going to be. He made the Vallejo dock riding beside a former man-o'-war's man who was now driving a grocery wagon, scrambled into the receiving-ship cutter, which had a new crew of men whom he did not know, and five minutes later the executive officer with the meticulously cut Vandyke beard was clapping a hand to his dazed head, and all but reeling at the sight of a chief boatswain's mate whom he thought at the bottom of the sea.

"Great sea smokes, this can't be Kenny!" the officer gasped.

"It's me all right, sir," replied Chub, in a voice that certainly was no spook's.

"But you're reported overboard, man!" broke out the amazed executive officer. "I just got the wire this morning. The *Spokane* spoke a steamer that was putting into Acapulco, and asked the steamer to report that you'd disappeared over the side, and the wire only reached me a few hours ago!"

"I did go over the side, sir," said Chub, with perfect truthfulness. "The *Colima* picked me up and I came up on her." Which also was the truth in a certain way of speaking.

"Man, but you've spared me a miserable job!" exclaimed the executive officer. "So that the word of it wouldn't be broken roughly, I was going over to your house this evening to tell your wife that you had been lost at sea."

"I'm glad to've got back in time, then, sir," said Chub, with a grin. "I haven't been home yet. I thought it best to report first. But now, if I may——"

"Good heavens, man, go—go at once!" cheerfully rapped out the officer. "I'd clean forgot about that boy-to-be of yours!"

"I hadn't, sir," said Chub, and down the gangway ladder he went to regain the steam cutter, which was about to push off.

His triple-chinned, comfortable-looking mother-in-law was sunning herself on the porch when Chub unlatched the gate. She threw up her hands, with mouth agape; but she uttered no words; the trials of her life had bestowed upon her the gift of quick recovery from shock. The boatswain's mate made half a dozen panther leaps of it up the walk.

"Well, I'm back, but I'll tell you about that later," he said hurriedly and hoarsely. "How is the——"

His mother-in-law put a fat finger to her lip.

"Wait a minute, Chub, till I tell her you're back," she said, and she waddled into the house.

Chub, knowing that the right thing for him to do was to allow the mother-in-law to break the news of his extraordinary return, nevertheless fumed on the porch. His wife's mother was back at his side in half a minute. She led Chub through the hall to his wife's and his own bedroom. His wife, with a becoming pallor, and with her burnished black hair streaming over the pillow, as he had visualized it in his absent thoughts, looked up at him out of smiling eyes.

A new crib stood beside the bed. But the crib was empty. Chub gulped and stared blankly when he saw this.

"Has the—where is the——" he began. But his wife's low, sweet voice, with the brogue of it, stopped him.

"Look behind you, daddy dear," she said to him.

Chub whirled about. There, smiling broadly in the doorway, stood his fat mother-in-law. In the hollows of her arms she held two white-swaddled little creatures with their blinking eyes of wonder. The boatswain's mate gazed at them, for an instant, too entranced to speak; but the question then fairly leaped from his lips.

"Are they——" he started to ask. But the mother-in-law interrupted him this time.

"Sure, and they're the gift av the fairies for the both av yeez, Chub, me son," she said. "Wan av thim is Pat and the other is Eileen."

❧

PUTTING FRILLS ON FRENZIED FINANCE

WHEN Ralph A. Graves went out ahead of "Damaged Goods" last August, he decided to sell outright a wonderfully constructed piece of junk which, he flattered himself, was a motor car. One of his friends had described this distorted mechanism thus:

"It's a good thing to have, Ralph, if you can't afford an automobile."

Another friend bought the mechanical wonder for three hundred and fifty dollars, and wound up the transaction as follows:

"Now, Ralph, I've given you three-fifty for this machine, and you've agreed to let me have it for that on time. That's very good, very good. Now, I have the machine as collateral for a loan. You lend me one hundred dollars, and I'll give you a lien on the machine to insure payment. You see, that puts me a hundred dollars and an automobile to the good, and it relieves you of the machine and leaves you with a hundred dollars well invested."

As Graves got on the train for his first dash into the West, he was chattering to himself and making long columns of figures on his cuff.

The Lawyer and the Mouse

By William H. Hamby

Author of "Feeding Fat the Enemy," "Cold Potatoes and Ten Dollars," Etc.

It may seem belittling to introduce Bart Craig by saying that a mouse made him; but this story is more fact than fiction, and the mouse cannot be gainsaid. Bart's career is interesting. He had many obstacles to overcome, but if a man has the fight in him, and brains, and is master of himself, you scarcely notice that anything is in his way. That's the case with Bart. In his uphill climb he learned a prime element of success: to be able to face any man without cringing and tell him without a quaver of apology just what one wants.

(*A Novelette*)

IT would be in line with the eternal humor of things and in accord with the platitudinous sense of appropriateness to begin a story by telling how a mouse made a woman—or a dozen women—go up into the air. But it may seem belittling to introduce Bart Craig by saying a mouse made him. Still, a cow made the Chicago fire, and a pig the War of 1812, and those were considerable events. Of course, it is an exaggeration to say any one thing made or unmade a man. Yet, in Bart's case it was a mouse that pulled the lever that yanked him out of what he planned to be, and plunked him into the cold water of another sort of life.

It was Saturday and June. Bart had returned home the day before from the State University with a LL. B.'s piece of sheepskin. Also a new tailor-made suit of clothes, the first he had ever owned. And to the credit of his judgment, he thought more of the clothes than the sheepskin.

Bart was out under an apple tree with pencil and paper—not figuring how long it would be until the June apples were ripe, but putting the finishing touches to the speech that was to astonish the natives.

All during his college course Bart had figured on coming home and astonishing the natives. He was rather proud of himself, as a fellow may be who gets an LL. B. on two hundred and ten dollars a year, counting clothes. That was what his father had allowed, and when a fellow is doing a three-year course in two he hasn't very much time to engage in those pleasant by-pursuits of cleaning furnaces and sawing wood to help out.

And to their credit the Mount Nebo community was proud of Bart when they happened to think of it. And tomorrow was a day on which they were going to take time to think of it. It would be the big day of the year at Mount Nebo. People would come for miles, primarily to eat a big basket dinner, and secondarily to hear "the young feller back from college make a talk." Nobody but William Jennings Bryan ever made a speech at Mount Nebo. Everybody else "made a talk." Of course, there was to be a big singing contest by all the Sunday schools in the hills, which gave an excuse for having it on Sunday. But the great event would be the speech on "Subduing the Wilderness," by the brilliant young college graduate, Barton Craig.

Bart finished the last phrase of the

speech, leaned back against the June apple tree, and looked off at the clear summer sky above the green Ozark hills. Perhaps vague uneasiness, a dissatisfied, speculative subconsciousness was astir. But for the time Bart could always become so absorbed in his intellectual processes that he would even forget a stone bruise. He drew a deep breath, his chest swelled, he flung out his arms. The hour of his triumph was near. Through coming years all speeches would be measured by that on Mount Nebo, Sunday, June fourteenth.

Bart fell asleep that night, dreaming of beginning his career with a term in Congress and ending it as the general attorney for the Frisco Railway Company.

It is easy to be sarcastic about people "who want to show off." But what more natural ambition than for a youth to desire to justify his estimate of himself in his old home? What man among us has not had his dream of going back to the old schoolhouse, and the crossroads store to show the people what greatness he has attained?

From his youth Bart had known he was a born orator, but nobody had noticed it. In college he had proved his ability as a speaker. That was one reason he had been happy on two hundred and ten dollars a year. Now the supreme hour of his ambition was near when he was to astonish and captivate the whole hill settlement by one masterful torrent of eloquence.

II.

Next morning when Bart awoke, the June sun had already evaporated the make-believe diamonds on leaf and grass. He jumped up with a hasty yawn, scarcely awake enough yet to define the pleasant consciousness that had lingered through the night. He went across the room at once to have a look at his new tailor-made suit, carefully folded and laid out on a box in the corner of the room. It was that suit—new, fine, fashionable—that was to attract the attention of all the girls.

He stood over the suit, and blinked. Rubbed his eyes and blinked again. Then snatched up the coat and held it before him. He took up the vest more slowly, and examined it. Then he slumped down on the box and stared at the clothes.

A mouse had been busy all night. The lapels of the coat were riddled, the front of the vest cut into rags, and two holes marked the trousers above the knee.

After a while Bart's mother called to him to come to breakfast; but he answered glumly that he did not want any.

Later she knocked on the door, and told him it was time to get ready; pa was hitching up. Already there was the rattle of wagons and buggies on the road bound for Mount Nebo.

"I'm not going," he told her.

Astonished, his mother pushed open the door and came in.

"Why, what is the matter, Bart?"

He pointed to his new suit. She picked it up and gasped:

"Well, isn't that too bad!"

She didn't suggest it could be fixed up so it would do. She didn't urge he go anyway. A few times in her life she had wanted something supremely and didn't get it. She knew how he felt. She understood. There could be no substitute for what he wanted most.

As she turned toward the door her apron went up to her eyes. Bart bit his lip hard, and looked out of the window.

"You have nothing else you could wear?" she asked helplessly at the door.

"No!" savagely. "I soaked everything but that at Kansas City for a ticket home."

The mother went out and closed the door softly. It is comforting in hours of regret to remember that mothers knew that our sharp tones were for the outrageous slings of fortune, and not for them. Bart dressed in the mouse-riddled suit—it was literally as he said—there was nothing else, and sat down by the window, where he could watch the streams of people go by down the big road toward Mount Nebo. It hurt worse to watch them—and he wanted to hurt. He took a savage pride in the depth and injustice of his suffering. It was just like fate to fling him such a trick.

Until almost noon he watched the road, and thought of every bad thing that had ever happened to him. The wagons and buggies ceased. Only an occasional belated horseback rider galloped by in haste lest he miss the basket dinner.

Bart arose. He had come to a sudden and final conclusion. The people were right. He could never succeed as a lawyer. A college education was a failure. He had wasted his time and his father's money—and he'd get out.

Now, when we speak of a man suddenly changing the whole course of life, going in a moment from the settled opinions of years to the very opposite, we speak superficially. On the surface the change is sudden, and may be caused by very trivial circumstances. But on any vital subject a man's mind debates both sides. He produces all the arguments for and those against. Perhaps he finds a hundred "ayes" and ninety-nine "nays." Then he proclaims his conclusion so insistently he puts the negative arguments to sleep. But some day two other reasons against it carom into him. He picks himself up and discovers that the ninety-nine are clamorously awake, and that now there is a majority on the other side. Suddenly he changes his mind, and goes in an opposite course. No doubt during Bart's "bright college years," all these doubts of his ability and negative arguments as to the values of his education had occurred to him. No doubt he had wondered where in this lawyer-crowded world was room for another, and now set off by the emotional explosion they all piled upon him, and convinced him that his face had been set the wrong way. And now that he had failed to appear at Mount Nebo he would be disgraced. They would say he could not speak, or had lost his nerve.

Nine o'clock that night Bart sat on a pile of old ties beside the railroad. Fifty yards down the track was a water tank. He had walked the nine miles, and had been waiting since sundown. A freight, coughing up the grade, came screeching and grinding down the slope, and stopped with groaning brakes at the water tank.

He gave a brakeman seventy-five cents of his only dollar, and the brakeman put him in an empty lumber car and slid the door to.

It was toward daylight when Bart climbed out. The freight was on a siding at a pretty good-sized town. It was Vanita, Indian Territory, but he did not know it. He left his coat and vest in the box car. The trousers were not so badly gnawed, and, anyway, one must have trousers, even in June and the Indian Territory.

III.

Two weeks later, after applying for everything and anything within fifty miles, Bart got a job on a farm in the Cherokee Nation. It was a beautiful, rich farm near Spring River—three hundred and twenty acres, with a large, comfortable house. It was owned by a full-blood squaw—a widow. She had a grown son who did not work, and a daughter who worked some, but sang mournful songs most of the time.

The father had been a white man. The children had inherited most of his color. The girl had the Indian eyes, but their hard blackness was softened by her white blood. She was a very good-looking girl, and read innumerable novels. She had been to school in the East.

The first week as a hired man—drudging on a farm for an Indian—gave Bart all the misery his most morbid desire could conjure up. His hands blistered, his back ached; his head hurt—and the sun blistered his neck and back. But to be ordered to hitch up a team by a seventeen-year-old, cigarette-smoking half-breed!

But it is always the first few days of an adjustment that hurts worst. If the man who suddenly sees himself plunged from his "high position" to poverty would put off shooting himself for a couple of weeks, and go out and get a job at two dollars a day herding cattle or shocking wheat, corn bread and sweet milk would taste so good to him, and the bed would feel so comfortable to his aching back at ten minutes past eight every evening, that he would not shoot himself for a hundred thousand dollars' life insurance payable directly to his wife's second husband.

Bart stayed six weeks. He did his work pretty well, and said nothing—or very nearly nothing. Then he noticed the squaw, who had watched him very closely, disappeared every evening from the front porch, and the boy was gone, too. Only the girl remained.

She talked rather disconnectedly, but with a soft, drawling voice. And her eyes looked at him with shy interest. She asked him questions, and on some pretext or another often asked him to sit by her on the porch seat.

"Nice farm," he remarked one evening. As usual, he and the girl were alone. He had got so far over his early tiredness he could sit up until half past eight now—even to a quarter of nine. "Your mother will have a big crop of corn."

"Yes," she sighed. He was sitting by her—had been showing her some places on a map that she inquired about.

"I have three hundred and twenty acres just down the river," she said.

She was leaning a little toward him, her face toward his, her eyes downcast. In the twilight she was a white girl with very dark hair—and there was that three hundred and twenty acres.

Bart got up hastily, and went to see if the horses were all right.

The next morning they found his bed had not been slept in, and what few things he had, together with his three weeks' wages, were left behind.

IV.

Late in the afternoon, two days later, Bart had crossed the Kansas line, and turned in at the gate of a big farmhouse to ask for work. There was about a thousand acres in the farm, and they must employ a good deal of help.

A girl came to the door, a girl with high-arched eyebrows and brown eyes.

"Where is the boss?" Bart spoke gruffly, for her glance had pronounced him a tramp.

"Pa is at the shed back of the barn, working on a mower." She was not afraid, and was indifferent to his tone. Her voice did not sound as though it were accustomed to calling cattle or scaring chickens.

Judge Baydock—judge by virtue of his opposition to taxes—straightened up part of the way, with a monkey wrench in his hand, and looked over the young man who had said "Hello!" rather aggressively. Baydock's face was wrinkled as a pigskin purse, and his eyes were small and suspicious. He was lean and stooped, but the thin fingers, lapped around the handle of the monkey wrench, had grip enough in them to squeeze the alloy out of a silver dollar.

"Want a hand?" asked Bart.

Baydock speculated a minute. He wanted one awfully bad, for haying began to-morrow; but his theory in trading was always to let the other fellow be the anxious one.

"Might use you. Where you been at work?"

"Territory." Bart nodded to the south. By this time he had callouses and tan enough to look like a real farm hand.

Baydock hired him for thirty dollars a month, and put him cleaning the hog troughs—it was yet a half hour until supper time.

From time to time Bart looked across the fields; it was time for the other hired help to be coming in to supper. One lone hand came in from the field riding a horse and leading another; evidently he had been laying by late corn. He was a long, collapsible-looking fellow, and swung from side to side with the jog of the horse like he was loosely pinned on.

"Hello!" The fellow slid off his horse and grinned at Bart with a wide, loose mouth that reminded him of Mother Goose pictures of the man in the moon who came down too soon.

"Hello yourself!" said Bart.

"Hired?"

"Yep."

"You look better to me than a bee tree does to a bear." The fellow ran his sleeve across his forehead.

"Why so?"

"Somebody to divide up the old man's cussin'."

"Does he cuss his hands?" Bart doubted if he had reached that stage of endurance.

"No." The fellow shook his head. "I wish he would. He makes a fellow do that himself. He just comes around, looks cussin' at him, and makes him think up his own words. And I tell you, partner, it makes me plum' tired to work all day, and then think up cuss words to fit myself just because a brown shote has cut itself on barbed wire."

"Why do you stay, then?" asked Bart.

"Me and the old man just suit." Again the lean one wiped his forehead.

"Why?"

"I'm so triflin' nobody will hire me; and he's so onery mean nobody else will work for him."

V.

The two hired men ate with the family. At supper the girl did not notice Bart at all, except to pass him things in a polite, impersonal way. Bart noticed her several times. He guessed she was about twenty, and had been reading a lot of novels. She had a sort of impersonal, south-wind sort of dreaminess about her. And she was troubled about something. "She's either awful lonesome," concluded Bart, "or thinks her heart is broken—or else she wants to go somewhere."

They called the girl Laura, and he learned her mother was dead. Old Baydock's sister ran the house, and she had the same sort of squeeze hold on the inside that the old man had on the outside.

Bart and the other hired man—Ben Holliday, of Patiwonicka, Arkansas—were assigned to sleep together in the attic. The attic was finished with a dozen loose boards thrown across the joists, and one badly mussed bed set on the loose floor. The roof was close enough to require dodging, and as Ben declared:

"The shingles gets so stocked up with sunshine during the day they keep oozin' it all night." There was one window at the end of the attic.

Bart did not sleep well that night, but he got a fine Turkish bath.

The next morning he was put to stacking hay. Now, tossing the sweet, new-mown hay on a dewy summer morn is a beautiful occupation—if you can do it with a camera or a fountain pen. But about six hours after the dewy start—say about noon when the thermometer stands a hundred and twenty on top of the stack—the fellow who is not used to it is apt to feel about like an empty meal sack doubled over a picket fence in a flapping wind.

Bart was used to work—that is, he used to be used to work. He had not done much manual labor since going to college. Nor was he a crack athlete—or any other sort while in college. I mention this point to keep the reader from being disappointed later on. Otherwise he would naturally expect in the crisis of the story that our hero would suddenly remember a trick he had learned while center on the varsity eleven, and would grab the beefy villain and sling him clear across the barn lot, and hurt his back on a hog trough badly enough to give six months' steady employment to an osteopath.

But Bart was none of these tricky wonders—it was all he could do to live through that first day of stacking hay.

When he finished his supper he sat leaning against the edge of the table debating whether he better try to get himself to bed or get on the front porch and rest before he attempted to climb to the attic. The porch won. He sat, humped and aching, in an old hickory chair at one end of the porch. Laura sat at the other, reading. At the end of a chapter she paused and inquired politely:

"Where is your home—Mr.—Mr. —er——"

"Craig," he supplied at one grunt. "Missouri," he answered at another.

"How do you like Kansas?"

"Love it." He got up, and went to the attic, leaving her puzzled. She didn't hardly know whether it was sarcasm or his natural tone.

VI.

By October Bart had become a real hired man, seasoned and morose, with a grudge against his boss. He was still fostering contempt for himself, and developing bitter scorn for colleges, ambitions, and civilizations—and farmers. He hated farmers, and fairly despised old Baydock. When the old man snarled, as he often did when things went wrong, and looked at Bart with profanity in his eyes, Bart lifted his nostrils, and curled the corners of his mouth, and gave him back a look that was fairly blasphemous. Very few words ever passed between them.

Through the long, hot summer and the hard, driving fall Bart had continued to punish himself like a child who persists in biting a sore gum. That he had thrown over all his plans and ambitions merely because of a mouse-gnawed suit of clothes was one source of self-contempt. And yet he had no thought of going back. He wrote home and sent what money he could save, but gave no inkling as to his plans.

To an inquiry from his fellow-hired as to why he didn't go to the Sunday basket dinner at the country church he replied: "A hired man ain't fit to go into the company of fools."

And once the Arkansawer asked:

"What you going to do with your mun? You ain't spent a red since you came here. Savin' enough to buy you a team and rent you a piece of land?"

Bart laughed bitterly. The idea of him starting life with a plug team and a piece of rented land! And yet what was he going to do with it? And how was he going to start life? And was he going to start at all?

"Doesn't make a blue bean's worth of difference what a fellow does with it," he replied. "It all comes to the same thing—a burned neck, a blistered shoulder—a few sloppy victuals, and a fellow kicks the bucket—and the undertaker does the rest."

Nothing can equal the cynicism of a very young man who has dipped his head several times in a concentrated solution of self-pity, anger at things that have already happened, and open rebellion against those that are going to happen. And it makes him all the savager to find the solution does not affect his heart at all, but leaves it at open war with the unfaith and brutal scorn of his head.

During the summer and fall Bart had not talked all together an hour with Laura Baydock. He felt himself a mere hired man, one of the beings whose social scale is a little lower than the family horse, and whose chance for success is as two hundred dollars a year to infinity. Moreover, there was something fine about the girl, something so obviously trusting, and ardently full of visions, as to come in for the supreme measure of contempt—of his head.

But though they seldom talked—any way more than two or three sentences, they often sat on the porch at the same time. Immediately after supper, while the summer twilight lingered, Laura usually went to the porch to read one more chapter of the book over which she was dreaming, and Bart dragged himself out to the opposite end of the porch to rest up for the climb to the attic.

When the twilight got thick enough to hide the words on the printed page, Laura would close the book, and fold her hands behind her head and look off across the softening fields and sigh. Bart would sit humped over with his chin in his hands, his elbows on his knees, resting his back and inventing torments that the devil—if there was one—should use on old Baydock.

Sometimes she asked a question. Rarely, very rarely, he made a remark.

"You still like Kansas?" she asked, one evening in September.

"Love it." The scorn was not so apparent this time. "It is a great place for a hired man."

"Why?"

"Furnishes so much work. More work to the dollar than any place I ever saw."

She seemed a little uneasy. "Aren't you—aren't you rather cynical?" Then hastened in an apologetic effort to atone for the use of a word above the understanding of a hired man: "That is, I mean, aren't you rather soured?"

"A crock of sweet milk always sours if you set it by clabber." He got up and went to bed.

But the next evening after she had closed her book and sat a long time looking off into the night that hid only the more sordid features of the prairie, he wondered if he had really offended her.

"It looks better at night," he remarked of his own accord.

"Yes," she said wistfully. "I almost like it—at dusk."

Brief as their comments had been, he had come to see—or, rather, feel—pretty clearly her attitude. She was an unsophisticated child of twenty, with the deep thoughts and rose-painted visions of the great poets and dreamers she read. She had gone to the cross-roads high school. But beyond that her father would not let her go. In the home she obeyed the iron rule of her aunt, but was not really part of the household affairs. She was out of harmony with the farm and all it meant—and yet she was not rebellious. Instead she let her mind run off to dreams of things as they might be.

Bart sneered at these tinsel dreams—with his head. Just wait until she got a chance at them. But his fool heart felt sorry for her—and wished she could have what she wanted. And his head abused his heart; and he was positively, sneeringly savage with her for a month.

But one Friday he found his change of clothing had been mended most skillfully—and it was not the hand of Baydock's sister who had made those dainty stitches.

That evening his head could not make his tone savage enough to sound sharp when he asked:

"Why don't you ever go visiting?"

She got up so hastily she dropped her book and left the porch. As she went down the dark hall, he caught just the faintest echo of a sob; and Bart sat for a half hour kicking a porch pillar until it was loosened from its base.

VII.

The next morning, as he came in from feeding the stock to breakfast, she was sweeping the front porch. He glimpsed her eyes, and saw it had not ended with one sob the night before. Her hair was very soft—a lively brown; and her hands were long and slender. She must have had a fine mother.

While he sowed wheat that day Bart wondered what he really was going to do with himself.

That night the Arkansawer remarked at feeding time:

"See the dead hog in the fattening pen? You are due for a trip to town to-morrow."

"Why?"

"Hog's got the cholera. Old man'll send 'em to market at daylight in the morning."

Baydock called the hired men a half hour early. It was only faintly light when the feeding was done.

"Craig"—the old man had come into the barn lot—"right after breakfast you take them fifty hogs from the fattening pen, and drive 'em to town."

"Not me," said Bart.

"Not you?" Old Baydock raised his rather shrill voice and looked a volley of abuse at his hired man. "Why not?"

"Got the cholera," replied Bart. "I might steal, or kill a cripple, but I don't help feed poisoned meat to hungry people."

The old man's eyes smoked sulphurously, his jaws worked convulsively, and his fingers knotted into the palms.

Craig returned the look defiantly. "Go there yourself," he said dryly and turned away.

He really expected to be discharged

this time. But Baydock's greed was above his hate—and there was no other hired man he could get to compare with Bart. He sent the Arkansawer with the hogs, and let Bart go on with the wheat sowing.

As Bart hitched to the drill and started across the long field he was surprised to discover he was glad the old man had not fired him. Several times during the morning, to the utter disgust of his cynicism and self-hate, he caught himself speculating on what he might do to get a start; and once at least he roused himself with a sneering lash from a long, appreciative look at the autumn prairie.

"Be quoting poetry next, you dern fool!" he said disgustedly, "and planning to build a colored-glass house on the moon."

That evening as they did their chores the Arkansawer remarked in shrewd self-justification: "I wouldn't have done it, either—only I'm so triflin' I couldn't get a job anywhere else. I reckon you are the only fellow ever on the place that faced the old man down—except his boy."

"His boy?" Bart had not heard ot a son.

"Yes; there was a boy two years older than Laura. He skipped out about five years ago—and they don't talk none about him around the old man. Guess he's gone plum' to the yaller dogs. May be in the pen by this time for all I know."

"Was the old pup mean to him?" asked Bart.

"He's mean to anything he gets in sight of," said the Arkansawer. "He don't have to do nothin'. If he just stands around close to a fellow it's abuse. But I guess he was contrarier with Bob than common. Now, with Laura it's different. She don't never cross him any, and he lets her have her own way—except in things she really wants to do."

Bart thoroughly understood his fellow hired man's feelings toward his boss. It was not so much what the old man did—but just his attitude and personality that grueled everybody near him. He was undoubtedly a man of force, and his selfishness and penuriousness made him offensively domineering even when he was not exercising authority.

The more he thought of it the sorrier he was for Laura.

VIII.

One Sunday afternoon late in October a livery rig from Haysville was hitched at Baydock's gate, and a young man with a black coat and a white bow tie, with one end carelessly drooping over a white shirt bosom, was on the front porch.

The hired men were not called that evening until after the family and the company had supper. But after he had eaten Bart took his accustomed seat at the north end of the porch, with his feet propped up against the corner post.

Laura and "Mr. Jay Benson" were seated at the opposite end, Mr. Benson being tipped back against the wall with his knees crossed. He had black hair, with three long wisps combed across his forehead, with strips of untanned skin showing through like the opening in a lattice. He had round, prominent black eyes, and a fluent sort of mouth, and was near enough fat to look soft.

When Bart settled himself on the front porch Benson glanced at him, palpably annoyed. A man with a good deal of clothes on, and a woman with as fashionably few as the Sunday supplement will allow, feel an offense clear up to high heaven in the presence of a man in his shirt sleeves.

Bart was perfectly aware of the changed atmosphere on the porch. But cared not at all—or, rather, he liked it.

The visitor resumed his conversation —or oration. He was rather a florid talker, who embellished his periods by self-appreciative gestures with his right hand. He was telling about "when I was in college." And in two minutes Bart knew he was lying. If he had ever been to college at all it was about three months in some mislabeled normal school, where board and room and tuition is furnished at two dollars and a quarter a week, and the pupil loses money on the deal.

But Laura, he noticed, was looking up at him with eager and admiring attention.

Bart followed the conversation so closely that when Laura asked some simple question that Benson hesitated over he instinctively spoke up, and told her what she wanted to know.

For a full minute there was perfect silence. Both the beau and the young woman utterly ignored his remark.

Bart was a hired man. For once the sting went deeper than he wanted. He got up and went to the loft.

The next evening he was not on the porch. Laura spoke to him more frequently than common at the table. He replied as briefly as possible.

Wednesday evening the porch was empty, and he took his accustomed place. He had really come, without knowing it, to make of these twilight rests a bit of worship—an hour when he saw the dusk and the prairie and the stars—and was not a hired man.

Directly Laura came out, seated herself, and sighed conversationally. She subtly felt some amends should be made to this hired man for being ignored. She hated to give pain, and knew he was hurt.

"It must be wonderful to go away to school—and learn everything and see everything."

He made no comment.

"A college education is so broadening and helpful."

He gave a scornful "Hm!"

"About as helpful as to study chicken tracks in the dust," he said.

She replied with sudden heat: "It does not become any one to run down a thing merely because they haven't got it."

He made no reply, and directly went in.

Benson came again the next Sunday, and quite frequently after that. Bart stuck to his post on the porch as long as the weather was warm enough to sit out, but did not often contribute anything to the conversation. Benson ignored any open recognition of his existence, but showed a resentful and spiteful consciousness of his presence. He managed to refer most unflatteringly to "hired men." And one Sunday evening launched into oratorical discussion of the "hired-man problem."

"Miss Baydock"—he waved his right hand dramatically—"it really is getting to be a big problem. It grows more acute as the standard of living on the farm is raised. Farmers now have elegant homes and want to live in style—and of course it is impossible to have hired men in the very bosom of the family, as it were.

"Some farmers are working it out by building separate houses—like small tenant houses—for the hired men, and employing a negro or Chinese cook for them."

"You lookin' for a job?" came out of the dark from the corner of the porch.

And for three days afterward Laura failed to so much as look toward Bart at the table—and avoided sitting on the porch at evening.

IX.

"That galoot from Haysville seems pretty well gone on Laura," remarked the Arkansawer. They were shucking out corn from the shock in a strong wind, and Bart put his leg over each bundle of fodder to keep it from blowing away.

"What is he?" Bart asked, above the rattle of the dead fodder.

"Sorter betwixt and between," answered the Arkansawer.

"Betwixt and between what?"

"He's about halfway between a catamount and an ash cat. He's a rip-roaring wild cat seeking what he can devour when there ain't no danger; and a mighty meek ash cat when the dogs are loose."

"What does he do?"

"He's a lawyer when he's got any lawin', and an insurance agent when he ain't. And just a common yaller dog lickin' his chops for anything in sight the rest of the time."

It was very evident that the old man

was highly pleased by Benson's visits. Although Baydock was one of the richest men in the county, and nastily overbearing and independent, he secretly felt a toadish admiration for a fellow that carried a fountain pen and kept his collar dry. He was really ambitious for his daughter to marry a man who belonged to the charmed circle of unsweated smoke blowers, who wore clean shirts, and rested their feet on their desks every day.

It was quite as plain that Laura was both flattered and fascinated. In these days, where pretty, good girls have few beaus, and pretty good girls none, she had not received a great deal of attention. And Benson, with his easy air of having seen and heard—and done most everything, with his half-mysterious air of hiding a whole lot of interesting things beneath a fluent surface, too shallow to float a cornstalk boat, above all with his frequent allusions to his vast knowledge and learning, which allusions were very inaccurate, he captivated the dreaming country girl whose life had been squeezed into narrow bounds by the grip of her father's selfishness.

All of which Bart saw—and said nothing.

Twice during the winter parties were given—especially to get Benson out. Of course, the hired men did not come in. They stayed up and shivered around the barn until eleven o'clock to look after the teams of the company.

Bart grew more morose as the winter passed. For days he did not speak to Laura. He rarely wasted a word with old Baydock, and the Arkansawer had almost a complete monopoly of the conversation when they were together, hauling manure, feeding stock, or building cross fences.

But Bart was both unable to explain or check the effect it was having upon him. Instead of growing more bitter he found himself often smiling; and he felt a constantly growing sense of power. His withering scorn for the shallow, make-believe lawyer, and his contempt for many things he had seen in the men around him, eased off his self-scorn. Then, too, his ability to dominate, and even domineer the tough, forceful old Baydock gave him a sense of power. Baydock was really in constant fear of offending his hired man. And Bart knew that Benson on his weekly trips feared and dreaded his presence much as a weak teacher does the arrival of her strongest, most unruly pupil.

Early in February the county became aroused with interest by the near approach of a railroad which was building from the north through Omega County, and south into the Indian Territory. The road would pass through Haysville, and only two miles east of Baydock's farm. Already three grading contractors, with several hundred men, were at work on the right of way. And one big company of three hundred men were at work on a strip of the contract only seven miles away.

It was mostly an open winter, and almost every Sunday scores and hundreds of country people drove to the railroad camp to watch the progress of the work. Twice Benson had come with a livery rig, and Laura had driven away with him.

The construction company began to whip up, and by the twentieth of February had thrown in two other grading gangs, one of them only four miles from Baydock's. The following Sunday Benson came in his buggy for Laura. She had been dressed and waiting for him for an hour. He drove up to the gate, and called "Hello." She hastened out, and he did not alight to help her in, but merely reached down and took hold of her arm and gave her a pull.

It was a clear but crisp evening. Bart put on his overcoat, and sat on the front porch. There was no moon, but the stars were atwinkle over the frosted prairies. He liked the stars—and these open stretches, and the winter sky—and could not help it. No sneers nor scorn nor cynicism would work. He looked steadily and deeply into the half light of the winter evening—and liked it.

Benson's buggy drove up. He let her

out at the gate, but did not get out himself. They shook hands good night, and her feet almost danced as she came down the walk.

"Oh, isn't it a beautiful night!" she said, pausing on the step and looking across the fields.

"Yes," Bart admitted.

"Have you been to see them work?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because everybody else goes," he answered.

"It's wonderful!" she said. "Wonderful to see big work being done. Mr. Benson is attorney for the citizens—the right-of-way committee, you know ——" She was a little hazy about the duties, but certain of its importance. "It's sure a fine thing for him."

"Hard on the citizens." He ought not have said it. He knew it—but couldn't help it.

"Mr. Craig"—her tone was sad, and really sympathetic—"I'm awfully sorry you are so spiteful—and envious of people who amount to something. Instead of sneering at—other folks who are ambitious, why don't you save up your money and go to school, and try to amount to something yourself? I believe you could learn if you tried hard enough."

Craig laughed, and it was not all scorn. Part of it was real merriment, and it puzzled the girl.

He sat in the frosty night an hour after she had gone in, and felt strange emotions—at least he thought it was strange—a sense of sad and infinite pity for the tender and fragile ones who feel a great deal and see not at all. What a tragedy it was! Their affectionate hearts and dreaming fancies luring them on to the jagged rocks and cruel thorns and dark pits which their eyes can see not at all.

X.

As spring came the activity in the railroad construction quickened. By the middle of March it developed into a race with time.

Under the original surveys there had been a question whether the railroad should run through Omega County or Sweet Springs Country just to the east.

Omega County voted a bonus of three hundred thousand dollars to the company, conditioned on cars being run over the new road through the entire width of the county by May first.

This seemed ample time, and it would have been if a deal of things had not interfered. At the middle of March there still seemed enough time—if no more delays occurred. But to save risks the company rushed an army of laborers along the line through Omega County, working three shifts a day, never pausing for Sunday.

As the time drew nearer, and the trains had not yet traversed half the county, it developed into a mad race, and the whole county became excited, and on Sundays thousands of visitors in buggies and on horseback and afoot lined up along the right of way to watch the hurried digging and laying of ties and steel rails.

Bart did not get excited, but he went from time to time, often at night, and sat on a rise near the construction works, and watched the bobbing lanterns, the hurrying figures, the shouting teamsters, and cursing bosses.

April twenty-first and they were about to make the last gap. Three days more and their bonus would be safe.

Then it rained; it poured; it came down in sheets. Boston Creek went out of its banks, all over its banks—and the temporary bridge went out with it.

The cuts were filled with water. The mud stuck to the shovels.

It rained more. It rained so hard and blindingly that not even a bohunk could work.

Sam Johnson and Buck Wingo came over to felicitate Judge Baydock. They were all in the barn watching the rain. Bart sat apart, but overhearing.

"If it only rains to-morrow," said Wingo, with huge satisfaction, "we've got 'em sure."

Old Baydock's wrinkled face pursed

up into a look of the keenest pleasure Bart had ever seen on it.

"We've got 'em, anyway. If it quits right now they can't finish."

He was right. It quit within an hour. But in spite of the floundering teams, the hurrying, cursing bosses, the frantic work of the exhausted men—the first engine did not steam the full length of the county until May second.

The manager of the new road at once appealed to the county court to allow the bonus. They refused—said they had no authority. The manager asked that it be left to a vote of the people, and they agreed—the railroad company to pay for the election.

"It'll give the boys a day's job as judges and clerks," said Baydock to Johnson, with a wink; "and you don't never need worry about this county votin' away three hundred thousand dollars. We got 'em beat, and we'll keep 'em beat."

The election was called for the second of June. The railroad people actually got some prominent citizens to work for them; and although feeling pretty sure of the outcome, old Baydock told Johnson and Wingo and several of his neighbors: "We better do a little missionary work of our own." So they called a big meeting at Haysville for May twentieth. The meeting was to be open for discussion; and Attorney Benson, the most ardent exponent of the acceptable doctrine of saving three hundred thousand dollars, was to be the chief speaker.

XI.

During the early spring old Baydock had pushed the hired men into the field at sunup, and reluctantly let them come in at sundown to do the chores. But, tired as he was, Bart still spent his half hour after a late supper on the porch. The prairie now was one vast swamp of grass and wheat and wild flowers, and the soft spring evenings turned it into glimmering visions from which Bart no longer tried to hide.

And Laura was there with her book again. Often a word, a sentence, or two or three minutes of conversation passed.

It was one evening early in May that Laura remarked in the dreamy dusk:

"Isn't the law a wonderful profession?"

"Real good skin game," said Bart. "That is, if you can get your victim hitched until you remove his hide. The public is getting pretty shy about being carved up in lawsuits with lawyers on four sides of 'em.

"But," he added reflectively, "even if a lawyer don't get no victim to practice on, most generally with 'biled' shirt and plenty of gall he can marry some rich farmer's fool daughter and get a mortgage on the old man's land."

Laura didn't reply; but her silence was surcharged with indignant resentment.

"To say what we are both thinking about in real words," resumed Bart, "it's your opinion that Benson is a noble wonder. But it is my certain knowledge that he isn't worth two whoops in Arkansas. He's a shallow-pated, slippery crook, and he can't get away with it. If you marry him you'll be just as well suited as a dove with a hamstrung coyote. He's got just about as much college education as a jackass that has learned to stand on his hind legs. You better let him alone."

There were sounds from the other end of the porch which threatened angry, indignant sobs, and Bart got up.

"Don't charge you nothing for that advice," he remarked, as he started in, "because it ain't worth nothing—not to you. Just as much use in advising a pig with the blind staggers to stand still as to advise a silly girl not to marry her palaverin', varnished, punk hero."

Of course, Bart knew it was not the standard thing to say. A gentleman, in fiction, should always be so honorable that he allows a villain to ruin the life of his best friend by marrying her, before he will say a word against him. It is mighty bad taste to tell a girl she is being snared—especially if it is so.

For a week Laura avoided Bart entirely. Bart noticed, however—or imagined he did—that Sunday she was not so radiant and animated when Benson drove up.

As the night of the big meeting drew near, Baydock, Johnson, Wingo, and the rest in sympathy with their ideas, became very active. They urged every man they saw to attend the Haysville meeting. There was still no doubt of the defeat of the plan to forgive the railroad for being one day late. But, strange as it might seem, there were a few, who by their inadvertent remarks, or uneasy silence indicated they were traitorous enough to the county to vote for the bonus to be paid. All of these were urgently pressed to attend on the evening of the twentieth—Attorney Benson would win them over. "He's sure a talker," said Baydock. "Yep, he's a slick one," assented Wingo.

"I expect there will be some railroad fellers there," said Johnson.

"Benson will make them take to tall timber, if there are," said Baydock.

As they did the chores the evening of the twentieth the Arkansawer inquired:

"Goin' to-night?"

"Yes," answered Bart. "Old man wants me to drive. You going?"

"Yes; Baydock told me I could ride a horse. First time in his life he ever offered to let me ride a horse. I can vote, you know."

The womenfolks were invited to the meeting—Benson had insisted on that—"on account of their influence." That was the day when woman suffrage was in eclipse in Kansas. But women were still supposed to have influence. Laura went, of course. She and her aunt rode in the back seat, Bart and Baydock in the front. Not twenty words were said during the drive. The aunt was not talkative unless she had something to scold about. Baydock was busy with plans; and Bart, in his shirt sleeves, drove with his eyes on the moonlight that chased cloud shadows across the prairies.

XII.

Haysville was not much of a town; but it had a roomy place for public meetings—an old skating rink that had been converted into a combined city hall and opera house.

It was so full the Baydocks had to get seats in a row of loose chairs placed in the aisles. Bart found a place in the far corner.

Beside the chairman on the platform sat Jay Benson, slightly tipped back, with his left foot crossed over his knee. He was resplendent to-night, and looked from corner to corner with that searching glance, intended to convey to the public that he was a marvelous reader of character, and was searching out their very souls. In truth, he was not thinking of them at all—only thinking of how much they must admire him. The black hair strayed a little lower across his forehead than usual, and almost touched the right eyebrow. He wore a white bow tie, tied in a way to indicate that he loved good clothes, but was too brainy and busy to give them the proper amount of attention.

The chairman announced the purpose of the meeting:

"To discuss whether or not we should vote to affirm the bonus the railroad forfeited by their failure to complete their contract in the specified time." And he introduced as the chief speaker of the evening, "Our fellow townsman, Honorable Jay Benson, who will now take the floor."

Benson arose deliberately, backed off a couple of steps, walked forward to the table, took a sip of water, glanced all the way around the hall, and then opened with:

"Did you ever hear of a railroad giving anybody anything?"

That brought a laugh.

"Then I demand to know"—he shot out his right hand and lifted his voice—"why anybody would expect us to give them anything?"

He paused dramatically.

"They contract to run a train through the entire county by May first. They failed to do it. The bonds are forfeited. And we'll be a fine bunch of suckers if we vote away three hundred thousand dollars that they have no legal right to demand."

That was the whole thing. He might

have quit there. But speakers like Benson never quit there. They always have to run gurgling on, bumping over shallows until they evaporate. Benson had a barrel of stale, obvious jokes and a keg of soft soap that he absolutely must unload on that "magnificent array of brawn and beauty."

He lasted for an hour. Bart saw it was exceedingly shallow, obviously trumped up, cheaply dramatic, and rottenly dishonest. But the crowd liked it—most of them. He stirred up all the rank prejudice against railroads he could, and lauded "honest farmers" to the full sixty-minute limit.

There was a good volley of cheers and feet stamping when he finished.

The chairman said the meeting was open for public discussion. He wanted the voters to express their opinion. "Everybody feel free to speak. Judge Baydock, what have you to say?"

Judge Baydock had some concentrated lye seasoned with vinegar to offer anybody fool enough to vote three hundred thousand dollars' tax on the county—when they didn't have to.

The meeting was still open, and what would Mr. Wingo suggest? Wingo was of the same and similar obvious opinion as the rest.

There was a friend to the railroad trying to get a chance to reply, but the chairman, so far, had not seen him.

Once more the meeting was open, and the chair recognized a good, old, hard-fisted, anti-tax money lender from Haysville.

And then, from away back in the far corner, came:

"Mr. Chairman."

XIII.

People craned their necks, and saw a six-foot, muscular young fellow, without a collar and in his shirt sleeves. He was so obviously a farmer the chairman recognized him, and invited him to come forward.

Bart went, picking his way deliberately down the crowded aisle, and mounted the platform.

Not twenty people in the audience knew who the collarless, shirt-sleeved farm hand on the platform was; none of them knew why he was there. But power of any sort held in leash has a subtle grip on the attention, and they felt curious and expectant.

Bart was as deliberate in beginning as the lawyer had been; but it was a different sort. His was the deliberation of intense concentration. His opening words were slightly drawn out with a faint drawl, tinctured with acid.

"Mr. Chairman, I am Judge Baydock's hired man. I introduce myself that no one may suspicion me of being one of the stockholders in this pernicious railroad.

"I might mention also"—he turned toward Benson with a sarcastic smile—"that I am not watering with my oratory a little budding hope of some day being elected prosecuting attorney by the votes of these 'honest yeomen.'

"I have no notion of talking for votes, nor for anything. That would be a pure waste, and a hired man can't afford to waste even words.

"I know, and everybody knows, what you are going to do. You are going to vote to keep that three hundred thousand dollars. The situation, as stated dizzily and at great length by a previous speaker, is this:

"You wanted a railroad, and wanted it awfully bad. You found one was going through the county east of you, and offered to hire them to come through Omega County instead. They offered to come for three hundred thousand dollars, and you figured it would be worth twice that, or you would never have voted the bonus.

"You got your railroad. But fortunately the rains fell and the floods came, and the company was one day late in getting through. That forfeits the contract. The road is spiked down, and can't get away; and you can keep the road and skin them out of that three hundred thousand dollars, too.

"Do it by all means. After waiting for seventy-five years for a railroad, who wants them to come along and be twenty-four hours late in getting through? You've got the law; and when you go to steal, it is a glorious thing to have the law—and the lawyers—with you.

"Grab it, of course. This is the best chance for a big steal most of you ever had. And your attorney says you'll be fools if you don't take it. I agree with him. However, I don't think the vote either way would change that point.

"You can't help it. It is just in you. I don't blame you any more than I do an apple for being rotten. Most of you in this neck of the prairie came from Tennessee, Indiana, or Iowa. And all the continents and islands and waste places of the earth, including New England, never produced a finer specimen of penurious littleness, and contemptible, greedy stinginess than a native of Tennessee or Indiana who has been transplanted into Iowa twenty years, and then goes south so he won't have to feed his hogs so long.

"It is in your blood. You were taught it, and you teach it to your sons. It is just as natural for you to steal or withhold from others what is theirs, when you can do it under a sneaking cloak of pretended honesty, as it is for an egg-sucking dog to break up a setting hen."

They wondered afterward—at least, Baydock, and Wingo, and Johnson did—why somebody did not stop him. But at the time it never occurred to them. He had a grip on them, and they sat under the lash for thirty minutes. There was clearness and biting humor—and, above all, force in what he said, and they listened in constantly growing astonishment, wondering what he would say next. His voice was clear and penetrating, but not once did he raise it, or quicken it into a tone of railing or denunciation. But it slowly gathered power and volume until his words came hammering out with driving force. Of course, his personal experience with Baydock and his neighbors gave color to his bitterness; but it was not a personal matter. He was speaking with clear mental conviction, and he was telling the truth so often that the bell rang at almost every shot in many an old rascal's conscience.

But it was not all bitterness—not quite. Toward the close he paused, and then resumed, in a sad, but disillusioned, sort of tone:

"And so it is not for the railroad, nor for Omega County, nor for votes that I'm talking. But merely to tell you a few things about yourselves.

"For you know while it is natural for the egg-sucking dog to break up the setting hen, yet sooner or later the egg-sucking dog almost invariably gets poisoned.

"And you've already got a few doses of poison—many of you. There is one farmer near where I work that sold his corn one August—agreed to sell it at forty cents a bushel, for he thought corn would be cheap. At gathering time corn was fifty cents, and he told his seventeen-year-old son to deliver it to another man—because no money was paid on the contract, and the first buyer could not hold him to it—by law.

"Last year that man's son defaulted as cashier of a bank—and the detectives are waiting for him along the border of Mexico.

"Another one of the honest farmers inside of six miles from here is worth fifty thousand dollars. He wouldn't let his daughter have a two-hundred-dollar piano, nor his son a buggy. There was nothing but grind and grumble and poverty in that home. The son who was not given a buggy ran away. Last week in the city he stole an automobile, and is in jail now. The girl who was not given a piano ran away—and listens to one played behind windows with red blinds.

"Another farmer withheld from his son all things he needed. And from time to time sent him to market with choleraed hogs, and taught him how to dope horses for a trade, and also to work off the rotten fruit and bad eggs on buyers too trustful or weak to fight back.

"That boy got such a dose of poison from his father's attitude toward life that he is now employed for seven years in an institution whose chief officer is called a warden.

"You can be selfish, or greedy, or

morose—and it's nobody's business. The sheriff won't get you. You steal from this railroad, and none can prevent you. You can withhold from your neighbors and families that which they ought to have, and still prate about being a good provider.

"But there is a law that does not take into account shyster lawyers and their precedents, a law that neither land and cattle nor platitudinous assumption of honesty can help you dodge. It is: That whatsoever you withhold shall be withheld from you. Steal from your children the light and life and warmth of love they need, and coin it into dollars. But, mind you, after a while, knotted and old and bitter in your selfishness, you will find that which you withheld is in turn withheld from you. And that which you take shall be taken again—and pulled up in a way to leave a mighty jagged hole in your lives.

"You prate honesty and practice choleraed hogs and diseased cattle and bad eggs; and then get together and bemoan the ingratitude and unaccountable waywardness of your children.

"But nothing you say or pretend avails against the power of your spirit—your attitude toward man and life. The atmosphere of your homes, more subtly than the dews of heaven, more intangibly than the brooding twilight on the prairies, saturates and colors the very fluids of life of those who grow up in it.

"Take the railroad's three hundred thousand by all means. It is the best chance you will ever have to suck eggs that don't belong to you. But don't whine and howl when you get the poison that is bottled up somewhere for every egg-sucking dog."

Even the chairman sat flushed and speechless while Bart stalked down the aisle and out into the prairie. The road to Baydock's turned west; he took the south one. The moon looked with gladness upon the meadows and wheat, and the winds of the spring night were soft and perfumed. Bart lifted his head and threw out his arms, and breathed deep, and then laughed. It was a good laugh that came deep and clear from the bottom of his heart. He felt good and free. He was a man—and master of men.

Hadn't he roasted them good—hadn't he given them what they needed? He remembered how the honorable attorney, Benson, had shriveled in the fire of his sarcasm like a crackling in a rendering pot. He laughed again. He was free. He no longer hated men—and all hate for life was gone—gone like some evil obsession, vanished in a moment.

XIV.

He struck straight south, and as he walked at easy swing he knew he loved the night and the prairies. In a moleskin purse he carried, as he always did, all his savings—a considerable sum, despite the fact that at intervals he had drawn upon his store to send money to his home folks in Mount Nebo. He cared not a grain of corn for the things he was leaving at Baydock's.

At two o'clock in the morning he walked into Cherokee City, just over the Territory line. He roused the sleeping hotel keeper, and got a bed.

Next morning Bart discovered he was not a hired man looking for a job, nor yet an inflated college boy looking for praise, but a grown man, chock-full of fight, looking for an opportunity.

He remembered that while working for the squaw he had been thirty miles south into the Creek Nation with two horses; and although it was only June for two miles he rode through prairie grass that came up to the horse's side.

Two days later he was in the Creek Nation, and found a magnificent strip of prairie meadow where the wild grass, thick as wheat, was already knee high. For uncounted years it had grown up and fallen back and rotted on the ground. The Indians no longer pastured it, and no white man wanted it. There was no market, and none thought of making one. It was ten miles to the nearest shipping point, and twenty-five to the nearest town of any size.

Bart had three hundred dollars. He paid a hundred dollars of it to the Indian owners for the right to mow the grass on a thousand acres.

In reality, friction and chilly water and hard knocks and bad luck and impossibilities are scattered around just as thick in one place as another; and all seasons are their own. The big difference is in a man's attitude. If a fellow shrinks about like that tuneful animal that gets kicked around every time he comes to town, he'll never find a place or a time when he isn't swatted fore and aft, sideways, and on top by discouragements and failure. But if a man has the fight in him, and brains, and is master of himself, you scarcely notice that anything is in his way. *He* does, of course. He faces grimly and often with back and soul-aching poignancy his difficulties. But they do get out of the way.

Bart had a thousand acres of grass—and two hundred dollars. He did not have a single mowing machine, a team, nor a hand. Moreover, he had no market.

He went to Kansas City, and the hay dealers told him the crop of hay was very abundant that year. Remarkable how heavy the crops always look to the man who buys. But they thought they could pay seven dollars a ton for choice prairie hay.

Bart then went to a farm-implement house, and saw the manager. After facing old Baydock for a year he was not timid about standing up to anybody. And that is a prime element of success—to be able to face any man without cringing, and tell him without a quaver of apology just what one wants. He convinced the dealer that it was good business to sell him five mowers on credit.

He went back to his grass, and got it fixed in the heads of five white renters that it would be good business for them to hitch their teams to his mowers and cut grass—and wait until it was shipped for their three dollars a day.

Until a fellow has learned better by experience the shrewdest man is apt to pick up the wrong end of the details first. Until now Bart had not thought to learn the freight rate on baled hay to Kansas City.

It was three dollars a ton. It would cost him two dollars and fifty cents a ton to have it hauled the ten miles to Waupong, the shipping station. He could not cut it and bale it for a dollar and fifty cents. He would lose money.

When a man who is doomed to failure faces three difficulties, he always jumps in and fights the wrong one—the one that is a stone wall. Bart saw clearly he must save expenses somewhere. He could not move the railroad—not now. He could not cut down his field expenses. Therefore he must get it to the railroad cheaper.

He stretched out on a pile of loose hay that night, and substituted figures for dreams. Next morning at daylight he rode off toward Vinita. There he heard of an old thresher engine not in use. It was a big, bunglesome old thing, but adapted to pull the separator and water tanks and other equipments from one farm to another. It was slow, but had a strong pull, and with its big, flat wheels could go anywhere. He could attach five wagons in a string behind the engine, each loaded with a ton and a half of baled hay. By working the old snorter all day and part of the night he could make two trips a day.

When the haying was well under way, Bart rode to Waupong, the shipping point. Waupong had a depot, a switch, and about twenty inhabitants. After Bart had pounded the ticket window with his pocketknife two minutes, the agent, who looked like a case of chills warmed up with a pint of whisky and toned down with the sleeping sickness, got up from the desk, and came to the window and looked with languid offensiveness at the person hammering the window.

"What do you want?"

"Forty freight cars," said Bart crisply.

"Aw, don't git funny," said the agent boredly. "This is my busy day."

Bart brought him up with a snap. "I want the cars, and I want ten of them on the siding Monday."

Bart himself went with the first load.

When the old engine coughed and chuffed into Waupong, only one car was on the siding, and it loaded with lumber. That meant his hay must be dumped beside the track, with the risk of fire and rain.

"Say"—he was at the window, boiling with more heat than an oil refinery—"where are those cars I ordered?"

"I dunno." The agent half turned his sallow face over his shoulder, and gave the angry Bart an indifferent glance, and then turned back to the telegraph key.

"When will they be here?" demanded Bart.

"I don't know. To-morrow, maybe, or maybe the next day."

For three days the old engine took in fifteen tons a day, and the bales were stacked by the track. For three days Bart waited for the arrival of his empty cars. But none came. His hay was in danger; it was a delay in getting money for his hands—and he needed money awfully bad. And still the sallow, nasty nightmare of an agent dawdled over the keys and professed his "I dunno."

There are times when every man of action and force longs to be a mandarin or a sultan, with unlimited power over human lives—and no questions asked.

The next day Bart broke into the general freight agent's office at Kansas City. Even the clerks recognized him as a fellow headed for the man higher up.

"Well?" the freight agent inquired in a very human tone. Freight agents are usually about the most civil people around a railroad.

"Have a station on your road at Waupong, Indian Territory?"

The agent nodded.

"What do you pay the agent a month?"

"I don't know. He is not employed by my department. Perhaps sixty dollars a month. Looking for his job?" The freight agent had time to smile.

"Yes," said Bart. "And I can save you seven hundred dollars a year. There is a cigar-store Indian down here on Tenth Street you can buy for twenty dollars, and he'll be worth a thousand dollars a year more to you than that mosquito-bitten aggregation of congestive chills and sleep which you have there now."

"What's the trouble?"

"Trouble?" Bart leaned forward and hit the table with his fist. "Why, I've been waiting two weeks for empty cars to ship hay in—and that butternut says he can't get them; and I counted two hundred odd cars rusting on the siding between here and there. What's the matter with this road, anyway? Don't you want business? I've got forty or fifty carloads of hay to get out down there, and it looks like it would take me as long to get cars as it would to get a ruling on an adverb from the supreme court."

Forty cars of freight looked good. The freight agent got busy at once. And not only promised the cars would be on the siding by the time he got back, but the agent should be given a summer vacation, close to home.

Bart was back the next day, and his cars were on the siding. The auditor arrived on the same train with Bart, and proceeded to check in a new agent.

XV.

The first of the following April Bart sat in a little office in the feed and produce district of Kansas City, bargaining with the purchasing agent of the stockyards for the sale of his last car of hay.

The summer before, as fast as the old engine had dragged the hay to Waupong, he had shipped it out to Kansas City, where it sold for seven dollars a ton. When enough of it was sold to pay his bills he stopped; built sheds by the track, and stored the rest, making arrangements with the accommodating railroad agent to ship when he ordered. Bart went to Kansas City and opened a small office under this sign:

Barton Craig.
Wholesale and Retail Dealer
In Prairie Hay.

His business had been devoted almost entirely to the selling to good advantage the remaining five hundred tons which he had left. He had plenty of time, and hunted for markets. One of the best he found was the stockyards, and he had cultivated the purchasing agent.

The hay was all sold, some of it as high as eleven dollars a ton. His bills were all paid, including his winter's board and the five mowing machines. He had leased the hay crop on ten thousand acres of wild Indian land for five years, and made five hundred dollars advance payment. He had contracted for a special flat-wheeled, strong-pulling engine and a string of trucks, and fifty mowers, and made small advance payments. He had built up a good-sized bank account for his home folks in Mount Nebo. And still he had a thousand dollars in his own bank.

He might have been satisfied with that, but he was not. It was more money than he ever had in his life before; it was more than he could have saved as a hired man in five years. But he was not a hired man. Hence, he was not satisfied. Did you ever notice it is the man who is not satisfied with that who gets some more?

After his last sale he debated with himself for two days whether to go back to the Territory and begin early preparations for his harvest, or to stay in Kansas City another month and start a fight on the railroad.

The railroad was very friendly to him now, furnished his cars promptly, hastened them to market, and treated him with consideration—for three dollars a ton.

But he knew that was too much. He had been studying freight rates at odd times during the winter. If he had good luck with the harvest, and prices were right, he could make a nice profit in spite of that rate. But it was too much. Again, if he started a fight, failed to win, and angered the company, they could and would smash him like a grasshopper under the heel of a Creek Indian. Those were the good old, bad old days, when railroads were a law unto themselves—and acted it.

But three dollars freight was too much. He decided to stay and fight. There was to be an important meeting in Kansas City the last of the month of all the road's important officials. He'd try to find a way to reach them.

XVI.

One morning, about the middle of the month, Bart passed a brisk, well-dressed man on Walnut Street. The man turned quickly when he was by, and said: "Hello, Craig!"

Bart turned and took the extended hand without a glimmer of recognition. "You don't know me"—the other's eyes twinkled—"but I know you. You are —were—Baydock's hired man." He laughed. "I'm Wallace, the general attorney for the N. & S. Railroad, and was at that meeting in Haysville that night to speak for the company. But I didn't need to. That was the best speech I ever heard." He laughed ringingly. "It certainly wilted them—and it won us our bonus. I suppose you heard?"

Bart had not. He had tried to blot out that year from his memory.

"I looked for you, but they said you'd skipped out. By the way, we have always felt we owed you a good turn. If you ever need a lawyer, call on my department."

"Thanks," said Bart. "I guess I won't need one—I'm something of a lawyer myself."

"Is that so? I knew you were no common hired man even before you began to speak. Well, if there is anything I can do, let me know." He started to pass on.

"Say!" Bart caught at a sudden idea. "Are you acquainted with any of the L. F. & T. people?"

"Sure; know all of them. Used to be in their legal department."

"Then you can do something for me. Get me a chance to appear before the meeting of their officials the twentieth."

The day before the meeting Wallace called up Bart, and said he'd arranged it. The officials would give him thirty minutes Thursday at four to make his complaint.

Bart had not said anything about

complaints, but they always took that for granted—they had a right to.

The president, the vice presidents, general freight agents, the general attorney, and fifteen or twenty other prominent officials were in the company's big executive office when Bart was admitted.

They were prepared to be bored and ignore any request. But this clear-cut, strong-headed youth seemed to arouse their curiosity.

Those were the days of the lordly officials and cringing shippers, and Bart well might have felt his knees wabble and his head grow dizzy. But he did not. His training with old Baydock still made him capable of pulling the beard of a Rocky Mountain lion. They had given him thirty minutes. He took seven.

"Gentlemen, I'm a hay dealer. I've discovered about a hundred thousand acres of wild prairie hay in the Indian Territory that goes to waste every year.

"I want to cut it and ship some of it up here. But the freight rate is too high. You haul hay from southern Kansas for one dollar and sixty cents, and charge three dollars from my station, only fifty miles farther on.

"I've been figuring on this thing, and know you can make money at a two-dollar rate. It seems to me mighty poor business sense to make a rate so high the hay will rot in the fields and your old box cars rot on the sidings."

That was the gist of it—so swift and straightforward and scrappy that it first took their breath, and then stirred their keenest attention.

Of course, they gave no promises, and Bart went out, not knowing whether he was to have war and the sullen ill will of the company—which meant his finish; or whether he'd won a reduction, which meant a fortune. He probably would not know for months.

XVII.

He prepared to leave at once for the Indian Territory to begin preparations for the big season's cutting. He ran down to the stockyards next morning to talk with the purchasing agent about some summer contracts.

They were crossing the stockyards when he saw a familiar, collapsible figure sitting on the fence watching a pen of steers.

The Arkansawer nearly fell off the fence when he saw Bart.

"Why, I'm as glad to see you as a hummin' bird is a honeysuckle bush," he said, rocking Bart's hand from side to side.

For nearly a year Bart had been trying to dam up his mind so none of the currents would run backward to old Baydock—and the Kansas prairie. He had succeeded rather imperfectly, for at every slip of his resolute grip his memory jumped with the swiftness of a dream to the twilight—and the porch, and the prairie—and——

Any very vivid experience, whether pleasant or painful, is always remembered with some sort of yearning. Even things that hurt us badly, if they stirred us deeply, will bring to the memory a sort of haunting yearning to go back.

Seeing the Arkansawer broke down the dams, and Bart's memory had him, and the longing and the pain were not because of his bitter experience. He could even smile at that.

"Still with old Baydock?" questioned Bart.

"Oh, yes. Nobody else would hire me."

"How—how's the folks?"

The Arkansawer grinned. "She's feelin' pretty well—but still lookin' sorter peaked."

"Why, has she been ill?"

"No, not exactly—only seemed purty lonesome, or lost or somethin'. Sits out on the porch readin', and gazin' off toward the Indian Territory most of the time."

Bart swallowed fiercely. He wanted to shake the Arkansawer.

"Do you mean she didn't marry Benson?"

"Oh, no! He kinder blowed up after that meetin'." The hired man stopped to laugh. "I tell you, Mr. Craig, that roastin' did me more good than anything I ever heard. It was finer than a school exhibition. You orter heard old Baydock and Wingo as they went home. It sure stirred things up.

"But it hit Benson hardest. The fellers seemed to kind of blame him for the whole business, and he just petered out and left Haysville last fall."

"Hasn't been back to Baydock's since he left?" Bart asked, with assumed nonchalance.

"Oh, gracious, no! He never did come but once after that meetin'—and that was the next Sunday, and he didn't stay more than ten minutes then. I don't know what happened, but I heard him cussin' as he drove off."

Bart went up into the city and ordered a sixty-dollar tailor-made suit. Then went to his room to pack. There was a message there for him to come to Wallace's office.

XVIII.

That afternoon, when he went to the attorney's office, Wallace shook hands with the enthusiasm of a fellow member of the bar. "I heard about your speech. It sure took their breath; but I have reasons to believe that when the new freight schedule is published next month there will be a reduction in the hay rates from the Territory of fifty cents a ton.

"By the way, Craig, you seem to be a fellow who gets what he goes after."

"Thank you." Bart could smile easy now.

The attorney assumed the look of considering, which indicates a man has already studied it over and come to a decision.

"I think we need you. You are the sort of young man that makes good in our business. I can start you in as assistant attorney in my office at about fifteen hundred a year. How would that strike you?"

"Not at all," said Bart, without a moment's hesitation. "I'm going to make more the next five years than all your assistants combined."

"Think so?" The lawyer looked surprised. He had expected unbounded gratitude and immediate acceptance. "Maybe we could raise that offer to two thousand——"

Bart shook his head. "No inducements. I'm not a lawyer. I'm a dealer in hay. I rather handle real straw."

When Bart bought his ticket it was not to Waupong, but to Haysville.

The first flowers were in bloom on the prairies as he drove toward Baydock's just after sundown. The south wind was full of spring, and the tender young grass gave the prairie that faint green that softened with the gathering twilight.

Laura was on the porch. It had just grown too dark to read. Her book lay face down on her lap. She arose so quickly it fell unnoticed as Bart came down the walk.

Not until his foot was on the step did the exclamation of certain recognition escape her:

"Mr. Craig!"

He went straight to her, and put his arms around her and kissed her on the lips.

"What will papa say?" she said, gasping and trembling with happiness.

"He'll say 'Yes,'" said Bart grimly. "I'll see to that.

"And, honey," he said, "I've got a wedding present for you. I've been wondering a long time what the thing was good for, but now I know—it'll just suit you."

He handed her a roll of paper tied with a ribbon, and she ran in to the light and unrolled it.

It was his college diploma.

AS DEVELOPED BY WALTER JOHNSON

Eddie Ainsmith, who is used by Manager Griffith as the man to catch Walter Johnson's hot curves and smoking straight ones for the Nationals, has hands that fill the bill. His fingers are so strong that he can tear a pack of cards in half, then tear in half the first halves of the deck.

Black Gold

By Frederick R. Bechdolt

Author of "The Old Man of Eagle Pass," "Free Rein," Etc.

CHAPTER IX—(*Continued*).

OUT in the darkness near the western limits of Kernfield a dozen men were crouching in the deep shadows of a lumber yard. One hundred yards away, looming vague against the starry sky, two clusters of enormous cylindrical tanks sprawled, like two lightless, silent villages. The twelve men gathered close together. They spoke in whispers. Now and again one stole away from the others to peer into the darkness toward these tank villages; then came back with stealthy tread, and muttered: "Not yet."

Hart stood facing the twenty-three mutineers in the Southern Hotel. Already the room was filling with a haze of cigar smoke. Through the blue mist he saw their eyes upon him; hostile, unflinching. He shook his shoulders; his lean face became stern.

"Gentlemen," he said quietly, "I intend to keep you from selling our oil for that figure—just on the eve of victory. You trusted me in the beginning. I fought for you. If you will trust me now I will have seventy-five-cent oil within a week."

They sat before him, silent; but their eyes contradicted him.

And now, as he was speaking, he wondered—of a sudden, for the first time—whether perhaps he might be wrong. He wondered whether the enemy might have accumulated oil without the knowledge of men. Stranger things had happened. And the enemy was resourceful—lusty with power.

He remembered his orders to Olds and Porter: "I expect you here with the figures." He shut his lips tight. He would wait for them. He must hold these others.

"Now," he said slowly, "I am going to give you the evidence."

He reached down to the table beside him. He picked up the papers and began to read the reports, deliberately and with significant emphasis. There was a mass of them—verbatim recitals of interviews with tank watchmen; statements of outgoing trains, oil-laden for factories; information given by pumpmen at the pipe-line stations; a maze of statistics; a huge compilation of interviews. Once during his reading some one tried to interrupt him. He raised his hand and sternly demanded silence.

Thus an hour dragged by.

The sentry who once more had stolen out from the lumber yards came back this time with a tense swiftness. "Now," he whispered, "both watchmen have gone away on their rounds. We've got two hours."

It was Olds. He was trembling as a fox terrier trembles, or a blooded horse facing the barrier.

"Porter, you take the United tanks. We'll handle the Association. You fellows, have those wire nippers ready. We got to hustle if we ever expect to make it."

There was a faint sound of metal touching metal. A flash light threw a circle of radiance upon the ground.

"Keep that lantern in your pocket!" growled a voice.

This story began in the first November POPULAR. Back numbers may be ordered at the news stands.

Two groups of men stole forth through the darkness. They made no more sound than two groups of shadows. They separated. Each group flitted through the night toward one of the tank villages.

About each cluster of oil tanks a fence of barbed wire extended, ten feet in height. And now, beside each fence, there was a blur in the darkness. Into the night came the sharp, rasping click of metal shearing metal. It lasted but a moment. Then silence.

The blurs melted away. Among the tall steel tanks, looming there darker than the night itself, single forms were creeping. Along the side of one tank a form crawled upward. One after another the raiders began climbing the steel ladders which led to the manholes.

When Hart finished reading the reports of Olds and Porter regarding the oil supply, the watch beside him on the little center table showed three minutes beyond half past ten.

An hour and a half to wait! An hour and a half—and what then? He felt the doubts again assailing him. He did not know. He realized, more fully than any of these before him, that these figures which he had been reading were but hearsay evidence. There was room for doubt. He had no proof to back them.

The twenty-three were stirring in their seats. Now and again a man whispered to his neighbor. For some moments they sat restless.

Barker rose again. He talked swiftly; his voice was loud, his manner assertive. Confidence was upon him—the confidence of a man who is firm in his belief, bent on accomplishing his purpose. He attacked the figures; he pointed out the room for inaccuracies. The situation was too grave to run any risk. That afternoon Savage had made his offer—and Savage had told them that it was the last time he would hold conference with any of them. That offer had been an ultimatum. And they could not afford to fight longer on the strength of those figures. Bankruptcy hung over them. It threatened scores of others.

From the room came a cry: "Question!" Several voices repeated it. "Question!" They shouted it fiercely.

Doherty rose suddenly. He begged them to trust their chairman. "Ye started with him. Stick with him!" he importuned them. He bade them remain loyal. He bullied them, abused them, called them cowards.

But when Doherty had at last finished, several voices shouted: "What has the chairman to show us?"

That was it. He had shown them nothing. They had nothing on which to pin their faith—nothing beyond those hearsay figures.

"I demand the question be put!" cried Barker.

Hart stepped forward. "I ask you to wait. I have that coming to-night which may change the entire situation——"

He got no farther. The room was in a tumult. They were on fire now. Panic had taken hold of them that afternoon. They were desperate. They suspected him. They believed in no man.

"I'll put the motion myself." Barker was on his feet again. He recited it; there followed a chorus of "Ayes!" Several began rising from their chairs. Their voices, angry, upraised, filled the room.

"You wouldn't put it! We had the right to!" Barker walked toward Hart, brandishing his fist. His ruddy face was aflame. His eyes were dilated. Hart looked at him, unmoved. "We put it! We passed it! It's done, I tell you!" Barker repeated.

The others were advancing behind him. "Done!" they shouted. "Done! Adjourn this meeting!"

Doherty got up from his chair. The movement was leisurely. He loomed beside Hart. He walked slowly to the room's one door. He carried his chair with him. He halted in front of the door. He rested both hands on the back of the chair, then raised it as if trying its weight.

"Ye may as well go back to your

seats," he said heavily; "for the first man who tries to leave this room gets this chair broke over his head."

They hesitated. The rage which had been in their faces vanished. This thing had suddenly assumed enormous proportions.

Hart nodded to Doherty. "Come back," he said quietly. Doherty hesitated. "Come back!" Hart repeated. Doherty returned slowly to the table, carrying his chair. Hart faced the others.

"Listen to me," he bade them earnestly. "For the sake of two hundred other producers and the sake of an industry, I ask you to stay here. I've fought this thing through. To-night I am going to win the battle for you. I ask you to wait until midnight."

They stood regarding him with mingled wonder and suspicion.

Olds lay prone upon the roof of an oil tank. In the thick night which enwrapped him at this height, shutting off all but the stars far above him, he listened intently. About him came faint noises, of bodies scraping over metal; slight, sharp blows. But save for these sounds there was nothing to disturb the silence. Close beside him a boxlike inclosure stood, a wart upon the tank's smooth roof. He ran his hands along the sides of this; they were made of heavy builders' paper. He made a swift movement with his right arm, thrusting forward, then sweeping downward; there came the sound of ripping paper. He had cut away one side of the inclosure.

Now he was leaning over the manhole which gave ingress to the vast tank. He flashed his searchlight down. There lay below him a smooth, gleaming surface—the unmistakable glistening of crude oil.

Oddly enough, the sight of that oil surface brought no dismay to Olds. He had gauged other tanks before this one—— He unrolled his gauge line and dropped it. For a moment after striking that surface the plummet at the line's foot descended slowly, encountering the oil's resistance. So for one foot, as the figures slid through the engineer's fingers. Then abruptly the speed of the descent increased.

When Olds had rolled up the gauge line again, and had descended the ladder, he crouched at the foot of the tank, setting down figures. And now his work was done.

He stole away to the hole in the barbed-wire fence; he emerged from the tank yard, and hurried to the rendezvous between the lumber piles. There he joined his fellows.

Porter was speaking quietly. "Eleven-thirty," he muttered. "We've got to hurry to get back to the hotel."

"You're keeping us here," Barker was protesting, "and for no reason that you will give."

"I'm keeping you here because you'd betray two hundred other men if I let you go. I ask you to wait for the sake of——"

Hart got no farther. A footfall sounded in the passage. Another followed. A knock resounded on the door.

Hart threw back his head. "Now, men, we'll see how things stand. Come in!"

Olds entered the room; Porter came at his heels. The clothes of the two men were covered with dust. Oil stained the fabric. They were breathing heavily.

They glanced about them—at the twenty-three who were regarding them in open-eyed amazement; at Hart, who stood before them, his head back, smiling slightly; at Doherty, beside him.

Hart spoke evenly: "What did you find?"

Olds started toward him.

"You did it?" Hart asked sharply.

Olds nodded. His breath was still coming heavily, as if he had been running. His eyes were alight. "Tell it to the rest of them," Hart commanded.

"We gauged the tanks," Olds began, with a queer catch in his breath. "Gauged all of them." His voice raised with his excitement. "Listen, gentlemen! They haven't one hundred thousand barrels of oil there where they claim ten million. Those tanks are full of water, with a foot of oil floating on top of it!"

The twenty-three sat like men petrified. They did not comprehend yet. Hart stood still. His face had not altered by the movement of a single muscle. In this moment it seemed to him as if victory was a little thing after so long waiting.

Then Doherty uttered a loud cry. He swayed where he stood. He moved unsteadily toward Hart, both hands outstretched. "Ye did it?" he said thickly. "Ye did that? Man! And ye've proved it!" He seized Hart's shoulders. His face was working.

Suddenly the others comprehended. They leaped from their chairs. Their voices rose in wild, exultant babble.

Barker walked up swiftly. "I ask your pardon," he said. "I was afraid. Good heavens, man! It has been terrible, this waiting!"

The others crowded about. They were asking questions of Olds. He was answering them, reading from his notebook. Their voices raised together. "Tanks filled with water!" "Not a hundred thousand barrels!" "Think of that!" "Oh, what a bluff!" "Men, we've got them now!" "He's saved the situation." "Hart, you did it!"

But Hart remained unmoved. "Just one more talk with Savage," he said. "We're all right then. Now, let's finish up our business."

CHAPTER X.

TO COMPROMISE OR NOT.

The raid upon the tanks was one of those news stories which force their way to front pages. Throughout the State the papers emblazoned its facts in long, black letters. The effect of that one episode counteracted all the skillful press-agent work of months. And everywhere men spoke of the oil shortage.

Hart waited for capitulation. The agency had given him absolute control again. He had the bargain in his hands. He was to judge the terms.

Three days he waited in Kernfield, and no word came from the enemy. Savage had left town; so men told him; the oil master had disappeared. All manner of wild rumors accompanied that disappearance. Hart disregarded them, biding the hour when the word would come.

And now Hart's sureness became greater than himself. He could see nothing but the issue for which he had fought—seventy-five-cent oil.

So, when he opened a telegram in the lobby of the Southern on the third morning, and read these words: "Would like to talk with you in my office at ten o'clock.—Savage," Hart's face showed no exultation. There was upon his features no trace of expectancy; nor was there eagerness. They remained like features of some statue hammered from metal, in whose shaping the sculptor had succeeded in showing superb, unchanging confidence.

The lobby was quiet this morning, as it had been for many weeks. The clerk who had handed Hart the message was unharassed by guests. Folding the yellow slip, and stuffing it in his pocket, Hart looked up and saw a traveler entering the wide front doors. It was Barker, who had led the mutiny against him in the meeting of the agency. Barker's face was not ruddy this morning; there was a gray pallor on the cheeks, and several heavy lines had sprung there. There was fear in his eyes.

He saluted Hart with a gesture which acknowledged unquestioning obedience. "I came down on business," he said. There was a catch in his voice; he passed on and left his grip at the counter.

A half hour later, as Hart was leaving the hotel for the offices of the Petroleum Association, Barker caught up with him. "Any news?" he asked.

"Nothing definite." Hart did not heed the anxiety in the question. He was thinking of his victory—just ahead. He was thinking of it as something beyond prevention.

Barker swallowed as if there was something dry in his throat. "I was hoping they might come to time." He shook his head. "I've got to see Jacoby," he explained. Then hesitated, and after a struggle remained silent. At the door of the First National Bank the two parted.

Hart went on down the street. He passed the line of idle men on the sidewalk's edge. Those men did not mutter behind him now. They glanced up at him as he went by, and there was a tribute of admiration in their eyes. Then they bowed their heads again, and sat with their hands between their knees, their backs bent.

An empty street; and it was lined by silent stores. The town was like a place stricken with some old-time plague.

But neither Barker nor the men, nor yet the condition of the town, affected Hart. He had no thought of anything but that victory. Savage must capitulate; and the terms would be—seventy-five-cent oil.

Thus, at the ending of some bloody battle, many a famous general has ridden over a field all strewn with dead and littered with the ruin done by artillery; looking neither to right nor left, but straight ahead, sublime in the unreasoning and splendid assurance which only the born fighter knows.

When he entered the offices of the Petroleum Association, Hart created a subdued stir among the clerks. A man sprang to his feet and hurried noiselessly to the door of the last office. Others looked up at the visitor, as men who have been expecting some one of note. Almost immediately the secretary of William Savage emerged from the last door, bowing to Hart.

"Mr. Savage says you are to come in," the secretary said.

On those two previous visits Hart had waited for some time. Yet he felt no personal gladness in this change. It was a part of the result.

Savage sat by the wide desk. He seemed to have shrunken a little. Hart noticed that. It came to him that every one seemed to be getting too small for his clothes. There was Doherty, and he remembered Barker this morning. The thought flitted through his mind, departing at once before the bigger thing than personality—the victory.

Savage spoke more quietly than usual, with less abruptness; and what gruffness there was in his voice seemed to have been forced. He motioned toward a chair.

"Sit down," he said, and arose, going to the wall closet at the end of the room. He was there a moment, with the whisky bottle and a little glass. He came back to his desk.

"Well," Savage sighed, "I'll do business with you."

Hart settled himself more comfortably in the soft leather chair. He made no reply; nor did he even nod.

"You got us the other night." Savage placed his elbow on the desk, and rested his chin in the palm of his hand, staring at Hart with lackluster eyes. "You got us," he repeated heavily.

Thus far Hart had done exactly as he had done on those two other visits. He continued on the same course. He accentuated his former lack of demonstration. He remained dumb now.

"What"—Savage thrust his square chin forward in the palm of his hand—"do you ask?"

"Seventy-five-cent oil; three-year contracts," Hart said slowly, and his voice was monotonous.

Savage made no reply. He rose and walked up and down the room. Twice he traversed the length of the office. Then he paused beside his chair.

"I can give you fifty cents and three-year contracts."

There was something in his manner and his tone that was unlike the old Savage. There was in his whole bearing an elusive suggestion which somehow brought to Hart the memory of George Long; a vision of Long on that morning when the corporation lawyer had offered the bribe. And why this was Hart could not understand. He was strangely moved by that resemblance; it held his attention for the moment.

Then the words came to him: "Fifty cents."

Hart started to rise. Savage sat

down heavily. "Keep your chair," he said. "I am telling you what I can do."

"Seventy-five-cent oil." The ultimatum sprang from Hart's lips as though it were a power beyond him. And he felt a stern thrill of exultation; a primitive male joy, like the joy a fighter feels when he sees his opponent, at the end of a long, grueling battle, staggering blindly before him, leaving the opening for a swift, final blow.

Then both these men sat in silence again. Hart was sitting straight in his chair, stiff-backed like a cavalryman, so that his lean body from the waist up was free from any support; his thin face was inflexible, showing neither anger nor mercy. His gray eyes were cold. Savage held his chin on his hand, his fingers were twitching slightly, his cheeks were marked by two dark purple patches under the feverish eyes. And in those eyes there was something haggard, almost pathetic. In this manner they faced each other.

Hart felt the faith, which had owned him, centering on himself. He had done it. He had won this war. He knew this other was a whipped man. He could wait; he felt he could wait for a year. He was going to gain that point for which he had started.

Savage spoke: "Sixty-two and a half cents; three-year contracts."

He dropped his hand from under his chin. He sat shaking, looking Hart in the eyes, staring at him. "I tell you God's truth. That is all I can do." His voice trailed off oddly in a mutter. "They won't stand for any more."

He uttered the last words as if he were talking to himself.

Hart rose. He intended to go now. As he was starting for the door he heard a sudden noise in the street. His chair was close to the open window. He glanced down at the sidewalk.

Two men were struggling there. One of them Hart recognized at once. He was Kernfield's chief of police. The other man was clad in blue denim working clothes; these clothes were stained with oil—one of the men from the fields; one of the idle ones. A crowd was gathering about these two. Many in the crowd were of the idlers who now lined the streets. They were shouting at the policeman; and Kernfield's chief, with the familiarity of the small-town officer, was calling some of them by name, asking their help.

The big denim-clad man was making a hard fight of it. As he struggled, Hart caught a glimpse of his face, upturned briefly. It was the face of a man brought before an appalling revelation, a catastrophe come into his own life.

"Gimme a hand, one of you—Bill, Jake! Come!" the guardian of the town's peace implored.

"Aw, let him go. He ain't done nothin'," a voice cried.

"Done! He robbed a freight car last night. Come now!"

Suddenly the denim-clad man seemed to wilt, as if before the enormity of those words.

"I'll go," he cried; "I'll go."

The crowd passed on, following officer and prisoner.

Hart stood watching this. He remained in the same position as the crowd went away. He had seen something illuminating. Now other things began rushing through his mind; things to which he had given no thought; things which had impressed themselves on his senses and registered themselves in his brain. Now they came forth again as memories——

Doherty at that meeting three nights before. Doherty, with flabby cheeks and shrunken frame—shrunken as Savage was now shrunken. Doherty standing by him, unquestioning. Doherty facing bankruptcy. Then Barker. And Barker had shrunk, too. His clothes did not fit him as they had before. His face had lost color. Barker, entering Kernfield's bank. Come—for one purpose, the purpose which was bringing other men to other banks—to borrow money. Barker had come clear from San Francisco to this town—his last resort. There were scores like those two—scores—aye, hundreds.

And the men who lined the side-walks; the rows of listless, idle men, waiting for the work to resume. The silent streets. The oil waiting out there in the sumps. An industry struck with paralysis.

Well, this was war. And war had its casualties.

These things raced through Hart's mind. The crowd had not gone more than twenty steps up the street in that time. Savage had not changed his position in the chair.

Hart turned from the window. He glanced at Savage.

Suddenly there came to him—like the solution of a difficult problem over which the brain has been subconsciously struggling—the reason for that elusive resemblance between Savage and George Long. It came with the recalling of a phrase, that last phrase which Savage had uttered—low-voiced as one who is talking to himself:

"They won't stand for it!"

Savage was a hired man. Like George Long, the oil master was now only a paid employee. He did just what others told him. For a bare fleeting instant a sort of ugly, grim triumph raced through Hart's being. Savage was no master. He would never be a master again. But——

"They won't stand for it!"

The phrase stuck. It had come with sincerity. It had been wrung from Savage's lips. And Hart saw.

The two dumb, insensate machines; the two monstrous and complex mechanisms created for the purpose of getting dividends.

"They!" Savage got his orders from them. Sixty-two and a half cents. And if this thing were to go farther—those machines might wait; wait for weeks. "They" did not care, for they could not feel. They could stand more than men could stand.

The casualties of war would continue. The dead and wounded. The list of failures, the filling jails.

Then Hart began thinking. He began reviewing the situation coolly.

Savage sat there before him. Savage was looking up at him no longer. He was staring straight ahead. A hired man. And the mechanism for which he worked was never done. That mechanism would never quit with the termination of this war. It would go on.

After all, there was more than seventy-five-cent oil. There still remained the liberation of an industry. There still remained the accomplishment of freeing the producers from this pipe-line trust. And, if those producers were to get this lesser figure now—sixty-two and a half cents—the biggest price the State had known for crude oil—if that came to-day the producers would be able swiftly to recuperate. They would grow strong again. They would make another fight before the expiration of those three-year contracts.

And if the war went on——

Why should it go on? He wanted seventy-five-cent oil. He had been irrevocable. He alone.

But there was that next fight. They had it to win before they accomplished anything—before they had anything but temporary safety.

Still he wanted that one thing. It hurt him—the idea of giving up one cent from that price. It hurt him to the bone. "Give up? Compromise?" he asked himself. It was like a blow. His pride revolted. His lips shut tight. He could not compromise. It was not in him. He had fought, and he had won. He had done it alone. And he had the right to fight on if he chose. Yet had he that right? Who was he? He was himself no more than what Savage was; no more than George Long. Those two fought under orders for the dividend machines. He fought—for the industry. And if he were commander, the responsibility was so much greater. The abnegation of self must be so much sterner.

He had been standing motionless for several minutes now. Savage turned his head slightly, and looked at him again.

"It's all I can do," he said, and his eyes proclaimed that he had spoken the truth.

And the first temptation that he had faced left Hart then. He walked over to his chair and sat down again.

"Fix up papers," he said quietly. "I'll do it."

While he waited for temporary agreements to come from the outer offices, Hart was no longer thinking of seventy-five-cent oil. He was thinking of an industry given a new impetus; of producers regaining lost strength; of money coming back to those men; until they would once more be in shape to fight another battle which would win them independence.

For some day within three years he saw how they must have a pipe line of their own.

When he and Savage had affixed their signatures to the agreement, Hart rose with this new purpose before him. He felt stronger than he had felt before. Something had gone which had come to him during the past three days—something like an arrogance—the feeling that he alone was master. That had departed.

But as he was walking toward the door, Savage called out to him. Hart turned. Savage was scowling again. His fist was clenched before him on the table. He spoke thickly.

"Listen!" he said. "You got me in the middle of the road, with a shotgun in your hand. You held me up. But you'll never get me that way again!"

Hart looked down on him sitting there, and he made no answer. He left the place, looking straight ahead, as one who plans.

Part IV.—The Battlefield of Industry.

CHAPTER I.

THE HOUSE THAT HART BUILT.

That night Hart went home. In Kernfield rejoicing men sought him, eager to give him homage. His name was on the lips of those who crowded the streets and the hotel lobbies. But none saw him in the town for weeks.

Out on the saffron plain, under a sky as clear and warm as though it were still summertime, he spent these days with Jean. They marked out the site for their house. They saw the lumber come, in the van of a long procession of heavy teams and traction engines. At the head of these clanking troops of Industry, the wagons creaked and rattled under burdens of heavy pine and redwood.

While the framework of the bungalow arose to the staccato drumming of hammers and the rasp of saws, these two turned their backs upon the teeming roadways. They remained oblivious of the roaring camp of tents and flimsy shanties which was spreading out a mile away. They paid no heed to the thump of sledges and the bang of timbers among the rising derricks all about. They watched the building of their home.

At last they went to Kernfield, and Jean picked her household goods. Hart stood beside her during the three days of shopping. He watched her as she inspected furniture, selected rugs for the living room, or hung irresolute in the choosing of fabric for window curtains. In these things he had small interest. But in her repressed eagerness, the subdued joy shining in her eyes, her never-tiring visualization of the things before her as they would look among the other possessions in her house—in these things he found pleasure beyond his fondest dreams. And when, in some moment of indecision, he was able to make her choose the more expensive article—a softer-shaded rug, a more luxurious armchair, or perhaps only a better grade of cooking utensils, of whose merits he was utterly ignorant, when he was able to point his finger at the thing of higher price, he got a taste of one genuine satisfaction which money brings. In the evenings, when they dined together, he saw her flushed with happiness, free from the grinding worry of constant petty economies. Her eyes glowed. She talked with a swift eagerness. She was seeing visions, and those visions made her bosom heave.

Thus these two spent their days. Hart dismissed from his mind the memory of his great fight. He put aside thoughts of the future and its struggles. He rested with his wife; while she, with a depth of joy which only a woman can know, looked ahead toward her own future and her home. She looked ahead, and he watched her with tenderness and deepening love.

One afternoon, when the house was built and all the furniture installed, when all the little things which make a home unlike any other four walls in the whole world, were in their places, Hart turned his eyes to the oil field again.

It was time for him to fight once more.

He went out with Lawson that afternoon. They traveled in an automobile, the property of the company. For now the company was prosperous. What stock had gone on the market—sold by the men who had taken it in pay for their toil—had brought a high figure. The shoe string on which they had started months ago had become in reality a steel cable. Within a few weeks their oil would be flowing through the Petroleum Association's pipes. They had won their way to the point where dividends lay just ahead.

Lawson drove the automobile. Already dust had begun to cover the gleaming varnish of the machine; the tires were showing wear.

The two men rode away from the new bungalow. About them lay the saffron plain, stretching to the range of bare hills. But that plain, wherein Hart and Lawson had made the first sign of any change by digging out a shovelful of earth, was all spattered for miles with the desecrations of Industry; huge lumber piles, half-finished derrick frames towering naked toward the clear blue sky, engines which smeared the landscape with their steam wreaths—and the town.

Midway lay, a mile ahead, a sprawling patch of yellow pine and canvas, resounding to the noise of carpentry, seething with an ever-moving crowd. It had sprung up in a week. With weird swiftness it had spread then until it housed a thousand men and women. Its stores and lunch counters proclaimed their high-sounding titles on loud-colored canvas signs. Its saloons and gambling places blared noise to the clear desert air, even at this hour of uncompromising afternoon sunshine. A crude, unlovely place, all littered with tin cans and refuse; a town of tents and shanties whose every inhabitant expected to become a millionaire; a town where none had time for comforts, lest they overlook a chance to make a fortune.

The auto sped down the dusty road. Lawson, at the steering wheel, was busy turning out for heavy traffic. Ten-mule jerk-line teams, clanking traction engines hauling strings of loaded wagons, automobile trucks laden high with casing and drilling tools; buckboards and carts; they streamed through the town's one street; they went on into the plain among the straggling derricks. They filled the air with loud sounds; the trampling of hoofs, the coughing of gasoline engines, the hiss and roar of steam, the sharp cries of the mule drivers mounted on the near wheelers, the grind of tires on gritty sand. Dust rose over that gray roadway in a stifling, acrid cloud.

As they threaded their way through the traffic toward the town Hart peered at these vehicles. At first he had a feeling of great pride. He had helped to bring this about. But the pride was succeeded by a thrill—the old, fighting exultation. He leaned over and spoke to Lawson.

"Petroleum Association!" He smiled grimly. "See that auto truck?" Lawson nodded. "Another coming there ahead." He pointed down the road. "They're going to start with ten strings of tools this week, I hear."

And Hart remembered the words of William Savage: "You held me up. But you'll never get me that way again." Savage was beginning his campaign.

Even as Hart realized, he saw farther down the road a truck larger than any which had yet come. It was painted bright red, the color of everything which the United owned. As that truck came on he saw the name of the great pipe-line trust painted on its side.

"They're both busy," he cried, "starting in to producing now. They're going to get ready for us when the contracts run out."

Lawson nodded at the steering wheel. "Been here for a week," he answered tersely.

Three years ahead. Three years of selling oil. Three years of getting money for the black gold which they brought forth from the earth. Three years. But during that same time these two corporations were going to fill their tanks. And then——

The producers would never have a chance like the last one.

Hart nodded as he saw the facts before him. He and his followers had had their day of grace. They must act now, or they would find themselves helpless for all time.

The auto was entering the town of Midway. Lawson jerked his head toward a cluster of frame buildings, off to one side from this main street. These one-storied structures bore gaudy signs. Their doors were wide open; from them came many noises; thumping pianos, scuffle of feet, voices upraised in mirth and dispute, women's shrill, unmusical shriekings.

"Whisky Row," said Lawson.

Hart was looking at the neighborhood of ill repute. He was frowning. Before the doors of those buildings were many men. Some of them were drillers, tool dressers, rig builders, and other workmen who had come to the new field. But there was another element. And this element made Hart frown.

They wore rough clothes, like the men who toiled. But those clothes showed no signs of work. The men themselves were of a more sinister breed. The auto was running slowly. Hart scrutinized the different groups. He saw the faces, all seamed by lines of unrepressed passions, scarred by drink and dissipation, the cold eyes emanating cruel ferocity.

"Who are those fellows, Ed?" he asked abruptly.

Lawson smiled. "Spreckles and Ryan were downtown last night. They told me about them. They're gunmen."

"Gunmen!" Hart exclaimed.

"Remember in the old Baker River days?" Lawson asked. "When the railroad and the Petroleum Association were fighting over claims? They had two or three battles trying to tear down assessment derricks. Well, these are the same bunch that the railroad hired. Lord knows who brought them here. Some of the big companies, I suppose."

"Humph!" Hart muttered. "Drive out to our derrick on twenty-five, Ed."

Lawson nodded. He shifted the gear, and the auto increased its speed. They left the road, and traveled across the plain. The derrick on section twenty-five had been erected for assessment purposes—to hold its quarter section of land for one year. It stood a mile from the road, and there were no others near.

When they arrived at the naked tower, which stood here with neither shed nor derrick house, Hart climbed from the machine. He walked about the place, and when he came back his face was grave.

"Been two autos out here," he said tersely.

Lawson stared at the tracks. He frowned. "Do you suppose," he said slowly, "any one would try and jump it?"

"I only know that Savage would like to hurt us, and it's a good claim," Hart replied quietly.

"We ought to see about leasing it to some one right off. If we don't do that, or start drilling ourselves, we may find this derrick pulled off the place some fine morning." He fell silent for a while, and at length—— "I don't like the looks of things," he said. "There's land enough around here. Why is any one getting ready for claim jumping so quick?"

"Ryan said he heard the American had gotten several strings of tools ready to start in this field, and that the Petroleum Association was going to try and crowd them out," said Lawson.

Hart nodded. "Sounds likely, too. But, anyhow, we want to look out for our property, and Savage is sore." They sped across the plain to the number-one well. The gusher had been cleaned out after its subsidence. Now the walking beam was heaving slowly up and down, whining to the strain of the pump. A thick black stream was running from the lead pipe.

"Two hundred and fifty barrels a day," Lawson smiled, and pointed to a new derrick near by. "We'll have number two down in a few weeks."

"Lots of oil." Hart looked down the plain toward the town. Far away a cloud of dust marked a toiling gang of "pipe-liners" who were bringing in the Association's ten-inch main. That dust cloud was coming nearer every day. Soon his oil would be going to tidewater. Then more oil would come. The field would be producing heavily before the winter was over. Where would that oil go?

For the next year the field was safe. The Petroleum Association needed every barrel that it could buy. But at the end of that time, when the tanks began to fill, what then? How long would the enemy buy beyond its existing contracts?

Near by the great oil pool in the arroyo—the gusher's yield—lay glistening black in the afternoon sun. Half a million barrels, waiting for the pipes to carry it to seaboard. And only fifty thousand barrels were sold.

"Well," Hart sighed, "demand's increasing. Two new steamship lines installed oil burners last week. They say the navy will use them soon. And the United is going to put in a topping plant. The use of distillates is growing fast." He paused and frowned. "But there's lots of fighting ahead before we sell this sump full, just the same."

When the auto had borne them back to the bungalow, Hart caught a glimpse of brown on the wide veranda. He recognized Virginia Henry's riding habit. Lawson was looking in that direction. There was an eagerness in Lawson's eyes. Hart smiled.

"Better come over to dinner, Ed," he said.

Lawson accepted the invitation with alacrity which he did not attempt to hide.

CHAPTER II.

THE FIGHT RESUMED.

When Hart came into the living room—with that natural-wood finish which Jean had planned during his days of perplexity—he found his wife giving directions to the Chinese servant. That servant was their first extravagance, the first luxury of any consequence which they had allowed themselves with their new circumstances. Jean had protested against him, but now she was making the most of his presence. Hart waited until she had dismissed the impassive Oriental.

"Lawson's coming over to dinner," he said, smiling with the knowledge of the discovery which he made on seeing Lawson's eager glance toward that brown riding habit. He was anxious to impart that discovery to her; he was proud of his keenness. To his surprise she bestowed upon him a smile which was full of complete understanding, which also showed tolerance for himself.

"I'm glad," she said lightly, "that you were good enough to invite him, without my sending you over to the bunk house myself."

"Why, of course," he replied, "I'd have asked him before——"

"I'm sure that he has wanted to come more than once. Virginia has been here several times."

"Hang it!" he exclaimed. "Why didn't you tell me? I never thought. Do you think they care for each other? It just occurred to me."

"Of course they care for each other." She laughed. "Frank, I should think you couldn't help seeing long ago."

He shook his head. He was out of his element.

A few minutes later, when Lawson's footfall sounded on the veranda, Hart started toward the door.

"Frank!" Jean called from the kitchen, where she had gone to attend to some final details concerning the meal. Her voice was sharper than usual. He turned quickly, and faced her, anxious to see what was wrong. She beckoned him back. "Why don't you sit down and read the paper?" she demanded, in a tense, low voice. He stared at her dully. "I should think——" she began.

"Oh!" he nodded, smiling broadly. "Sure! I just wanted to ask him about that assessment derrick—something that I forgot this afternoon."

"Let that go. He came for dinner—not for business. And—don't you see they're talking out there?"

"Of course!" He caught her in his arms suddenly and kissed her. "Jean, I'll read the paper from end to end."

He sat down in the deep-cushioned chair which he had persuaded her to buy in Kernfield, and read the paper. He wondered why he had never noticed Lawson's feeling for Virginia Henry before.

When dinner was announced Lawson and Virginia came into the house. The two men looked at each other with a little self-consciousness. The two women looked at each other with no trace of any such embarrassment; yet their eyes held the more complete understanding.

The Chinese boy served them in efficient silence. Those little details on which success of entertainment depends went through with absolute smoothness. At her end of the table Jean was watching these little details from the tail of her eye, keeping track of every one of them, while she was talking busily. She was very proud of her household and of her household gods. At his end of the table Hart watched his wife. He saw that pride. And he found new joy in seeing it. And Lawson and Virginia Henry, sitting one on either side of the table, stole occasional glances at each other, during the talk. Lawson's eyes showed a repressed longing; a lonely hoping, which he could not hide. Sometimes, when neither of the others was looking, Virginia allowed her eyes to answer his—and then a promise flashed across the board.

After dinner, when they had sat together in the living room for some time, Jean found an excuse which took her to the kitchen. And Hart, seeing himself with these two lovers, felt a sense of vague embarrassment, a feeling as if he and Lawson were estranged. He left them on some small pretext. They accepted that pretext without any demur. When he came back into the room again they had gone to the veranda.

The night was cool; Hart lighted the little natural-gas heater. He was sitting before the flickering blaze, his legs outstretched, when Jean came from the kitchen. She seated herself on the arm of his chair. He held her close to him with one arm. They were silent for a long time, enjoying their great happiness.

Out on the veranda there sounded now and then a low voice.

Jean leaned closer to her husband; she brushed his forehead with her soft cheek. Hart drew her head down and kissed her gently on the lips.

A swift, heavy footfall sounded on the veranda. A knock resounded on the door. There was in that knock—repeated three times—an urgency which was undeniable. It was a summons, unmistakable—an alarm.

Hart stiffened in his chair. Jean was on her feet now beside him, and he arose. "Come in!" he cried sharply.

Spreckles entered the room. His eyes were wide. His face was white. He was breathing heavily, as if he had been running hard.

Hart started toward him. "What is it, Spreckles?" he asked quietly.

Jean stood beside the chair. Her cheeks had grown paler; her eyes had widened. There was something in the attitude of the tool dresser which brought dread to her, dread of what she did not know.

Spreckles wore his best clothes, a new suit which he had bought on the day when he had sold a portion of his stock. He wore a tie of red and green.

And he held a spotless white felt hat in his hand. Thus adorned, he had gone that afternoon to the new town of Midway, on pleasure bent.

"I wanted to see you, Mr. Hart." His voice was tense. Then, as if the news were too much for him, and must out at once——

"They're goin' to pull that assessment derrick off of the claim on Twenty-five!" he cried.

Out on the veranda came the sound of Lawson's quick, firm tread. Lawson entered, with Virginia behind him. Spreckles saw him, and his face lighted as with relief.

"What is it? How did you hear?" Both men asked their questions at the same time.

"I was down"—Spreckles hesitated a moment, and cast an appealing look at Jean and Virginia, who were now standing together, then went on desperately—"down on Whisky Row. I happened along there, you know. I didn't——" He cast aside all excuses with a sort of desperation. "Takin' a drink," he went on, with his eyes on the floor; "and I happened to hear some of that bunch of gunmen down there. They was talkin' together, and they didn't notice me. They was pretty drunk, anyhow. And I listened while they was tellin' what they was goin' to do. Then one of them says it was the derrick on Twenty-five they must get to-night. And after that they'd look out for the other things. And they was a-braggin' of how they'd go at midnight and have it off inside of an hour. An auto truck was to pull it away. There's rig builders comin' to put another up and start work.

"I waited a long time to hear as much as I could," he explained breathlessly, "or I'd of gotten out here before. But when I heard it was the claim on Twenty-five they was goin' to jump, I run."

Hart pulled out his watch. "Half past nine," he said quietly. Then: "That's Savage."

"Two hours and a half," Lawson muttered, and turned to the tool dresser. "Spreckles, get down to the bunk house, and then to the number-two well. Tell the men to drop work and wait for us."

Spreckles nodded. He hurried away without another word.

"Why——" Lawson began.

Hart raised his hand. "Savage is going to get every claim he can. He's going to load up with oil. That's sure. But this to-night is just a case of playing even with me—personally. It's a good claim—worth half a million six months from now. We got to get busy, Ed."

Jean and Virginia Henry drew closer together. Neither woman spoke. Both watched the men with dilated eyes; their bosoms heaved.

Hart spoke quietly: "Any guns on the place?"

"Frye has a single-shot Sharp's. I own an automatic. I think Ryan has one, too."

Hart nodded. "I tell you, Ed, you make that machine burn up the road to Sunset. You can get rifles there, and help. Be back in an hour, or an hour and a half. I'll take the men out to the derrick. Chances are that when you come, the others won't be moving yet. We'll hold her down all right."

He spoke easily. His face was calm.

Lawson nodded, and started for the door. Virginia Henry made an impulsive movement toward him. Hart turned his back on these two, and he reached out his arms for Jean. "Don't you worry, dear heart," he said. "We won't have any trouble at all, the chances are. And if we do——"

She kissed him in silence. She pressed him close to her with a sort of savage strength. Then she held him for some moments.

"You'll have to stay there all night," she said in a low voice.

He nodded. She sighed heavily. "I can wait," she said patiently.

But when he was starting away she sped after him, and caught him in her arms again. "You—you—be very careful, Frank! I can't let you go to any harm now."

When he reached the roadway in front of the house Lawson was cranking the machine. "All right, Frank!" Lawson's voice was exultant, as if he were in this moment tasting some joy which made danger a little thing. The auto roared. It shot away. Hart heard it humming fainter down the road. He recalled a glimpse of Virginia Henry's face, as he had gotten it on leaving the house—the girl was white as paper; her lips all drawn with emotion.

In the bunk house he found the men where Spreckles had gathered them—Ryan, Johnson, old Frye, the grizzled cook, Brown, the teamster, and Spreckles himself. They took brief stock of arms and munitions. There was Frye's old single-shot rifle, with ten cartridges; there was an old single-action forty-five; there were two automatic pistols.

Briefly Hart told them what lay ahead. They made no answer, but their faces were grim. He remembered the day when he had sought to pay them their wages in cash, and their demeanor at that time. He knew the sense of ownership which dominated them now, which brought that grimness to their eyes and lips; they were going forth with him to defend their property.

As they were walking across the flat in the darkness, wherein now loomed a derrick frame and again a heap of materials, vague objects blacker than the surrounding night, Hart thought of the two women waiting back there in the lighted bungalow, straining their ears for the sound of shots. He muttered an oath.

"What is it?" asked Frye, the old cook.

"Nothing," Hart replied in a low voice. "I was just thinking this is no place for women to live."

"Always is that way," Frye answered steadily, "when a field is new. But it don't last long. Not after the good women get thicker. Then it quiets down—every time."

"I guess that's so," Hart said reflectively.

"Sure it's so." Frye chuckled. "All this rough stuff stops when the families come. Seems like big companies and all get more peaceable. And then we get schools and libraries and theayters and preachers, and we're civilized. You wait a year. I've seen oil fields before."

Hart pondered over the cook's statement, based on the history of other fields. After all, the men fought in their own way—and the women struggled in theirs. And both battled for the one ultimate end—the civilization of a wilderness. Perhaps the women had the harder fight. There was the matter of children. He realized that he was letting other things intrude where he should be planning details of this night's business. He brought his mind back to the affair in hand.

By the time they had reached the assessment derrick on Twenty-five he had the battle arranged. In the night the derrick loomed, ghastly pale yellow, streaking up until darkness swallowed it. The place was silent.

The derrick was but an open framework of timbers, to hold the claim according to the law. According to the law it would hold that land—unless some other party removed it and began actual work. There really was but one manner of attaining ownership—that was the pumping of oil. Until oil came, no man had title other than possession.

So now, as he disposed of the men about the place with shovels digging a four-sided rifle pit, Hart thought swiftly. On the morrow they must set to work here. The land was too valuable to jeopardize at this period, when the big companies were lusting for more oil. By its possession in itself the company's stock was worth one-tenth as much again.

For a long time the scraping of shovels on dry earth was the only sound. At intervals Hart halted the work; and all of them stood listening. Then, hearing no sign, they began again. Thus they dug a trench all about the base of the derrick—a trench nearly three feet in depth, whose upthrown earth on the outer side increased the shelter by three feet more. Shortly after the work was done Hart caught a faint humming from afar. The humming grew deeper and more vibrant; it increased into a roar. Two streaks of pale light crept toward them on the plain.

"Lawson!" Hart exclaimed.

Lawson stopped the auto at the very edge of the earthen breastworks. He clambered forth, both arms laden with rifles.

"Eight of them," he said, "and cartridges to burn. I looted the town of guns. And there'll be another party out inside of two hours." He chuckled. "When I came through Midway, I ran slow. And I think I saw your bunch, Spreckles—a dozen of them, all drunk, and howling like wolves."

"That's them, all right," said Spreckles, from the depths of the trench.

"May as well keep quiet now and wait for them," said Hart.

There followed an hour of silence. Into the thick night vague sounds came from afar—sounds of the distant town; and other noises, weird, indefinable, the stirring of the breezes, the heavy, murmurous breathing of the sleeping earth. They waited, straining their eyes, keeping their ears attuned.

At last there came a heavy, throbbing mutter, which grew into a pounding roar. "Auto truck," Lawson whispered into Hart's ear.

The roar grew louder; nearer. But there was no path of radiance. The claim jumpers were coming without lights. It throbbed on across the flat. They could hear the various noises of the engine and the snarl of voices.

"Full to the neck of whisky, every one of them," Ryan muttered. The big driller had not said a word thus far. He was lying in the trench, a rifle across his arms.

"Nobody shoot unless I say the word." Hart spoke in a low voice. "But if we do have to shoot, take care to aim." He rose and stood behind them, peering through the night.

A hundred yards away the auto truck came to a stop. Several men were talking at once.

"Stop that noise," a voice growled. "You'll wake up the whole field."

There was a mutter of oaths. Then the stirrings of men's bodies and the thud of feet upon the earth. They were leaping from the truck.

Hart leaned forward, holding his rifle in both hands.

Abruptly he straightened.

"Stop where you are!" he shouted.

Silence followed. They had halted in their tracks. Then came the shuffle of feet. "Stand fast. What's the matter wit' yo'?" The speaker uttered a string of oaths. Evidently they had not expected opposition.

Hart seized this instant of uncertainty on their part. "If one of you comes ten feet farther, we'll shoot," he cried. "Keep off this claim!"

Silence again. The darkness gave no sign. Then once more he heard the sound of moving feet. It was a shuffle no longer; irresolution had gone; this movement was more stealthy, more purposeful. Some one was stealing toward them. Hart stooped to peer forward the better. And even as he bent down, there came a streak of orange flame in the night; something snarled above his lowered head; a venomous crack resounded less than one hundred yards away.

"Get down, Frank!" It was Lawson's voice. "Get down, I tell you!"

Hart ignored the caution. He stood, peering forward. His ear caught the movement of several of the attacking party creeping nearer. He dropped on his knees. "Shoot low when I tell you. They're crawling."

Out of the darkness came another streak of fire. Then almost at the same instant a third.

"All right, boys. Give it to them!" Hart crouched and fired as he delivered the command. About him sounded a scattering of reports. The air was aflame.

"Hold hard!" he called. The shooting stopped.

A yell of agony resounded from the darkness ahead. It was succeeded by a deep groan.

Then a voice shouted oaths. Feet were pounding on the earth. The great auto truck started its throbbing roar.

"Holy smoke! They're running!" Spreckles leaped to his feet. He was on the top of the earthen embankment, his rifle in his hand. Lawson stood up and dragged him down again.

At that instant another spurt of flame leaped into the night. Standing behind the trench Hart heard a muffled groan. He thought it was Lawson's voice.

Before them more than two hundred feet away now some one was heaping imprecations on his fellows. The loud groaning began again, from the attacking party.

"Once more, but in the air this time," Hart said, in a low voice.

The volley followed hard on his words.

The enemy was in full flight. The auto truck roared away. The sound of upraised voices went with it.

Hart bent down. "Who was hit?" he asked.

Ryan answered him: "Lawson. He's fainted, I think."

Some one lighted a match. Lawson was lying in the trench. His face was ghastly in the wavering light. Blood was spreading on his shirt.

The roar of another automobile resounded in the night, and two streaks of honest light swept across the plain. The reënforcements which Lawson had arranged for sped up to the place. A dozen men from Sunset, owners of small wells who had stood behind the agency in the last fight.

They had passed the truck on its way back to Midway. There was no danger of the enemy's return. Hart heard these things as he was bending over Lawson, ripping away the flannel shirt with his pocketknife. A welter of blood lay over the bare breast. Lawson was breathing heavily.

"Help me pack him into that machine of yours," he cried.

Four of them carried Lawson's limp form to the auto, and laid it on the rear seat. Hart climbed in. "Get him back to my house," he ordered. "Some one take the other machine to Sunset for a doctor. The rest of you hold down this place till I get men out to relieve you. Now, let her go with all she's got!"

He had hardly finished before the auto swept away; and he was holding Lawson in his arms, trying to shield him from the jolts due to the rough ground.

They carried the senseless body up the front steps of the bungalow. Jean and Virginia Henry met them at the door. Neither woman said a word. Their faces were white; their eyes wide. But they moved at once to arrange a couch, and they began their ministrations to the wounded man as if they had been waiting there, expecting just this thing.

And Hart saw how Virginia Henry's face seemed to have grown years older during these few hours.

CHAPTER III.

THE BIGGEST GUSHER IN HISTORY.

The doctor came from Sunset within the hour. There followed one of these ordeals, when ordinary mortals stand by watching tensely, or do with utter obedience small, menial services; and one man, with businesslike assurance, explored with instruments of shining steel the human body's mysteries, allowing his cheerful demeanor to betray no sign of hope or fear.

When that ordeal was over, the surgeon announced that the bullet had broken Lawson's collar bone, and had lodged in one of the muscles of the back. Loss of blood had caused a swoon, and the hemorrhage had been external. Unless there was poisoning he would recover.

During the days and nights which succeeded, Virginia Henry remained at the bungalow. The mending of the splintered bone and torn muscles went on under her ministrations and Jean's.

Hart, with his hands full now outside, came home at all sorts of hours. He became accustomed to the sight of Lawson being served by Virginia, soothed by her, or—as was frequently the case—taking her orders as to the smallest detail of his existence.

And even Hart, wrapped up in the work, and absent-minded under the multitude of matters demanding his attention, saw the result of these things; the inevitable consequence. He fell into the habit of proclaiming his presence, when Lawson was able to sit up and to walk about; and he wondered with Jean how soon these two lovers would marry.

So, one day, when Lawson was again able to supervise the work, although he was still somewhat wan and rather weak, Hart got the news from his wife. Lawson was going to build a bungalow near to theirs. The lumber was coming out within the week. The wedding would take place when it was done.

All of these things came about as they had been decided. And one evening, when Lawson and Virginia had come back from Kernfield into their home, Hart and Jean returned from the housewarming. There had been more than a dozen guests. Of these several were superintendents of adjacent properties—and their wives. For the field was growing rapidly. There had been music, thanks to modern phonograph invention; there were flowers, thanks to the new railroad now into Midway. And altogether the affair had been one to make its participants proud that they were getting the softer things of civilization. Now, returning to their own home, Hart and Jean remembered the days—so recent, and yet so different in circumstances—when they two had come out here from their wedding; when they had come out to a black-oil fountain thundering in a saffron wilderness.

Yes. Things had changed. And, looking into each other's eyes, they felt that they had changed, too. They had gained sureness. Calm had come to them after struggles. They saw life ahead of them, and they knew something of the road now.

They sat up until a late hour in their home; in front of the little natural-gas heater in the living room with its household gods, whose number was increasing. They tasted the happiness of that companionship on which love is based—the companionship which comes from standing back to back during the lean days of stress.

Yet there was fighting ahead. There was no placidity in this life. They had not attained that.

On the morrow Hart was going to Kernfield to see Jacoby again. He had on his mind that same old problem. A battle lay ahead, another struggle whose issue meant the life or death of the producers.

The passing months were bringing nearer the day when the contracts with the Petroleum Association would expire. And what then?

Out there in the field—a huge derrick forest now extending for miles along the saffron plain, reaching up along the sides of the tall hills—the two mighty dividend machines were fighting by day and by night; fighting for oil lands. They were making war like the pillaging hosts of medieval days; war whose object was wealth. They were battling to get the black gold.

Since the night of that raid on the assessment derrick, the gunmen had not bothered Hart's property. The raid had been—as he had thought it—a bit of revenge on the part of Savage. The scheme itself which had brought these hired thugs to Midway, had developed later on. It showed when the American entered the field, just as Ryan had told Lawson the case would be.

The American owned many wells in other portions of the State; it was a producing corporation; its pipe lines and tank ships were but means to market its own oil. It sold direct to consumers at seaboard, and knew no middleman nor common carrier. It entered the new field a few days after the affray in which Lawson had been wounded. Its blue auto trucks, wide-tired wagons, bunk houses, and tool sheds came one after the other. But the movement was accompanied by grim war.

The crowd of gunmen in the town of Midway became a potent factor in the war. One night they seized three assessment derricks, which had been set up by the American's men; they pulled these light derricks off from the land with teams and auto trucks. And on the next morning the Petroleum Association was installing in places where those assessment derricks had been other derricks, equipped with engines and strings of tools. After that the employees of the American went to work with rifles and shotguns. There followed night battles, and sentries were placed on guard. Men passing these disputed places were halted at the point of guns.

But this physical warfare soon began to wane. Its diminution came from the cause which Frye, the grizzled cook, had prophesied. The women stopped it. The wives of superintendents—some of those superintendents in the employ of the Association itself—were bringing their families with them. The town of Midway, which had grown to a sprawling eyesore in the midst of the derrick forest; whose saloons and gambling places were bringing nightly brawls; whose array of swaggering gunmen was becoming a constant offense—the town, with all these rough elements, and with its spring epidemic of typhoid, the result of utter lack of sanitation, was cleaned up. That cleaning up came with incorporation, election of peace officers, and installation of schools.

The saloons became less in evidence. The brawling ceased. Some of the gunmen went to the county jail in Kernfield. Then the physical fighting stopped.

But the Petroleum Association still continued the war. There was something strangely vicious in the manner it kept on fighting against this new rival. The United, on the other hand, was going straight ahead, ignoring all these things, acquiring lands and drilling wells. But Savage's corporation had become a snarling jackal in its methods. Often the Petroleum Association attacked the titles of small producers; but in most cases it fought the American, trying to oust it from the field.

It was as if Savage feared this producing company; as if he were bent on driving it away. And Hart, watching the long warfare, wondered at the reason back of it. One thing, however, he knew. Savage was using all his strength toward an ultimate object. Savage wanted to get oil.

Demand was still continuing to grow. At seaboard industry clamored louder than ever for fuel oil. But there was, in the greed of the Association, something greater than a desire to keep pace with demand. Hart realized that Savage was looking ahead to the day when those contracts would expire. When that day came Savage wanted to be in a position to hold out against any organized demand for a fair price.

That was the big reason back of all this fighting. What particular fear Savage had of the American Hart did not understand. But, as he looked over the field during these days, and saw the new derricks rising on every side, many of them belonging to the Association, many to the United; as he saw well after well coming in with its new yield of black oil; as he saw the new sumps filling one after the other, he felt that the industry needed one thing.

There must come an outlet for that oil; an outlet independent of the United and the railroad. If these common carriers were striving to produce, it was time for the producers to get a carrier of their own.

This project of a new line was heavy on Hart's mind. He was thinking seriously of going to New York to raise money himself for that purpose. In spite of the power of the United, that should be feasible. To-morrow he was going to talk the matter over with Jacoby.

But the next day, when he went to Kernfield, Jacoby listened to the idea of an Eastern trip with evident disfavor. He tapped the desk with his pencil, as was his habit when he was thinking over a question. Then he looked up and shook his head.

"Can't you wait a while?" he asked.

Hart frowned. "Time's passing," he replied, "and I want to get a pipe line before the contracts run out. If I don't, we're up against it worse than we were before. The Association has two gushers now. They've four other wells on the beam, pumping heavily every day. And the United is getting nearly as much. Besides, look at the crowd of new men who've come in. This one field has tripled the production of the State."

He said nothing of his own surplus—four hundred and fifty thousand barrels still in storage. Nor did he speak of his number-two well and the well on Twenty-five, producing nearly a thousand barrels a day between them.

"Well"—Jacoby smiled peculiarly—"wait a month. You can't do anything back East. Within a month from now I'll have news for you, perhaps."

There was something in Jacoby's manner which savored of mystery. Hart remembered a similar enigmatic expression on the afternoon when Jacoby had told him how Savage had sold out, and had lent him the money to store the oil. But he did not press the matter farther. He went back to the field. He had faith in Jacoby.

Ten days later the American brought in a gusher. It was the largest fountain of oil in the history of the industry—larger than anything in the Russian fields. It was the marvel of the producing world. That black column tore away half of the derrick; it scooped out a deep crater in the earth; thundered skyward day after day—thick, solid, one hundred and fifty feet in height. It stained the plain for a mile about; its spray floated five miles on the wind; its roar resounded for seven miles. Its output nearly doubled the yield in this portion of the State.

Hart rode over with Lawson to see the black fountain. When the two were riding away, Hart leaned from the saddle, shouting to make Lawson hear.

"Thank God neither the Petroleum Association nor the United owns that well!" he cried.

Lawson smiled broadly. "Good thing for the market that they don't."

Nevertheless, Hart worried deeply. Production was growing too fast. There was no new outlet for the flood of oil. Industry might yell from seaboard, but so long as the United and the Association owned the pipe lines, those two dividend machines stood between the wells and seaboard like two dams.

"I'll go to New York next week," Hart told Jean that night.

But the next morning Jacoby telephoned from Kernfield.

"Come and see me this afternoon about that pipe-line proposition," was all that Jacoby said. Hart hurried from the telephone to commandeer the auto.

That afternoon he found Jacoby in his office with Lewis, the president of the American. The old man with the chin beard of a past generation was cordial when Jacoby introduced them. But back of his cordiality was a sort of caution, as if he were saying: "You're a fine fellow, but I hold a string on everything I say."

Jacoby looked from one of them to the other. "Now," he said, in his emotionless business manner, "Frank, I called you here to talk pipe line with Mr. Lewis." He nodded to Lewis, who remained silent for some moments, then began, with a cold caution:

"The American is always ready to handle its own oil. We are slow people." He nodded his gray head. "Conservative, perhaps. We own our pipe lines and our fleet. We have a good market. I carried out that plan—because I knew it was the only safe way. But now"—he looked at Jacoby sharply, as if for reassurance regarding Hart, then nodded briskly—"we are thinking of going farther. We have our oil in the new field to take care of. We must get it to seaboard. We will build a line across the hills to Monterey Bay. It has occurred to me that we might increase the size of that line, and handle the oil for the Agency when your contracts expire."

He paused, and waited for Hart to reply.

Hart sat silent. He was thinking of a situation which was wider than the one field. At length——

"If we were to sell to you——" he began.

Lewis interrupted: "Not sell. I don't plan that. A commission basis is best."

Hart nodded. "It is fairer," he

agreed; "but if we were to give you our oil on any basis from one field, it would hinder our marketing it with other people elsewhere. How about the other fields?"

Lewis bowed his head. "That is sensible. I would make no agreement for one field without looking after the others. We're producing in all of them now. We are ready to build three new lines—if we can get other oil besides our own to carry."

Then Hart saw the object back of this. He had been trying to discover it. For he knew the American was no eleemosynary institution. He thought again.

"A commission basis, you said?" He put the question sharply.

"Give us your entire output—all the members of the Agency. We will carry it to seaboard, and we will take it on our ships. We will sell it to consumers—charging ten per cent. There's a bare profit, but it makes our pipe lines safe investments, independent of our own oil."

Hart answered slowly: "That brings us to depend on the market direct—and on your ability to sell."

Lewis smiled as if he were beginning to like this younger man. "Just so," he said. "As to the market, you can judge yourself. When it comes to our ability to sell—I will sign a contract which will give your Agency the same show that our own oil has—doing no favors to either party. We will—in case of such a deal—of course put on new tank ships."

Hart had made up his mind now. "I'll call a meeting of the Agency," he said.

They sat there for an hour or more, going over details. And then Lewis left Hart and Jacoby together.

"Come out with me to dinner, Frank," Jacoby said when the old millionaire had gone, and then: "You can depend on him. He's square. Shrewd but fair. As much as you can depend on any man." He sighed.

As they were leaving the bank together, Hart recalled that afternoon when Jacoby lent him the money to store his oil. "You knew, then, that the American was looking to the new field," he asserted.

Jacoby nodded. "Yes," he said. "I was bound to confidence then."

"You were sure of the situation, I remember," Hart went on. "Did Lewis meditate the pipe lines then?"

Jacoby smiled. "I don't know that I'm at liberty to answer that question even now," he replied. But Hart knew the guess had been correct.

As they got into the banker's carriage Hart thought over that afternoon and the days which had followed it. Lewis had been ready for those pipe lines. He had seen an opportunity—for his own company. He was undoubtedly fair. Jacoby knew him and vouched for him. He would deal honestly. He would market their oil on commission. And he would fulfill his contracts.

But he had been willing to sit and wait while these small men—these panic-stricken producers facing ruin—fought out their salvation. He had let them bear the brunt of a war which he could have waged himself—had he been moved by feeling for others.

Yes, they had made the situation for him. At cost of suffering; at cost of broken fortunes; at cost of men driven to poverty; of toilers gone to the jails; of pitiful failures in scores of lives. At such cost they had accomplished.

And now Lewis was ready to help them—because it helped himself. After all, Lewis was consistent. He had risked no more than he had to. That was business.

Jacoby turned to look sharply at him. "What are you thinking of, Frank?" he asked.

Hart smiled, and the smile was laden with sadness. "I'll have to figure carefully on the wording of that contract with Lewis," he said. "Jacoby, it's all cold-blooded, this game—all cold-blooded fighting."

"Certainly," Jacoby answered calmly. "Sometimes I hate business. But it's like life. Life is all fighting—all of it. Only, Frank"—he laid his hand on Hart's knee—"you got to fight fairly.

That's the one difference. Every one fights to get and then to hold. But some use decent methods, and others don't."

The carriage was rolling along Kernfield's main street. The stream of Industry's troops had ceased for the day. Down the street an auto was coming swiftly toward them. As Jacoby stopped speaking both of them glanced toward the machine. It passed them.

William Savage was in the rear seat. He was leaning back heavily. His face was empurpled from much drinking.

"There," said Jacoby, "goes one who thought only of winning the battle, and forgot fairness."

CHAPTER IV.

LOYAL HEARTS AND TRUE.

Hart was standing on the broad veranda of his bungalow. Evening was coming on. Far-off lights began twinkling, although all the landscape showed, softened under the sunset's glow. It was the hour when distant sounds float high on the air, reaching the ear like strains of music, when objects stand out against the sky line in silhouette, beautified and lonely.

Hart raised his head and looked over the derrick forest.

Mile after mile it stretched—gaunt, naked towers, all black with oil, absolutely still, somber under the heavens whereon evanescent lights were sweeping in swift mystery. The lofty derricks hid the saffron plain; they mantled the sides of the first hills; a man-made forest, of thick timbers and heavy steel. Unlovely, crude, yet in their strength owning a certain grandeur, these tapering frameworks emanated a suggestion of huge defiance to all the elements, in keeping with their task of battering deep wounds into the earth, whose black gold they would drag forth for Industry.

Here and there among the derricks Hart saw the full sumps. The oil pools glinted black in the waning light. The thick, ebon streams flowed smoothly from the lead pipes. He saw the mighty walking beams heaving upward, sweeping down again. He heard the low whine of the pumps, lifting from the earth's remote depths the black gold, the power of long-gone ages, the strength engendered in the world's crude youth.

Through the wide-open doors of a power house half a mile away he saw the flare of red furnace maws. Natural-gas torches splotched the depths of the derrick forest with orange flames. A cloud of steam billowed toward the sky, and took on ruddy colorings from the receding sunset.

Across the flat, nearly two miles from the bungalow, a gusher was thundering upward to its flattened pall. Its roar came subdued; its crown was like a cloud of wind-driven smoke.

All the air was laden with the keen, primitive odor of the oil, the black gold, warm from the earth's treasure house.

Gazing over the expanse, thick-covered with the derricks, pointed with hundreds of gleaming lights, splotched with orange flames, Hart remembered the morning when he and Lawson had scooped the first shovelfuls of earth from the plain's monotony. That morning seemed long, long away.

All these changes had come; an industry had covered the plain and the hills. He had fought to bring that industry.

A mile away the lights of Midway began appearing in rows. Some twinkled from cottages; some from business places. The town had two schoolhouses; there was a public library, a theater, a bank, churches, and homes. Yet only the other day that mile square had been a portion of the saffron plain, whose withered grass stirred in the moving air.

He had fought to bring that town.

His eye traveled across the derrick tops on and on until he saw the first slopes of the climbing hills, empurpled now by evening's haze. Upon those slopes, ascending in a straight, uncompromising line, up and on up, he beheld a long, pallid scar. There the new pipe line crawled to the uttermost summit to dip again beyond in its long, seaward swoop.'

He had made that pipe line possible. He remembered the days when he had fought the long war through; the days when he had stood alone; when men had assailed him; when he had endured the assaults of the mighty dividend machines. He remembered the loyalty of Doherty, the terror of his followers facing ruin. He remembered George Long. Long had tried to bribe him—a man of fineness; but he had hired out his conscience with his brains. He thought of Savage——

Those memories passed before the knowledge of victory.

The pipe line was taking his oil to seaboard. The gusher's enormous yield—the wealth in whose hope he and the others had dared fortune—was going to Industry.

That pipe line would carry the yield of other wells and yet others. And there would be more lines serving distant fields. The war was over; the producers had won free paths to seaboard.

It had been a grim struggle. It had made him harder, graver, more firm. It was a part of life, for life was all fighting, a series of battles. He liked that. He was growing stronger with those battles. He looked again at the derrick forest, at the distant town, at the pipe line. With their growth he had developed. He was mightier than he had been on that morning when he had determined to leave the old rut.

And now there lay ahead of him more fighting. Wealth had come, and power had come; he handled the affairs of other men; he had battled for an Industry. Soon he would leave the field. He would go to the city, and he would undertake new and larger things. He promised himself that he would continue to fight fairly.

That was it—to fight fairly for his own and for others. So long as he did that he was right.

His mind went back again to those first days. There were the others; Jacoby, watching the warring with a cold, appraising eye, judging the contenders with the fairness of one who knows the game from end to end.

Lawson, who had seen it all before any of them; who had studied an outcropping of rock and the surface of a saffron wilderness, and had said: "Here there is oil." The man with the prospector's soul—the seeker. And now Lawson had the reward, which he had earned.

Ryan, who had risked his labor and had won. Spreckles, who had sacrificed many a longed-for good time because he believed in the existence of that black gold. And the other men. They had been loyal.

He had begun, with these others beside him. He had done what he found to do; had fought when there were obstacles. He had come to leadership. And now, leadership of greater movements lay before him. And he would battle on. That was his part in life—to be an officer in the clanking troops of Industry.

Dusk had deepened to darkness. Hart was on the broad veranda once more. He was walking now. He paced slowly. There was, in every movement of his body, a stern repression, as if he had a terrible desire to move more fiercely; as if he were compelling himself to keep to this quiet, regular step. He walked to the extreme end of the veranda. He turned and went at the same tense, repressed step back to the other end. Thus he kept on and on.

He had left Jean back there in the house. He had bent to kiss her once more before going. Now he had to stay out here, and he could only walk up and down like a caged animal, like one who is helpless. He was helpless. He could but wait.

When he was leaving her, she had smiled up into his eyes. Even as she had smiled, he had seen her face grow white and her eyes grow wide—as if she beheld before her some mighty presence which she did not yet know, whose identity she could not yet place: Life or Death.

Thus he had gone from her. He had

left her. There, within the closed room, Jean was fighting her battle now.

Her battle. The issue was beyond him. He could only wait. She had waited more than once while he was fighting. It was his turn now. Once, when he was walking faster than he had gone before, he muttered to himself.

His hands were clenched behind his back. The fingers were twisted painfully, straining against one another. His head was bowed. His face was white; sweat stood out on his forehead.

Suddenly he turned his head. He listened to something from within the house. A spasm of pain crossed his features. Then he straightened his quivering lips to a tight line. He resumed his walking

Virginia Lawson came out from the door. She looked at Hart; but it was as if she had not seen him; or as if, seeing him, perhaps, she did not heed his presence. She ran down the front steps. Shortly afterward she came on up the steps again and entered the house. This time she did not look at him, although he stood staring at her as though he were trying to read something in her face.

Within the house the battle went on.

Hart walked on the balls of his feet now, making as little sound as possible. But often he stopped. And the spasm of pain crossed his face again, as he twisted his fingers, straining the tendons.

The night grew black. And through the dark the lights glowed, miles and miles of lights from the depths of the derrick forest. Hart did not see them. Nor did he hear the soft whine of the pumps, the sigh of the engines at their laborings.

But there were minutes at a time when he stood holding himself with all of his strength, enduring the torture of helplessness.

At last he stood with a different expression, as if he were listening with deep wonder, with wonder born of something beyond belief. There came to his ears now a new cry. It was not the voice of suffering. Life had entered the house.

When they sent for him he stole on tiptoe to the bedside. He dropped on his knees, and he held Jean's hot hand in his. And then he saw the new atom of humanity, the baby lying soft within her arm. He bowed his head.

He had fought well. But here lay another, who had waited while he battled. Now she had fought her fight. And her victory had brought more than any victory of his could ever bring. She had won the fundamental thing on which all man's work depends—Life.

She looked up at him with all the great, deep pride of motherhood in her dark eyes. He bent lower, whispering:

"Jean! Dear heart of mine!"

THE END.

In the next number of the POPULAR, on sale December 7th, there will be the first installment of a splendid, full-blooded novel by Vingie E. Roe, entitled "On the Old North Trail"—one of the "best ever" class.

* * *

SOME SENTENCE! SOME SENTENCE!

REPRESENTATIVE FRANK B. WILLIS, of Ohio, who stands out as the champion speller of Congress, has on tap a great assortment of stories dealing with words and spelling.

One of his linguistic feats is to reel off a sentence of twenty-six words, each word beginning with the successive letters of the alphabet, like this:

"A boy cannot dig easily for gold; hence, if just keeping lead melted needs oxygen, put quicksilver, rapidly saturated, timidly under vitriol, when xebecs yean zeolites."

A Motor-Boat Necessity

By Mayn Clew Garnett

Author of "Around New Jersey," "Sam, the Engineman," Etc.

Which records the direful mishaps of a night in the life of Captain Sam Gales, builder of motor boats and would-be inventor of patent muffler exhausts and fire extinguishers

SAID the captain to his wife: "No man gets rich just buildin' plain motor boats; they gits rich same as I'm a-goin' to—in some deal, some big thing that no one else has. There's a way to make money out of boats, s'help me Davy."

"Yes, I heard there was," sighed his wife resignedly. "Have some coffee."

The captain waved a hand. "Look," he said. "Look at the man who invented the carburetor! Look at the man who invented ball bearin's! Look—well, all got rich. Not one ever did a stroke of work in a boat, just what I'd call work. No, my dear, it's brains properly directing brains what develops new ideas, makin' new devices. It's the intellect that saves labor what makes the coin——"

"Do you mean you are going to try something new?" interrupted his wife, drinking her coffee. Her tone was sad, her figure drooped, as she sat opposite her lord and gazed at him in sullen despair.

The skipper gave her a quick look. He was annoyed. Something about her manner cooled his ardor, put a brake on ambition, and weakened his iron arm of invention.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Well, you know the patent muffler exhaust cost us a lot of money, and Mr. Simkins, the grocer, ain't got too much patience—then there's the butcher and others."

Captain Gales reddened. He wanted encouragement, not a wet blanket thrown upon the warm body of his offspring.

"You must remember," said he, "that there are some things that are good that the public are not in immediate need of. Some day many a motor-boat man will thank me for that exhaust—you'll be rich."

"Well?" she said, evidently referring to Mr. Simkins.

"Well—well, what?"

"How about trying to pay up a bit on the house things?" suggested the lady, eying the captain nervously, but despairingly.

"Hum!" said he; and again, "Hum!" A short silence, then his eyes brightened. "My dear, let me tell you about the new idea. It's a fire extinguisher of the most improved sort—see? It's a bit expensive to manufacture, to be sure, but it's got to be of brass to stand salt water and the chemicals inside it. It's patented, of course, and I'll have one in every boat around here within a month. I'll have Jim take one down to the boathouse and put it in Mr. Jones' boat—the big one near the door. Jones'll see it—sure."

"Well, I suppose you'll need all the money to pay for the patent?" asked Mrs. Gales resignedly.

"Sure thing, my dear; but I'll take you out for a run in the dory, and you'll feel better after a dash up and down the river behind a motor that goes, and along with a fire extinguisher that would put out a volcano—if she happened to catch. You're nervous, but you'll be all right afterward."

The next day an imposing brass cylinder was placed in the boat near the door of the boathouse. It bore upon its face a legend describing its make and usefulness. It was very bright, and shone beautifully.

Mrs. Gales could not help admiring it.

"Well, maybe dear old Sam will strike something good in the end," she murmured, gazing at it. "I reckon I'll let him run me up and down the crik a few times—my nerves is awful lately."

Mrs. Gales felt better after the run. She went about her household duties with a feeling of relief.

Captain Sam Gales worked away with the assurance that he was good for a few weeks without serious handicap.

The fall set in cold and rainy. Frosts chilled the air, and the remnant of beach combers who lingered in the vicinity found poor shelter. Some of the boldest decided that, as the Gales property presented the best-looking front, the boathouse at least would probably show a pretty good interior. It would make a fine shelter—and, perhaps, there might be some valuable "junk" lying about.

Gales' boathouse was pretentious. It was heated below by a stove, and above were a couple of bedrooms where, in warm weather, the captain and his spouse often spent their days and nights, it being nearer the work upon the various craft under the captain's care.

"As long as I have this here muffler-exhaust patent I don't want any loafers about, an' I'll stick around a little later this year," he had informed his wife.

"Well, the boathouse is cool, but healthy, I suppose," assented the lady. "I don't know but what we might stay until it freezes. I suppose that extinguisher is also very valuable—don't want any one to steal the patent, hey?"

Mrs. Gales was given to acrid comment at times. Gales put his helm a-port and figuratively "swung off" to the right at the first sight of this red light of dissension, humming softly:

"When the light you see ahead,
Port your helm—and show your red——"

Peace reigned, save for the disturbing snores of the seaman, who slept as only a boatman can sleep.

The pair of worthy men below who were investigating the doors, however, could not hear the warning whistle of the seaman's slumbers. By the careful application of a small steel bar beneath the sill of one of the rear windows, they forced an entrance. One remained outside to keep watch until the other saw that all was clear, and, with these preliminaries arranged to their satisfaction, they forthwith went to work.

The captain was awakened a half hour later by a vigorous poke in the ribs.

"Port yer helm—show 'em your red light—sn-r-r-rhh——"

"Git up—git up, you sleepyhead! There's burglars in here—downstairs! I hear 'em plain. Oh, oh; why did we stay down here? Sam, git up——" Mrs. Gales was plainly frightened. She continued to poke her spouse in the side.

"Lemme 'lone," growled the seaman, turning over.

"But you ain't going to let them take your patent exhaust muffler—your patent fire extinguisher—are you?"

Like a shot Gales sat up. He was now awake, the dread idea for a moment calling forth all his reserve energies. He slipped out of bed and was just in time to see a man below rolling up the skipper's clothes about some brass fittings belonging to his inventions.

Without a moment's hesitation he rushed for the fellow, who seized the bundle and tore for the open back window, the captain yelling close behind, and his night robe flowing in the wind. At the window the thief, seeing the chase was growing warm, dropped a pair of socks and a few tools from the "swag," but, upon the whole, managed with skill to pitch the rest of the stuff outside, where it was seized by his pal. Out of the window he leaped, and the pair sped away across the garden, with the captain in full cry close behind.

The captain's voice, used to command, roared furiously upon the night, commanding them to "Stop thief! Stop thief!" Across the flower beds they went, and even as they ran they fumbled the bundle and dropped a pair of shoes and the skipper's shirt. At the fence they lost a few yards, and left the captain's neckcloth to mark their passage.

"Stop or I'll shoot, I'll shoot!" shouted Gales, but, as he had never had a gun in his life, the pair paid no attention, save to drop a waistcoat. They still tore along, and the captain went over the fence like a noisy ghost, his thin, white garment whiffling through the chilly darkness.

Down the slope of the field they ran, the captain, unincumbered, gaining perceptibly upon them, causing them to throw away all unnecessary weight to keep clear of his handgrip. The pile of clothes diminished rapidly as they neared the woods of the park, and they strove right manfully to make the cover before the irate seaman would seize them.

In spite of his years, and life on shipboard, the captain would have ended the chase successfully had it not been for his bare feet. At the edge of the clearing he struck his toe upon the edge of a sharp stump, and fell just as he reached out a powerful hand to seize a fugitive. He rolled over and over, uttering strange oaths, and when he regained his feet, there was no sign of a thief, only a garment-strewn trail into the thicket to show where the men had gone.

Gales limped slowly back to the house, uttering imprecations upon tramps and thieves in general, and more especially upon honest folk who allowed stumps to grow where there should only be grass. The house was lit up, and from every window a beam of light flashed out into the wintry blackness. He stumped up to the front door and knocked. A shrill scream from within answered his summons, and he recognized his wife's voice calling for the police.

"It's me—let me in," he bellowed.

"Go away—go away—I will have you jailed," came the response, followed by a series of frantic calls for the protectors of the peace.

He banged at the door again and again, shivering and calling aloud for admittance, but to no purpose. His wife could not be deceived by any wily burglar imitating her husband's voice and manner. He could not come in. The air was becoming bitter, and the captain's legs were freezing. Something must be done. Standing on one foot, and then another, he begged and pleaded for Mrs. Gales to open the doors. It was to no purpose, and, while he stood there, he noticed that the windows were all closed now, and the lights had disappeared. He groped his way to the rear, where the window had been forced, hoping to gain entrance there, but the window was fast, and all was dark.

Feeling about the ground beneath the sill, he came upon a bull's-eye lantern such as burglars usually carry. Its warmth was gratifying, and he lost no time in getting a few sticks of wood together, placing them in the lee of the corner of the house, and emptying the contents of the lantern over them. Instantly a glowing flame shot up, and he held his freezing limbs to the blaze. It was most gratifying, and he ceased his calling. Then he determined upon a new plan of action. Near him lay a dark object which he recognized in a moment as a shoe. He picked it up. At the window were his socks. He hurriedly pulled them on and, placing the shoe upon his foot, went quickly along the trail left by the burglars. His shirt was soon discovered, and then the rest of his underclothes. He put on his waistcoat and neckcloth. It was cold work, and his shaking fingers refused to button his collar. His coat was found just at the entrance of the thicket, a good quarter of a mile from the house, also his other shoe. His trousers were not on the trail, and, after a fruitless search, lasting many minutes, he gave them up and started back toward his home, arrayed in all but that necessary garment. He was much warmer now, and murmured several things uncomplimentary about his wife's intelligence. With the increased circulation he grew hot within, and by the time he reached the garden fence he was like a smoldering volcano which had been chilled upon the surface.

As he drew near he fancied he saw light upon the lee side of the house, and he turned at the garden gate to go around to that side. He turned the corner and saw flames flickering up the corner of his house from the fire he had built. The wind had blown the embers against the clapboards, and the fire was well under way.

Bawling "Fire!" at the top of his voice, he waited a moment to see if the besieged inmate would take notice. Nothing happened, and then, realizing that something must be done, at once he set out for a neighbor's, half a mile down the road.

Mr. Hodges was of a religious turn of mind, and disliked swearing. The appearance of a peculiarly attired and somewhat profane gentleman at his door in the small hours of the morning produced suspicion in his pious mind. Besides, Mr. Hodges had three daughters who snickered audibly at the captain's attire, which merriment led the sedate Hodges to decide that the seaman had gone back to some of his earlier habits, and had become the worse for drink. Protestations on the captain's part only increased this impression, for, as the seaman warmed to his subject, he thought of his burning property, and the delay for help angered him greatly. He finally wound up by calling Mr. Hodges several names that that gentleman had not heard of for many years, and departed hurriedly for the next house, a few hundred yards farther on.

In the meantime the Gales boathouse was burning rapidly. The lady, finally aroused to her danger, came forth and did what she could to save the fittings and valuables which might be carried to a place of safety. The light attracted several neighbors, who had not paid attention to the calls for police, but who were awakened and arose to the occasion when all danger of facing desperate men had passed. The captain finally got word by telephone to the fire department, and in an incredibly short time an engine was at the scene.

It took several minutes of hard work on the firemen's part to subdue the flames, but this they finally did before the house was damaged beyond a few hundred dollars. Then the skipper came panting back, arrayed properly in a neighbor's suit of clothes.

"It's in the first boat," he cried breathlessly. "Get it—it will put that fire out in two minutes—give it two turns and a pull on the handle—then turn the hose on the blaze——"

"What is the old feller talkin' about?" asked a fireman. "Is he nutty?"

"Nutty? You land crab—you—you——" But the captain's words failed him. He dashed into the house and made his way through the lingering smoke to where the bright, brass cylinder had been set near the foot of the stairs. It was not very light there, and he fumbled around, muttering for some minutes. Then it dawned upon him that the machine was gone. It was too much for him, and he sat upon his soiled staircase and held his head in his hands.

"I could prove its value right here," he said to his wife sadly. "I could have proved its value right here."

"Never mind, Sam; never mind," cooed his wife comfortingly. "Don't talk too much about it. They will have you arrested for arson, if they knew you did it on purpose. You gave me an awful fright. And you ought not to have done it—in the middle of the night, like you did."

"I—I set my house afire to try that extinguisher? Oh, Lord—am I nutty, as that land crab says? There were thieves in the house—it was no trick—I'm astonished at you, Delia—astonished."

Mrs. Gales soothed her captain, but did not believe him at all. While they sat there in the semidarkness, the neighbors came in with the various articles and fittings saved from the flames. The gasoline cans had escaped the heat, and the largest part of the boat gear and tools was safe. A stout lad came in, struggling with a bright object, which shone even in the dim light of lamps. He set it down and panted:

"I carried it halfway down to the woods, sir—I carried it a good half mile down, sir—'cause I knowed it ware valuable, very valuable—this boat stuff costs so much—an' me an' Jimmy Bings stayed down there until the fire was out, sir. Yes, sir, we stayed with it till the fire was out, not lettin' no one touch it till the fire was clean out——"

Gales looked up and saw his patent extinguisher. It was bright and unsoiled, as bright and clean as a piece of fine art work or silverware. It was also full of its chemicals, ready for use, and its mechanism had remained untouched. It was there—and it was not. It had been ready—opportunity had knocked, and now had fled. It had been carried to a place of safety by two boys until all chance to use it had passed.

"Put it back in that big launch, that first boat there," he said sadly, and then he started to climb the stair to the rooms above. The lads started off, feeling that something was wrong, but failing to understand the old man's woe.

"Give him two twists—an' one turn to de right," snickered a supercilious fireman, who stood at the door of the boathouse. Gales heard, but seemed not to heed.

"Two twists—mind yer," chuckled the fireman—"two twists—an' *one* turn—an' dat one to de right—get me, bo—get me—*one* to de right——"

The captain turned, caught the smile upon his wife's face. Then he plunged down the stairs. Instantly he rushed to the first launch and seized the machine, gave the handle a quick turn—to the right—and before the snickering fireman could step aside, a stream of intensely bitter brine struck him full in the face, and took away his breath, his vocabulary, and his temper. Glancing off, it went splashing into the face of the pious Mr. Hodges, whose anxious countenance turned the corner of the house at that moment.

"Merciful heavens!" exclaimed that excellent gentleman.

"Oh, help—the brute—he has ruined our clothes!" screamed the daughters.

The fireman could not talk—he choked, sputtered, and tried to get his breath.

"Git, dod-gast ye—git!" roared Gales in a fury.

Then he slammed the door.

❧

LOSING JOHNSON BY A WHISKER

WHEN John W. Carberry, the star writer of the Boston *Globe*, was in Idaho covering an important special assignment, somebody took him to see a baseball game.

That night he wired Tim Murnane, part owner of the Boston Red Sox, this message:

> Have found the greatest pitcher known to history. Saw him work this afternoon. You'd better get him. His name is Walter Johnson.

Tim showed the telegram to a lot of fellows in the *Globe* offices, and all of them nearly laughed themselves to death.

"Poor old John Carberry," they said between their gusts of hysterical mirth "He couldn't tell a curve pitcher from a tub of pretzels."

Then they sent him a whole lot of very funny, exceedingly sarcastic, telegrams.

One month later Walter Johnson made his début in Washington, having been purchased from a jerk-water Western team for fifty dollars.

The Squealer

BEING ANOTHER STORY OF THE RAILROAD MEN ON THE BIG CLOUD DIVISION

By Frank L. Packard

Author of "The Devil and All His Works," "The King of Fools," Etc.

BACK in the early days the pay roll of the Hill Division was full of J. Smiths, T. Browns, and H. Something-or-others—just as it is to-day. But to-day there is a difference. The years have brought a certain amount of inevitable pedigree, as it were—a certain amount of gossip, so to speak, over the back fences of Big Cloud. It's natural enough. There's a possibility, as a precedent, that one or two of the passengers on the *Mayflower* didn't have as much blue blood when they started on the voyage as their descendants have got now—it's possible. The old hooker, from all accounts, had a pretty full passenger list, and there may have been some who secured accommodations with few questions asked, and a subsequent coat of glorified whitewash that they couldn't have got if they'd stayed at home where they were intimately known—that is, they couldn't have got the coat of glorified whitewash.

It's true that there's a few years between the landing of the *Mayflower* and the inception of Big Cloud, but the interval doesn't count—the principle is the same. Out in the mountains on the Hill Division, "Who's Who" begins with the founding of Big Cloud—it is verbose, unprofitable, and extremely bad taste to go back any farther than that—even if it were possible. There's quite a bit known about the J. Smiths, the T. Browns, and the H. Something-or-others now, with the enlightenment of years to go by—but there wasn't then. There were a good many men who immigrated West to help build the road through the Rockies, and run it afterward—for reasons of their own. There weren't any questions asked. Plain J. Smith, T. Brown, or H. Something-or-other went—that was all there was to it.

He said his name was Walton—P. Walton. He was tall, hollow-cheeked, with a skin of an unhealthy, colorless white, and black eyes under thin, black brows, that were unnaturally bright. He dropped off at Big Cloud one afternoon—in the early days—from No. 1, the Limited from the East, climbed upstairs in the station to the super's room, and coughed out a request to Carleton for a job.

Carleton—"Royal" Carleton they called him—the squarest man that ever held down a divisional swivel chair, looked P. Walton over for a moment before he spoke. P. Walton didn't size up much like a day's work, anyway you looked at him.

"What can you do?" inquired Carleton.

"Anything," said P. Walton—and coughed.

Carleton reached for his pipe and struck a match.

"If you could," said he, sucking at the amber mouthpiece between words, "there wouldn't be any trouble about it. For instance, the construction gangs want men to——"

"I'll go—I'll do anything," cut in P. Walton eagerly. "Just give me a chance."

"Nope!" said Carleton, seriously enough. "I'm not hankering to break the Sixth Commandment—know what that is?"

P. Walton licked dry lips with the tip of his tongue.

"Murder," said he. "But you might as well let it come that way as any other. I'm pretty bad here"—he jerked his thumb toward his lungs—"and I'm broke here"—he turned an empty trousers pocket inside out.

"H'm!" observed Carleton reflectively. There was something in the other that touched his sympathy, and something apart from that that appealed to him, a sort of grim, philosophical grit in the man with the infected lungs.

"I came out," said P. Walton, looking through the window, and kind of talking to himself, "because I thought it would be healthier for me out here than back East."

"I dare say," said Carleton kindly; "but not if you start in by swinging a pick. Maybe we can find something else for you to do. Ever done any railroading?"

P. Walton shook his head.

"No," he answered. "I've always worked on books. I'm called pretty good at figures, if you've got anything in that line."

"Clerk, eh? Well, I don't know," said Carleton slowly. "I guess, perhaps, we can give you a chance. My own clerk's doing double shift just at present; you might help him out temporarily. And if you're what you say you are, we'll find something better for you before the summer's over. Forty dollars a month—it's not much of a stake—what do you say?"

"It's a pretty big stake for me," said P. Walton, and his face lighted up as he turned it upon Carleton.

"All right. You'd better spend the rest of the afternoon, then, in hunting up some place to stay. And here"—Carleton dug into his pocket and handed P. Walton two five-dollar gold pieces—"this may come in handy till you're on your feet."

"Say," said P. Walton huskily, "I——" He stopped suddenly, as the door opened, and Regan, the master mechanic, came in.

"Never mind," smiled Carleton. "Report to Halstead in the next room tomorrow morning at seven o'clock."

P. Walton hesitated, as though to complete his interrupted sentence, and then, with an uncertain look at Regan, turned and walked quietly from the room.

Regan wheeled around and stared after the retreating figure. When the door had closed, he looked inquiringly at Carleton.

"Touched you for a loan, eh?" he volunteered quizzically.

"No," said Charleton, still smiling; "a job. I gave him the money as an advance."

"More fool you!" announced the blunt little master mechanic. "Your security's bad; he'll never live long enough to earn it. What sort of a job?"

"Helping Halstead out to begin with," replied Carleton.

"H'm!" remarked Regan. "Poor devil."

"Yes, Tommy," said Carleton. "Quite so—poor devil."

Regan, big-hearted, good-natured for all his bluntness, walked to the front window and watched P. Walton's figure disappear slowly, and a little haltingly, down the platform. The fat little master mechanic's face puckered.

"We get some queer cards out here," he said. "He looks as though he'd had a pretty hard time of it—kind of a discard in the game, I guess. Out here to die—pleasant, what? I wonder where he came from?"

"He didn't say," said Carleton dryly.

"No," said Regan; "I dare say he didn't—none of them do. I wonder, though, where he came from?"

And in this the division generally was in accord with Regan. They didn't ask—which was outside the ethics; and P. Walton didn't say—which was quite within his rights. But for all that, the division, with Regan, wondered. Ordinarily, they wouldn't have paid much attention to a new man one way or the other, but P. Walton was a little more than just a new man—he was a man they couldn't size up. That was the trouble. It didn't matter who any one was, or where he came from, if they could only form some sort of an opinion—which wasn't hard to form in most cases—that would at all satisfactorily fill the bill. But P. Walton didn't bear the earmarks of a hard case "wanted" East, or show any tendency toward deep theological thought; therefore opinions were conflicting—which wasn't satisfying.

Not that P. Walton refused to mix, or held himself aloof, or anything of that kind; on the contrary, all hands came to know him pretty well—as P. Walton. As a matter of cold fact, they had more chances of knowing him than they had of knowing most newcomers; and that bothered them a little, because, somehow, they didn't seem to make anything out of their opportunities. As assistant clerk to the super, P. Walton was soon a familiar enough figure in the yards, the roundhouse, and the shops, and genial enough, and pleasant enough, too; but they never got past the pure, soft-spoken, perfect English, and the kind of firm, determined swing to the jaw that no amount of emaciation could eliminate. They agreed only on one thing—on the question of therapeutics—they were unanimous on that point with Regan—P. Walton, whatever else he was, or wasn't, was out there to die. And it looked to them as though P. Walton had through rights to the Terminal, and not much of any limit to speak of on his permit.

Regan put the matter up to Carleton one day in the super's office, about a month after P. Walton's advent to Big Cloud.

"I said he was a queer card the first minute I clapped eyes on him," observed the master mechanic. "And I think so now—only more so. What in blazes does a white man want to go and live in a two-room pigsty, with a family of Polacks and about eighteen kids, for?"

Carleton tamped down the dottle in his pipe with his forefinger musingly.

"How much a week, Tommy," he inquired, "is thirty dollars a month, with about a third of the time out for sick spells?"

"I'm not a mathematician," growled the little master mechanic. "About five dollars, I guess."

"It's a good guess," said Carleton quietly. "He bought new clothes, you remember, with the ten I gave him—and he needed them badly enough." Carleton reached into a drawer of his desk, and handed Regan an envelope that was torn open across the end. "I found this here this afternoon after the pay car left," he said.

Regan peered into the envelope, then extracted two five-dollar gold pieces and a note. He unfolded the note, and read the two lines written in a hand that looked like steel-plate engraving

> With thanks and grateful appreciation.
> P. WALTON.

Regan blinked, handed the money, note, and envelope back to Carleton, and fumbled a little awkwardly with his watch chain.

"He's the best hand with figures and his pen it's ever been my luck to meet," said Carleton, kind of speculatively. "Better than Halstead; a whole lot better. Halstead's going back East in a couple of weeks into the general office—got the offer, and I couldn't stand in his way. I was thinking of giving P. Walton the job, and breaking some young fellow in to relay him when he's sick. What do you think about it, Tommy?"

"I think," said Regan softly, "he's been getting blamed few eggs and less fresh air than he ought to have had, trying to make good on that loan. And I think he's a better man than I thought he was. A fellow that would do that is white enough not to fall very far off the right of way. I guess you won't make any mistake as far as trusting him goes."

"No," said Carleton. "I don't think I will."

And therein Carleton and Regan were both right and wrong. P. Walton wasn't—but just a minute, we're overrunning our holding orders—P. Walton is in the block ahead.

The month hadn't helped P. Walton much physically, even if it had helped him more than he, perhaps, realized in Carleton's estimation. And the afternoon following Regan's and Carleton's conversation, alone in the room, for Halstead was out, he was hanging over his desk a pretty sick man, though his pen moved steadily with the work before him, when the connecting door from the super's office opened, and Kenney, the dispatcher, came hurriedly in.

"Where's the super?" he inquired excitedly.

"I don't know," said P. Walton. "He went out in the yards with Regan half an hour ago. I guess he'll be back shortly."

"Well, you'd better try and find him, and give him this. Forty-three'll be along in twenty minutes." Kenney slapped a tissue on the desk and hurried back to his key in the dispatcher's room.

P. Walton picked up the tissue and read it. It was from the first station west on the line.

> SPIDER CUT, 3:16 p. m.
>
> J. H. CARLETON, Supt., Hill Division: No 43 held up by two train robbers three miles west of here. Express messenger Nulty in game fight killed one and captured the other in the express car. Arrange for removal of body, and have sheriff on hand to take prisoner into custody on arrival in Big Cloud. Everything O. K. KELLY, Conductor.

P. Walton, with the telegram in his hand, rose from his chair and made for the hall through the super's room, reading it a second time as he went along. There had been a pretty heavy consignment of gold on the train, as he knew from the correspondence that had passed through his hands—and he smiled a little grimly.

"Well, they certainly missed a good one," he muttered to himself. "I think I'd rather be the dead one than the other. It'll go hard with him. Twenty years, I guess."

He stepped out into the hall to the head of the stairs—and met Carleton coming up.

Carleton, quick as a steel trap, getting the gist of the message in a glance, brushed by P. Walton, hurried along the hall to the dispatcher's room—and the next moment a wide-eyed call boy was streaking uptown for the sheriff, and breathlessly imparting the tale of the holdup, embellished with gory imagination, to every one he met.

By the time Forty-three's whistle sounded down the gorge, there was a crowd on the platform bigger than a political convention, and P. Walton, by virtue of his official position rather than from physical qualification, together with his chief, Regan, the ticket agent, the baggage master, and Carruthers, the sheriff, were having a hard time of it to keep themselves from being shoved off onto the tracks, let alone trying to keep a modest breadth of the platform clear.

And when the train came to a stop, with screeching brake shoes, and the side door of the express car was shot back with a dramatic bang by some one inside, the crowd seemed to get altogether beyond P. Walton's ability to hold them, and they surged past him.

As they handed out a hard-visaged, bullet-headed customer, whose arms were tightly lashed behind him, P. Walton was pretty well back by the ticket-office window, with the crowd between him and the center of attraction—and P. Walton was holding his handkerchief to his lips, flecking the handkerchief with a spot or two of red, and coughing rather badly. Carleton found him there when the crowd, trailing Carruthers and his prisoner uptown, thinned out—and Carleton sent him home.

P. Walton, however, did not go home, though he started in that direction. He followed in the rear of the crowd up to Carruthers' place, saw steel bracelets replace the cords around the captive's wrists, saw the captive's legs securely bound together, and the captive chucked into Carruther's back shed—this was in the early days, and Big Cloud hadn't yet risen to the dignity of a jail—with about as much formality as would be used in handling a sack of meal. After that, Carruthers barred the door by slamming the long, two-inch-thick piece of timber, that worked on a pivot in the center, home into its iron rests with a flourish of finality, as though to indicate that the show was over—and the crowd dispersed—the men heading for the swinging doors of the Blazing Star; and the women for their own back fences.

P. Walton, with a kind of grim smile on his lips, retraced his steps to the station, climbed the stairs, and started through the super's rooms to reach his own desk.

Carleton removed his pipe from his mouth and stared angrily as the other came in.

"You blamed idiot!" he exploded. "I thought I told you to go home!"

"I'm feeling better," said P. Walton. "I haven't got those night orders out yet for the roundhouse. There's three specials from the East to-night."

"Well, Halstead can attend to them," said Carleton, a kindliness creeping into the tones that he tried to make gruff. "What are you trying to do—commit suicide?"

"No," said P. Walton, with a steady smile, "just my work. It was a little too violent exercise trying to hold the crowd, that was all. But I'm all right now."

"You blamed idiot!" grunted Carleton again. "Why didn't you say so? I never thought of it, or I wouldn't have let——"

"It doesn't matter," said P. Walton brightly. "I'm all right now," and he passed on into his own room.

When he left his desk again it was ten minutes of six, and Carleton had already gone. P. Walton, with his neatly written order sheets, walked across the tracks to the roundhouse, handed them over to Clarihue, the night turner, who had just come in, and then hung around, toying in an apparently aimless fashion with the various tools on the workbenches till the whistle blew, while the fitters, wipers, and day gang generally washed up. After that he plodded across the fields to the Polack quarters on the other side of the tracks from the town proper, stumbled into the filthy, garlic-smelling interior of one of the shacks, and flung himself down on the bunk that was his bedroom.

"Lord!" he muttered. "I'm pretty bad to-night. Guess I'll have to postpone it. Might be as well, anyway."

He lay there for an hour, his bright eyes fastened now on the dirty, squalling brood of children upon the floor, now on the heavy, slatternly figure of their mother, and now on the tin bowl of boiled sheep's head that awaited the arrival of Ivan Peloff, the master of the house—and then, with abhorrent disgust, he turned his eyes to the wall.

"Thank God, I get into a decent place soon!" he mumbled once. "It's the roughest month I ever spent. I'd rather be back where"—he smiled sort of cryptically to himself—"where I came from." A moment later he spoke again in a queer kind of argumentative, kind of self-extenuating, way—in broken sentences. "Maybe I put it on a little too thick boarding here so's to stand in with Carleton and pay that ten back quick—but I was scared—I've got to stand in with somebody, or go to the wall."

It was after seven when Ivan Peloff came—smelling strong of drink, and excitement heightening the flush upon his cheek.

"Hello, Valton!" he bubbled out, with earnest inebriety. "Ve rise hell to-night—by an' by. Get him goods by midnight." Ivan Peloff drew his fingers around his throat, and, in lieu of English that came hard to him at any time, jerked his thumb dramatically up and down in the air.

"Who?" inquired P. Walton, without much enthusiasm.

"Robber—him by train come in," explained Ivan Peloff laboriously.

"Oh," said P. Walton, "talking of stringing him up—is that it?"

Ivan Peloff nodded his head delightedly.

P. Walton swung himself lazily from his bunk.

"Eat?" invited Ivan Peloff, moving toward the table.

"No," said P. Walton, moving toward the door. "I'm not hungry; I'm going out for some air."

Ivan Peloff pulled two bottles of a

deadly brand from under his coat, and set them on the table.

"Me eat," he grinned. "By an' by have drinks all round"—he waved his hands as though to embrace the whole Polack quarter—"den ve comes—rise hell—do him goods by midnight."

P. Walton halted in the doorway.

"Who put you up to this, Peloff?" he inquired casually.

"Cowboys," grunted Peloff, lunging at the sheep's head. "Plenty drink. Say have fun."

"The cowboys, eh?" observed P. Walton. "So they're in town, are they—and looking for fun?"

"Ve fix him goods by midnight," repeated Ivan Peloff, wagging his head; then, with a sudden scowl: "You not tell—eh, Valton?"

P. Walton smiled disinterestedly—but there wasn't any doubt in P. Walton's mind that devilment was in the wind—Big Cloud, in the early days, knew its full share of that.

"I?" said P. Walton quietly, as he went out. "No; I won't tell. It's no business of mine, is it?"

It was fall, and already dark. P. Walton made his way out of the Polack quarters, reached the tracks, crossed them—and then headed out through the fields to circle around the town to the upper end again, where it dwindled away from cross streets to the houses flanking on Main Street alone.

"I guess," he coughed—and smiled, "I won't postpone it till to-morrow night, after all."

It was a long walk for a man in P. Walton's condition, and it was a good half hour before he finally stopped in the rear of Sheriff Carruthers' back shed and listened—there were no fences here, just a procession of buttes and knolls merging the prairie country into the foothills proper of the Rockies—neither was there any sound. P. Walton stifled a cough and slipped like a shadow through the darkness around to the front of the shed, shifted the wooden bar noiselessly on its pivot, opened the door, and, as he stepped inside, closed it softly behind him.

"Butch!" he whispered.

A startled ejaculation, and a quick movement as of a man suddenly shifting his position on the floor, answered him.

"Keep quiet, Butcher—it's all right," said P. Walton calmly—and, stooping, guiding his knife blade by the sense of touch, cut away the rope from the other's ankles. He caught at the steel-linked wrists and helped the man to his feet. "Come on," he said. "Slip around to the back of the shed—talk later."

P. Walton pushed the door open, and the man he called the Butcher, lurching a little unsteadily from cramped ankles, passed out. P. Walton carefully closed the door, coolly replaced the bar in position, and joined the other.

"Now, run for it!" he said—and led the way straight out from the town.

For two hundred yards, perhaps a little more, they raced—and then P. Walton stumbled and went down.

"I'm—I'm not very well to-night," he gasped. "This will do—it's far enough."

The Butcher, halted, gazed at the prostrate form.

"Say, cull, what's yer name?" he demanded. "I owe you something for this, an' don't you forget it."

P. Walton made no answer. His head was swimming, lights were dancing before his eyes, and there was a premonitory weakness upon him whose issue he knew too well—unless he could fight it off.

The Butcher bent down until his face was within an inch of P. Walton's.

"So help me!" he informed the universe in unbounded amazement. "It's de Dook!"

"Sit down there opposite me, and hold out your hands," directed P. Walton, with an effort. "We haven't got any time to waste."

The Butcher, heavy with wonderment, obeyed mechanically—and P. Walton drew a rat-tail file from his pocket.

"I saw you in the express car this afternoon, and I went to the roundhouse for this when I left the office," he said, as he set to work on the steel links. "But I was feeling kind of down and out, and was going to leave you till to-morrow night—only I heard they were going to lynch you at midnight."

"Lynch me!" growled the Butcher. "What fer? They don't lynch a fellow 'cause he's nipped in a holdup—we didn't kill no one."

"Some of the cowboys are looking for amusement," said P. Walton monotonously. "They've distributed red-eye among the Polacks, for the purpose, I imagine, of putting the blame—on the Polacks."

"I got you!" snarled the Butcher, with an oath. "It's de Bar K Ranch—we took their pay roll away from 'em two weeks ago. Lynchin', eh? Well, some of 'em'll dance on air for this themselves, blast 'em! Dook, yer white—an' you always was. I thought me luck was out fer keeps to-day when Spud—you saw Spud, didn't you?"

"Yes," said Walton, filing steadily.

"Spud always had a soft spot in his heart," said the Butcher. "Instead of drilling that devil, Nulty, when he had the chance, Nulty filled Spud full of holes, an' we fluked up—yer gettin' a bit of my wrist, Dook, with that file. Well, as I said, I thought me luck was out fer keeps—an' *you* show up. Gee! Who'd have thought of seein' de Angel Dook, de prize penman, de gem of forgers! How'd you make yer get-away—you was in fer twenty spaces, wasn't you?"

"I think they wanted to save the expense of burying me," said P. Walton. "The other wrist, Butch. I got a pardon."

"What's de matter with you, Dook?" inquired the Butcher solicitously.

"Lungs," said P. Walton tersely. "Bad."

"Hell!" said the Butcher earnestly.

There was silence for a moment, save only for the rasping of the file, and then the Butcher spoke again.

"What's yer lay out here, Dook?" he asked.

"Working for the railroad in the super's office—and keeping my mouth shut," said P. Walton.

"There's nothin' in that," said the Butcher profoundly. "Nothin' to it!"

"Not much," agreed P. Walton. "Forty a month, and—oh, well, forty a month."

"I'll fix that fer you, Dook," said the Butcher cheerily. "You join de gang. There's de old crowd from Joliet up here in de mountains, we got a swell layout. There's Larry, an' Big Tom, an' Dago Pete—Spud's cashed in—They'll stand on their heads an' yell Salvation Army songs when they hear that de slickest of 'em all—that's you, Dook—is buyin' a stack an' settin' in."

"No," said P. Walton. "No, Butch, I guess not—it's me for the forty per."

"Eh!" ejaculated the Butcher heavily. "You don't mean to say you've turned parson, Dook? You wouldn't be lettin' me loose if you had."

"No; nothing like that," replied P. Walton. "I'm sitting tight because I have to—until some one turns up and gives my record away—if I'm not dead first. I'm too sick, Butch, to be any use to you—I couldn't stand the pace."

"Sure, you could," said the Butcher reassuringly. "Anyway, I'm not for leavin' a pal out in de cold, an'——" He stopped suddenly, and leaned toward P. Walton. "What was it you said you was doin' in de office?" he demanded excitedly.

"Assistant clerk to the superintendent," said P. Walton—and his file bit through the second link. "You'll have to get the bracelets off your wrists when you get back to the boys—your hands are free."

"Say," said the Butcher breathlessly, "it's a cinch! You see de letters, an' know what's goin' on pretty familiar-like, don't you?"

"Yes," said P. Walton.

"Well, say, can you beat it!" Once more the Butcher invoked the universe. "You're de inside man, see? Gee—it's a cinch! We only knew there was mazuma on de train to-day by a fluke, just Spud an' me heard of it, too late to plant anything fancy an' get de rest of de gang. You see what happened? After this we don't have to take no chances. You passes out de word when there's a good, juicy lot of swag comin' along, we does de rest, and you gets your share—equal. An' that ain't all.

They'll be sendin' down East fer de Pinkertons, if they ain't done it already, an' we gives 'em de laugh—you tippin' us off on de trains de 'dicks' are ridin' on, an' puttin' us wise to 'em generally. An' say"—the Butcher's voice dropped suddenly to a low, sullen, ugly growl—"you give us de lay de first crack we make when that low-lived, snook-nosed Nulty's aboard. He goes out fer Spud—an' he goes out quick. He's fired a gun de last time he'll ever fire one—see?"

P. Walton felt around on the ground, picked up the bit of chain he had filed from the handcuffs, and handed it, with the file, to the Butcher.

"Put these in your pocket, Butch," he said, "and throw them in the river where it's deep when you get a chance—especially the file. I guess from the way you put it I could earn my stake with the gang."

"Didn't I tell you you could!" The Butcher, with swift change of mood, grinned delightedly. "Sure, you can! Larry's an innocent-lookin' kid, an' he's not known in de town. He'll float around an' get de bulletins from you—you'll know ahead when there's anything good comin' along, won't you?"

"When it leaves the coast," said P. Walton. "Thirty-six hours—sometimes more."

"An' I thought me luck was out fer keeps!" observed the Butcher, in an almost awe-struck voice.

"Well, don't play it too hard by hanging around here until they get you again," cautioned P. Walton dryly. "The farther you get away from Big Cloud in the next few hours, the better you'll like it to-morrow."

"I'm off now," announced the Butcher, rising to his feet. "Dook, you're white—all de way through. Don't forget about Nulty." He wrung P. Walton's hand with emotion. "So long, Dook!"

"So long, Butch!" said P. Walton.

P. Walton watched the Butcher disappear in the darkness, then he began to retrace his steps toward the Polack quarters. His one thought now was to reach his bunk—he was sick, good and sick, and those premonitory symptoms, if they had been arrested, were still with him. The day had been too much for him—the jostling on the platform, mostly when he had fought his way through the crowd to the shelter of their backs, for fear of an unguarded recognition on the part of the Butcher; then the walking he had done; and, lastly, that run from the sheriff's shed.

P. Walton, with swimming head and choking lungs, reeled a little as he went along. It was farther, quite a lot farther, to go by the fields, and he was far enough down from Carruthers' now not to make any difference anyhow, even if Butcher's escape had been discovered—which it hadn't, the town was too quiet for that. P. Walton headed into a cross street, staggered along it, reached the corner of Main Street—and, fainting, went suddenly down in a heap, as the hemorrhage caught him, and the bright, crimson "ruby" stained his lips.

Coming up the street from a conference in the super's office, Nulty, the express messenger, big, brawny, hard-faced, thin-lipped, swung along, dragging fiercely at his pipe, scowling grimly as he reviewed the day's happenings. He passed a little knot of Polacks, quite obviously far gone in liquor—and almost fell over P. Walton's body.

"Hullo!" said Nulty. "What the deuce is this!" He bent down for a look into the unconscious man's face. "The super's clerk!" he exclaimed—and stared around for help.

There was no one in sight, save the approaching Polacks—but one of these hurriedly, if unsteadily, lurched forward.

"Valton!" announced Ivan Peloff genially. "Him be sick—yes?"

"Where's he live?" demanded Nulty, without waste of words.

"Him by me live," said Ivan Peloff, tapping his chest proudly as he swayed upon his feet. He called to his companions, and reached for P. Walton's legs. "Ve take him by us home."

"Let him alone!" said Nulty gruffly, as the interior of a Polack shanty pictured itself before his eyes.

"Him by me live," repeated Ivan Peloff, still reaching doggedly, if uncertainly, for P. Walton's legs.

"Let him alone, I tell you, you drunken guinea!" roared Nulty suddenly, and his arm went out with a sweep that brushed Ivan Peloff back to an ultimate seat in the road three yards away. Without so much as a glance in the direction taken by the other, Nulty stepped up to the rest of the Polacks, stared into their faces, and selecting the one that appeared less drunk than the others, unceremoniously jerked the man by the collar into the foreground. "You know me!" he snapped. "I'm Nulty—Nulty. Say it!"

"Nultee," said the bewildered foreigner.

"Yes," said Nulty. "Now you run for the doctor. If he ain't at home—find him. Tell him to come to Nulty—*quick*. Understand?"

The Polack nodded his head excitedly.

"Doctor—Nultee," he ejaculated brightly.

"Yes," said Nulty. "Go on, now—run!" And he gave the Polack on initial start with a vigorous push that nearly toppled the man forward on his nose.

Nulty stooped down, picked up P. Walton in his arms as though the latter were a baby, and started toward his own home a block away.

"Lord," he muttered, "a railroad man down there in a state like this—he'd have a long chance, he would! Poor devil, guess he won't last out many more of these. Blast it all, now if the wife was home she'd know what to do—blamed if I know!"

For all that, however, Nulty did pretty well. He put P. Walton to bed and started feeding him cracked ice even before the doctor came—after that Nulty went on feeding cracked ice.

Along toward midnight, Gleason, the yard master, burst hurriedly into the house.

"Say, Nulty, you there!" he bawled. "That blasted train robber's got away, and—oh!" He had stepped from the hall over the threshold of the bedroom door, and halted abruptly as his eyes fell upon the bed. "Anything I can do—Nulty?" he asked, in a booming whisper, that he tried to make soft.

Nulty, sitting in a chair by the bed, shook his head—and Gleason tiptoed in squeaky boots out of the house.

P. Walton, who had been lying with closed eyes, opened them and looked at Nulty.

"What did he say?" he inquired.

"Says the fellow we got to-day has got away," said Nulty shortly. "Shut up—the doctor says you're not to talk."

P. Walton's bright eyes made a circuit of the room, came back, and rested again on Nulty.

"Would you know him again if you saw him?" he demanded.

"Would I know him!" exclaimed Nulty. "It's not likely I wouldn't, is it? I was deadheading him down from Spider Cut, wasn't I?"

"I think," said P. Walton slowly, "if it were me I'd be scared stiff that he got away—afraid he'd be trying to revenge that other fellow, you know. You want to look out for him."

"I'd ask nothing better than to meet him again," said Nulty grimly. "Now, shut up—you're not to talk."

P. Walton was pretty sick. Nulty sat up all that night with him, laid off from his run the next day, and sat up with P. Walton again the next night. Then, having sent for Mrs. Nulty, who was visiting relatives down the line, Mrs. Nulty took a hand in the nursing. Mrs. Nulty was a little, sweet-faced woman, with gray, Irish eyes, and no style about her—Nulty's pay check didn't reach that far—but she knew how to nurse; and if her hands were red, and the knuckles a little swollen from the washtub, she could use them with a touch that was full enough of tender sympathy to discount anything a manicure might have reason to find fault with on professional grounds. She didn't rate Nulty for turning her home into a hospital, and crowding her train sheet of work, already pretty full, past all endurance—Mrs. Nulty, God bless her! wasn't that kind of a woman. She looked at her husband with a sort of happy pride in her eyes; looked at P. Walton, and said, "Poor man," as her eyes filled—and went to work. But for all that, it was touch and go with P. Walton—P. Walton was a pretty sick man.

It's queer the way that trouble acts—down and out one day, with every signal in every block set dead against you; and the next day a clear track, with rights through buttoned in your reefer, a wide-flung throttle, and the sweep of the wind through the cab glass whipping your face till you could yell with the mad joy of living. It's queer!

Five days saw P. Walton back at the office, as good, apparently, as ever he was—but Mrs. Nulty didn't stop nursing. Nulty came down sick in place of P. Walton, and took to bed—"to give her a chance to keep her hand in," Nulty said. Nulty came down, not from overdoing it on P. Walton's account—a few nights sitting up wasn't enough to lay a man like Nulty low—Nulty came down with a touch of just plain mountain fever.

It wasn't serious, or anything like that; but it put a stop order, temporarily at least, on the arrangements Nulty had cussed P. Walton into agreeing to. P. Walton was to come and board with the Nultys at the same figure he was paying Ivan Peloff until he got a raise and could pay more. And so, while Nulty was running hot and cold with mountain fever, P. Walton, with Mrs. Nulty in mind, kept his reservations on down in the Polack quarters, until such time as Nulty should get better—and went back to work at the office.

On the first night of his convalescence, P. Walton had a visitor—in the person of Larry, the brains and leader of the gang. Larry did not come inside the shack—he waited outside in the dark until P. Walton went out to him.

"Hullo, Dook!" said Larry. "Tough luck, eh? Been sick? Gee, I'm glad to see you. All to the mustard again? Couldn't get into town before, but a fellow uptown said you'd been bad."

"Hello, Larry," returned P. Walton, and he shook the other's hand cordially. "Glad to see you, too. Yes; I guess I'm all right—till next time."

"Sure, you are!" said Larry heartily. "Anything good doing?"

"Well," said P. Walton. "I don't know whether you'd call it good or not, but there was a new order went into effect yesterday, to remain in force until further notice—owing to the heavy passenger traffic. They are taking the mail and express cars off the regular afternoon eastbound trains, and running them as a through extra on fast time—no stops. They figure to land the mails East in quicker time, and ease up on the equipment of the regular trains so as to keep them a little nearer schedule. So now the express comes along on Extra Number Thirty-four, due Spider Cut, without stop, at eight-seventeen p. m."

"Say," said Larry dubiously, " 'tain't going to be possible to board her at some station casuallike, is it?" Then, brightening suddenly: "But say, when you get to thinking about it, it don't size up so bad, neither. I got the lay, Dook—I got it for fair—listen. Instead of a trainload of passengers to handle, there won't be no one after the ditching but what's left of the train crew and the mail clerks; a couple of us can stand the stamp lickers up easy, while the two others pinches the swag. We'll stop her all right! We ditch the train—see? There's a peach of a place for it about seven miles up the line from here. We tap the wires, Big Tom's some cheese at that, and then cuts them as soon as we know the train has passed Spider Cut, and is wafting its way toward us. Say, it's good, Dook, it's like a Christmas present—I was near forgetting the registered mail."

P. Walton laughed—and coughed.

"I guess it's all right, Larry," he said. "According to a letter I saw in the office this afternoon, there's a shipment of two hundred thousand in bills—they don't like bills on the coast, you know—from some bank that will be on board night after next."

"Say that again," said Larry, sucking

in his breath quickly. "I ain't deaf, but I'd like to hear it just once more."

"I was thinking," said P. Walton, more to himself than to his companion, "that I'd like to get down to northern Australia—up Queensland way. They say it's good for what ails me—bakes it out of one."

"Dook," said Larry, shoving out his hand, "you can buy your ticket the day after the night after next—you'll get yours, and don't forget it, I'll see to that. We'll move camp to-morrow down handy to the place I told you about, and get things ready. And say, Dook, is that cuss Nulty on the new run?"

"I don't know anything about Nulty," said P. Walton.

"Well, I hope he is," said Larry, with a fervent oath. "We're going to get him for what he did to Spud. The Butcher was for coming into town and putting a bullet through him anyway, but I'm not for throwing the game—it won't hurt Spud's memory any to wait a bit—and we won't lose any enthusiasm by the delay, you can bet your life on that! And now I guess I'll mosey along—the less I'm seen around here the better. Well, so long, Dook—I got it straight, eh? Night after to-morrow, train passes Spider Cut eight-seventeen—that right?"

"Eight-seventeen—night after to-morrow—yes," said P. Walton. "Good luck to you, Larry."

"Same to you, Dook," said Larry—and slipped away in the shadows.

P. Walton went uptown to sit for an hour or two with Nulty—turn about being no more than fair play. Also on the following night he did the same—and on this latter occasion he took the opportunity, when Mrs. Nulty wasn't around to hear and worry about it, to turn the conversation on the holdup, after leading up to it casually.

"When you get out and back on your run again, Nulty, I'd keep a sharp lookout for that fellow whose pal you shot," he said.

"You can trust me for that," said Nulty anxiously. "I'll bet he wouldn't get away a second time!"

"Unless he saw you first," amended P. Walton evenly. "There's probably more where those two came from—a gang of them, I dare say. They'll have it in for you, Nulty."

"Don't you worry none about me," said Nulty, and his jaw shot out. "I'm able to take care of myself."

"Oh, well," said P. Walton, "I'm just warning you, that's all. Anyway, there isn't any immediate need for worry. I guess you're safe enough—as long as you stay in bed."

The next day P. Walton worked assiduously at the office. If excitement or nervousness in regard to the events of the night that was to come was in any wise his portion, he did not show it. There was not a quiver in the steel-plate hand in which he wrote the super's letters, not even an inadvertent blur on the tissue pages of the book in which he copied them. Only, perhaps, he worked a little more slowly—his work wasn't done when the shop whistle blew, and he came back to the office after supper. It was close on to ten minutes after eight when he finally finished, and went into the dispatcher's room with the sheaf of official telegrams to go East during the night at odd moments when the wires were light.

"Here's the super's stuff," he said, laying the papers on the dispatcher's desk.

"All right," said Spence, who was sitting in on the early trick. "How's P. Walton to-night?"

"Pretty fair," said P. Walton, with a smile. "How's everything moving?"

"Slick as clockwork," Spence answered. "Everything on the dot. I'll get some of that stuff off for you now."

"Good!" said P. Walton, moving toward the door. "Good night, Spence."

"Night, old man," rejoined Spence, and, picking up the first of the super's telegrams, began to rattle a call on his key like the tattoo of a snare drum.

P. Walton, in possession of the information he sought—that Extra Number Thirty-four was on time—descended the stairs to the platform, and started uptown.

"I think," he mused, as he went along, "that about as good a place as any for me when this thing breaks will be sitting with Nulty."

P. Walton noticed the light burning in Nulty's bedroom window as he reached the house; and, it being a warm night, he found the front door wide open. He stepped into the hall, and from there into the bedroom. Mrs. Nulty was sitting in a rocking-chair beside the lamp, mending away busily at a pair of Nulty's overalls—but there wasn't anybody else in the room.

"Hello!" said P. Walton cheerily. "Where's the sick man?"

"Why, didn't you know?" said Mrs. Nulty, a little anxiously, as she laid aside her work and rose from her chair. "The express company sent word this morning that if he was able they particularly wanted to have him make the run through the mountains to-night on Extra Number Thirty-four—I think there was some special shipment of money. He wasn't at all fit to go, and I tried to keep him home, but he wouldn't listen to me. He went up to Elk River this morning to meet Thirty-four, and come back on it. I've been worrying all day about him."

P. Walton's eyes rested on the anxious face of the little woman before him, dropped to the red, hard-working hands that played nervously with the corner of her apron, then traveled to Nulty's alarm clock that ticked raucously upon the table—it was eight-seventeen. P. Walton smiled.

"Now, don't you worry, Mrs. Nulty," he said reassuringly. "A touch of mountain fever isn't anything one way or the other—don't you worry, it'll be all right. I didn't know he was out, and I was going to sit with him for a little while, but what I really came for was to get him to lend me a revolver—there's a coyote haunting my end of the town that's kept me awake for the last two nights, and I'd like to even up the score. If Nulty hasn't taken the whole of his armament with him, perhaps you'll let me have one."

"Why, yes, of course," said Mrs. Nulty readily. "There's two there in the top bureau drawer. Take whichever one you want."

"Thanks," said P. Walton—and stepped to the bureau. He took out a revolver, slipped it into his pocket, and turned toward the door. "Now, don't you worry, Mrs. Nulty," he said encouragingly, "because there's nothing to worry about. Tell him I dropped in, will you?—and thank you again for the revolver. Good night, Mrs. Nulty."

P. Walton's eyes strayed to the clock as he left the room—it was eight-nineteen. On the sidewalk he broke into a run, dashed around the corner, and sped, with instantly protesting lungs, down Main Street, making for the railroad yards. And as he ran P. Walton did a sum in mental arithmetic, while his breath came in gasps. From Spider Cut to Big Cloud was twenty-two miles. Number Thirty-four, on time, had already left Spider Cut at eight-seventeen—and the wires were cut. Her running time for the twenty-two miles was twenty-nine minutes—she made Big Cloud at eight-forty-six. Counting Larry's estimate of seven miles to be accurate, Number Thirty-four had fifteen miles to go from Spider Cut before they piled her in the ditch, and it would take her a little over nineteen minutes to do it. With two minutes already elapsed—*three* now—and allowing, by shaving it close, another five before he started, P. Walton found that he was left with eleven minutes in which to cover seven miles.

It took P. Walton four of the five minutes he had allowed for to reach the station platform; and there, for just an instant, he paused while his eyes swept the twinkling switch lights in the yards. Then he raced up the length of the platform, jumped from the top end to the ground, and ran, lurching a little, up the main-line track to where the foreshortened, unclassed little switching engine—the 229—was grunting heavily, and stealing a momentary rest after having sent a string of boxes and gondolas flying down a spur under the tender guidance of a brakeman or two. And as P. Walton ran, he reached into his pocket and drew Nulty's revolver.

It wasn't very light inside the cab—there was only the lamp over the gauges—but it was light enough to show his glittering eyes, fever bright, the deadly white of his face, the deadly smile on his lips, and the deadly weapon in his hand, as he sprang through the gangway.

"Get out!" panted P. Walton coldly.

Neither Dalheen, the fireman, nor Mulligan, fat as a porpoise, on the right-hand side, stood upon the order of their going. Dalheen ducked and took a flying leap through the left-hand gangway; and Mulligan, with a sort of anxious gasp that seemed as though he wished to convey to P. Walton the fact that he was hurrying all he could, squeezed himself through the right-hand gangway and sat down on the ground.

P. Walton pulled the throttle open with an unscientific jerk.

With a kind of startled scream from the hissing steam, the sparks flying from madly racing drivers as the wheel tires bit into the rails, the old 229, like a frightened thoroughbred at the vicious lash of a yokel driver, reared and plunged wildly forward. The sudden, violent start from inertia pitched P. Walton off his feet across the driver's seat, and smashed his head against the reversing lever that stood notched forward in the segment. He gained his feet again, and, his head swimming a little from the blow, looked behind him.

Yells were coming from half a dozen different directions; forms, racing along with lanterns bobbing up and down, were tearing madly for the upper end of the yard toward him; there was a blur of switch lights, red, white, purple, and green—then, with a wicked lurch around a curve, darkness hid them, and the sweep of the wind, the roar of the pounding drivers, deadened all other sounds.

P. Walton smiled—a strange, curious, wistful smile—and sat down in Mulligan's seat. His qualifications for a Brotherhood card had been exhausted when he had pulled the throttle—engine driving was not in P. Walton's line. P. Walton smiled at the air latch, the water glass, the gauges and injectors, whose inner workings were mysteries to him—and clung to the window sill of the cab to keep his seat. He understood the throttle—in a measure—he had ridden up and down the yards in the switchers once or twice during the month that was past—that was all.

Quicker came the bark of the exhaust; quicker the speed. P. Walton's eyes were fixed through the cab glass ahead, following the headlight's glare, that silvered now the rails, and now flung its beams athwart the stubble of a butte as the 229 swung a curve. Around him, about him was dizzy, lurching chaos, as, like some mad thing, the little switcher reeled drunkenly through the night—now losing her wheel base with a sickening slew on the circling track, now finding it again with a staggering quiver as she struck the tangent once more.

It was not scientific running—P. Walton never eased her, never helped her—P. Walton was not an engineer. He only knew that he must go fast to make the seven miles in eleven minutes—and he was going fast. And, mocking every formula of dynamics, the little switcher, with no single trailing coach to steady it, swinging, swaying, rocking, held the rails.

P. Walton's lips were still half parted in their strange, curious smile. A deafening roar was in his ears—the pound of beating trucks on the fishplates; the creak and groan of axle play; the screech of crunching flanges; the whistling wind; the full-toned thunder now of the exhaust—and reverberating back and forth, flinging it from butte to butte, for miles around in the foothills the still night woke into a thousand answering echoes.

Meanwhile, back in Big Cloud, things were happening in the super's office. Spence, the dispatcher, interrupting Carleton and Regan at their nightly pedro, came hastily into the room.

"Something's wrong," he said tersely. "I can't get anything west of here, and——" He stopped suddenly, as

Mulligan, flabby white, came tumbling into the room.

"He's gone off his chump!" screamed Mulligan. "Gone delirious, or mad, or some——"

"What's the matter?" Carleton was on his feet, his words cold as ice.

"Here," gasped the engineer. "Look!" He dragged Carleton to the side window, and pointed up the track—the 229, sparks volleying skyward from her stack, was just disappearing around the first bend. "That's—that's the two-twenty-nine!" he panted. "P. Walton's in her—drove me and Dalheen out of the cab with a revolver."

For an instant, no more than a breathing space, no one spoke—then Spence's voice, with a queer sag in it, broke the silence:

"Extra Thirty-four left Spider Cut eight minutes ago."

Carleton, master always of himself, and master always of the situation, spoke before the words were hardly out of the dispatcher's mouth.

"Order the wrecker out, Spence—jump! Mulligan, go down and help get the crew together." And then, as Spence and Mulligan hurried from the room, Carleton looked at the master mechanic. "Well, Tommy, what do you make of this?" he demanded grimly.

Regan, with thinned lips, was pulling viciously at his mustache.

"What do I make of it!" he growled. "A mail train in the ditch, and nothing worth speaking of left of the two-twenty-nine—that's what I make of it!"

Carleton shook his head. "Doesn't it strike you as a rather remarkable coincidence that our wires should go out, and P. Walton should go off his head with delirium at the same moment?"

"Eh!" snapped Regan sharply. "Eh!—what do you mean?"

"I don't mean anything," Carleton answered, clipping off his words. "It's strange, that's all—I think we'll go up with the wrecker, Tommy."

"Yes," said Regan slowly, puzzled; then, with a scowl, and a tug at his mustache: "It does look queer, queerer every minute—blamed queer! I wonder who P. Walton is, and where he came from, anyhow?"

"You asked me that once before," Carleton threw back over his shoulder, moving toward the door. "P. Walton never said."

And while Regan, still tugging at his mustache, followed Carleton down the stairs to the platform, and ill-omened call boys flew about the town for the wrecking crew, and the 1018, big and capable, snorting from a full head of steam, backed the tool car, a flat, and the rumbling derrick from a spur to the main line, P. Walton still sat, smiling strangely, clinging to the window sill of the laboring 229, staring out into the night through the cab glass ahead.

"You see," said P. Walton to himself, as though summing up an argument dispassionately, "ditching a train traveling pretty near a mile a minute is apt to result in a few casualties, and Nulty might get hurt, and if he didn't, the first thing they'd do would be to pass him out for keeps, anyway, on Spud's account." P. Walton coughed—"I won't need that ticket for the heat of northern Queensland. I guess"—he ended gravely—"I guess I'm going *out.*"

P. Walton put his head through the window and listened—and nodded his head.

"Sound carries a long way out here in the foothills," he observed. "They ought to hear it on the mail train as soon as we get close—and I guess we're close enough now to start it."

P. Walton got down, and, clutching at the cab frame for support, lifted up the cover of the engineer's seat—there was sure to be something there among the tools that would do. P. Walton's hand came out with a heavy piece of cord. He turned then, pulled the whistle lever down, tied it down—and, screaming now like a lost soul, the 229 reeled on through the night.

The minutes passed—and then the pace began to slacken. Dalheen was always rated a good fireman, and a wizard with the shovel, but even Dalheen had his limitations—and P. Walton hadn't helped him out any. The steam was dropping pretty fast as the 229 started to climb a grade.

Larry, the Butcher, Big Tom, and Dago Pete had chosen their position well. A hundred yards ahead the headlight played on a dismantled roadbed and torn-up rails, then shot off into nothingness over the embankment as the right of way swerved sharply to the right—they had left no single loophole for Extra Number Thirty-four, not even a fighting chance—the mail train would swing the curve and be into the muck before the men in her cab would be able to touch a lever.

Screaming hoarsely, the 229 slowed, nosed her pony truck onto the ties where there were no longer any rails, jarred, bumped, and thumped along another half dozen yards—and brought up with a shock that sent P. Walton reeling back onto the coal in the tender.

A dark form, springing forward, bulked in the left-hand gangway—and P. Walton recognized the Butcher.

"Keep out, Butch!" he coughed over the scream of the whistle—and the Butcher, in his surprise, sort of sagged mechanically back to the ground.

"It's de Dook!" he yelled, with a gasp; and then, as other forms joined him, he burst into a torrent of oaths. "What de blazes are you doin'!" he bawled. "De train'll be along in a minute, if you ain't queered it already—cut out that cursed whistle! Cut it out, d'ye hear, or we'll come in there an' do it for you in a way you won't like—have you gone nutty?"

"Try it," invited P. Walton—and coughed again. "You won't have far to come, but I'll drop you if you do. I've changed my mind—there isn't going to be any wreck to-night. You'd better use what time is left in making your get-away."

"So that's it, is it!" roared another voice. "You dirty pup, you'd squeal on your pals, would you, you white-livered snitch, you! Well, take that!"

There was a flash, a lane of light cut streaming through the darkness, and a bullet lodged with an angry spat on the coal behind P. Walton's head. Another and another followed. P. Walton smiled and flattened himself down on the coal. A form leaped for the gangway—and P. Walton fired. There was a yell of pain, and the man dropped back. Then P. Walton heard some of them running around behind the tender, and they came at him from both sides, firing at an angle through both gangways. Yells, oaths, revolver shots, and the screech of the whistle filled the air—and again P. Walton smiled—he was hit now, quite badly, somewhere in his side.

His brain grew sick and giddy. He fired once, twice more unsteadily—then the revolver slipped from his fingers—from somewhere came another whistle—they weren't firing at him any more, they were running away, and—P. Walton tried to rise—and pitched back unconscious.

Nulty, the first man out from the mail train, found him there, and, wondering, his face set and grim, carried P. Walton to the express car. They made a mattress for him out of chair cushions, and laid him on the floor—and there, a few minutes later, Regan and Carleton, from the wrecker, after a look at the 229 and the wrecked track that spoke eloquently for itself, joined the group.

Carleton knelt and looked at P. Walton—then looked into Nulty's face.

Nulty, bending over P. Walton on the other side, shook his head.

"He's past all hope," he said gruffly.

P. Walton stirred, and his lips moved—he was talking to himself.

"If I were you, Nulty," he murmured, and they stooped to catch the words, "I'd look out for—for—that ——" The words trailed off into incoherency.

Regan, tugging at his mustache, swallowed a lump in his throat and turned away his head.

"It's queer!" he muttered. "How'd he know—what? I wonder where he came from, and who he was?"

But P. Walton never said. P. Walton was dead.

Jane Hardy, Shipmaster

By Ralph D. Paine

Author of "The Guests of Captain O'Shea," "The Branded Man," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF FIRST PART

While passing the time of day in a ship chandler's shop on the waterside of Boston, Captain O'Shea is astonished to see a woman shipmaster enter the place. Upon inquiry he learns that her name is Jane Hardy, that her father died and left her chief owner of the coastwise schooner, *Speedwell,* and that she is an efficient skipper. Her mate had taken sick and she is now searching for a substitute. Immediately, in a spirit of gallantry, O'Shea offers himself and she accepts gladly. On the voyage to Pine Harbor he learns much about Jane Hardy. Evidently she is in love with a chap named Elbridge, who keeps a grocery store in Pine Harbor. There is also a rival, Enoch Brent, who is rich and unscrupulous, and bent on ruining young Elbridge. As an added complication Brent owns forty shares in the *Speedwell,* and is bound to have the girl as well as the ship. Into this village drama O'Shea plunges, more than half in love with Jane Hardy himself, but resolved to see fair play, his sympathies being enlisted on the side of Elbridge.

(In Two Parts—Part Two)

CHAPTER VII.

THE FRENZY OF JEALOUSY.

PROMPTLY at six o'clock, Captain Michael O'Shea, blithe and debonair, strolled into the low-studded office of the hotel, and found Enoch Brent lounging comfortably before a fire of hickory logs. No reference was made to the afternoon's interview until they were in the dining room. The supper was excellent, and deftly served by an apple-cheeked, bustling waitress who dimpled whenever O'Shea happened to glance that way. The room was quaintly, tastefully appointed, old-figured wall paper, a claw-footed sideboard, cupboards of Canton ware, quite the atmosphere of an ancient seaport tavern. Yes, he had done the old house over, Brent admitted. He preferred to live in it.

"I own several very good colonial houses," said he. "Families died out or moved away. Running one of them is lonesome business for a bachelor."

"A rich man like yourself is single from choice," murmured O'Shea.

For once Brent's train of thought was obvious.

"By the way," said he, "how did you like young Elbridge? Hard-working fellow, but flighty. Has an idea that he can't make his store go because people don't like him. Morbid on the subject."

"Oh, I made allowances. Tell me, Mr. Brent, have you really a vessel in mind that might give me a berth as master? I am not flush enough with money to hang around too long."

"Well, no. I'm sorry to disappoint you. I received a telegram not an hour ago that the schooner I was thinking of had piled up on the rocks off the mouth of the Kennebec, and will be a total loss."

O'Shea knew he was lying—that he had turned wary. Brent became inquisitive, trying this tack and that, to discover how far O'Shea had joined cause with Hamilton Elbridge and Jane Hardy. It was all very cautiously and adroitly done, but, having made one disastrous slip, O'Shea was on his mettle to thwart a cross-examination. This round was a draw. They fell back on story-telling, and successfully entertained each other until Brent suggested adjourning to the log fire for a cigar.

The long windows of the office looked out on a piazza which abutted the street. Hamilton Elbridge, passing that way, saw the two men sitting by the ruddy glow. He heard Brent's sonorous laugh, and the mellow chuckle of O'Shea. It was a picture of intercourse friendly and familiar. All the young man's doubts and fears came surging back. How could he believe in the integrity of this Captain O'Shea? No decent man who knew the truth would behave like this with Enoch Brent. Had O'Shea sold himself? Would he be so brazenly open about it? Jane Hardy was confident of his unselfish loyalty. But he was a self-confessed adventurer. Sane and clear-eyed as Jane Hardy was, his dashing air and his blarney might have tricked her. Or else—— A thought so dreadful stabbed him that he quivered as if in physical pain. He despised himself for it. Jealousy is a frenzy so cruel that it spares not even one's heart's desire. He was young, wildly in love, and excessively emotional.

By noon next day the schooner was emptied of ballast, and Enoch Brent's steamer took her in tow. O'Shea persuaded Jane Hardy that he was competent to put the little vessel on the marine railway and see that it was properly blocked up. She therefore remained in the village, promising to inspect the finished work. The shipyard across the bay had been a busy place when many a stout coaster was launched from its ways, but now the sheds were idle and the machinery rusted. Several of the workmen's dwellings, which had formerly comprised a thrifty little settlement, were untenanted. A tidal creek near by flowed through a wide area of salt marsh.

To float the schooner over the submerged cradle of the marine railway so that the falling tide would let her rest upon the keel blocks required nice calculation. O'Shea thought it advisable to tie up at the adjacent wharf until early morning, and then warp her into position at slack water. He would spend the night on board. Matthew Halkett had been told to go home and talk theology with his brother, William, but there was food in the galley, and O'Shea was competent to cook his own supper.

He was glad of a leisurely evening to write certain letters touching his own affairs, which had been left at loose ends. Making bold to enter the cabin, he seated himself at the captain's desk. From a hook beside it hung Jane's blue reefer, flecked with salt crystals, and the visored cap she wore at sea. The schooner was rocking gently to the wash of the waves from the harbor mouth, and the familiar garment, swaying to and fro, brushed O'Shea's shoulder like a caress. The touch of it troubled him. His pen was idle and his thoughts adrift. With a kind of affectionate deliberation he took the reefer from the hook and laid it upon a locker. He wished he had kept out of the cabin. The shabby armchair, the table, the dead coals in the grate, addressed him eloquently. The canary and the black cat had been conveyed to Miss Titherbee's cottage.

With the expression of a man whose emotions were much disturbed, he turned to the desk and drove himself to the task of writing. Progress was slow and fitful. Business details that concerned fitting out an armed steamer and slipping to sea in defiance of the United States authorities were not as keenly interesting as of yore. At length it occurred to him to write to his friend, the ship chandler in Boston. He began:

DEAR KENNEDY: A quick passage and a safe arrival. When I am as old as you, maybe I will be as wise. You warned me against coaxing the girl to tell me her troubles. Of course, I flew in the face of your sound advice. I am in the thick of it as volunteer life-saver and general disturbance. Not for myself, if you will believe it, Kennedy, but to make her happy with a slip of a grocer lad. She doesn't want anything else. A stormy day it was for me when she came into your shop. She is a wonderful girl, and there is only one flaw in her: She has not the good judgment to prefer me to the poetical young grocer. The two of them are living the miracle that comes but once. And if I cannot have her, then I would sooner see her smile than sigh. This is a sign that I am hard hit, you will say to yourself. You have lived your life, Kennedy, and you will understand my confession.

There is a villain, a real one. He might have amounted to something as a bad man on a bigger stage. Here he is no more than a pompous, slippery dog with a rotten heart and the soul of a peanut. Do you recall the beefy, rosy chief officer of the *Haverdale* steamer, him they called Smiling Harry, the one I broke the nose of in Pernambuco for kicking a cabin boy when he thought no one was looking? This Pine Harbor sundowner is much like him. The villagers have never found him out. He looms big on their horizon. This is their whole world, understand? He is crazy to marry the girl himself. You can read it in the greedy eyes of him. He thinks he can do it by setting her hard and fast on the lee shore of misfortune and breaking her spirit so that she will have to turn to him. He is all wrong there, but it is his way of doing things. He doesn't know anything else, and——

The sound of the water outside, the grinding of the hull against the wharf, all the little, creaking noises that pervade the brittle fabric of a sea-worn vessel, made O'Shea unconscious of the thump of tholepins and the splash of oars, nor did he hear a quick footfall on deck. He did not look up until the heels of Jane Hardy's shoes clicked on the brass-bound companion stair. Startled, he jumped up, and was in time to catch her as a rug tripped her impetuous descent. Swaying to a cushioned locker, she held a hand against her breast, while her breath came painfully between lips from which the color had fled. O'Shea feared she might faint, and hovered anxiously near.

Never had he seen her look so winsome and girlish as now. A scarf covered her hair. Rallying a little, she unbuttoned the long gray coat, as if its warmth was oppressive, disclosing a waist of some soft white stuff, a bit of lace at the throat.

"Please don't look so worried," she panted, her smile brave but tremulous. "I ran most of the way—through the back streets—and down to the beach—and I jumped in the first dory I found—and rowed across the bay. I'll be all right in a minute."

"You broke in on me like a lovely ghost," said he, greatly tempted to sit beside her, and offer his shoulder as a prop. "I had just mentioned ye in a letter to old Kennedy. And you 'materialized' yourself, as the spook doctors call it. Rest a bit, now. Then you will tell me what is wrong. I have never seen you all dressed like a lady."

Shipmaster and yet a woman, indeed, was Jane. Her urgent errand must wait while she naïvely glanced downward to satisfy herself that a pair of slim, patent-leather ties and an inch of silk stocking were discreetly revealed.

"I am so glad you like my clothes," said she, with alluring candor. "Dear me, what *am* I talking about, Mr. O'Shea?"

"About what I would expect from any right-minded girl, Miss Hardy. Come and sit in the big chair till you get your wind back, and can tell me why you come flitting through the night."

With a grateful nod she crossed to the armchair, O'Shea steadying her while his fingers thrilled to the touch of her firm, rounded arm through the thin texture which covered it.

"How silly of me, to be so used up!" she exclaimed. "I thought I was strong enough for anything. I came to tell you that you mustn't stay alone in the schooner to-night. The girl who takes care of my aunt went to the hotel this evening to see a friend who waits on table—another Novia Scotia girl. It seems that Enoch Brent had two men there for supper with him to-night. I know them. They work on his steamer, rough customers from down Portland way. Something was said about an Irishman who wouldn't last twenty-four hours longer in Pine Harbor. Brent shut the talk up with one of his big laughs. It meant you, Mr. O'Shea. Our Eliza hurried back to the cottage to tell me. She had heard me talking about you to Miss Titherbee. There was no one else to bring you the message. So I came down the hill as fast as I could. I didn't dare take time to look for Hamilton Elbridge. It was after ten o'clock, and he had gone home. My aunt thinks it improper for him to stay later. It distresses her very much that I don't carry a chaperon at sea."

"Was there ever a loyal shipmate like

you!" warmly cried O'Shea. "I cannot thank ye enough. But what kind of talk was this at the hotel to scare a grown man? 'Tis not like Brent to attempt rough work, is it?"

"I think he is desperately afraid of you," she replied. "He may be already convinced that you mean to fetch him up with a round turn, to uncover his schemes and punish him."

"I was getting on his blind side," sighed O'Shea, "but I made a bad blunder in the grocery store yesterday afternoon. He smelled a rat. Did Mr. Elbridge tell ye about it?"

"He won't say much about you, Mr. O'Shea. I have never seen him so absent-minded and silent. It troubles me. No, Enoch Brent is not apt to do you bodily harm, but I am sure he would not hesitate to hire his men to do it. It is a lonely place over here at the shipyard. And you are all by yourself in the schooner. If you were asleep in your room, wouldn't it be easy to stun you and throw you overboard? This may sound very wild, but I just couldn't rest until I brought you warning. Your kind of a man has never come athwart Enoch Brent's course before. There is no telling what he may do."

"Right you are, Miss Hardy. If the man intends to fight back it will increase me respect for him. I will stay in the schooner to-night, of course. 'Tis a pity I left my gun in Boston."

"I have my father's revolver on board. I keep it loaded," said she, rising and opening the door of a cupboard at one side of the grate.

He stood close to her as she picked up the heavy weapon, unlocked the cylinder, and tried to throw out the shells by snapping the ejector, in order to be certain that it was ready for service. The sea air had rusted the mechanism.

O'Shea was about to take the revolver from her when a vigorous effort caused her hand to slip. The sharp edge of the hammer caught and cut it painfully. Ordinarily she would not have flinched, but the day had been crowded with wearing episodes, she was utterly weary in mind and body, and her nerves were at the extreme tension. She looked at her bleeding hand, felt the sharp sting of it, for the gash, though small, was deep and ragged, and began to sob like a grieving child.

O'Shea had caught the injured hand in his, and was fumbling for a handkerchief. The provocation to kiss her tears away was almost more than he could withstand. But in the finest interpretation of the phrase he was a masterful man, whose code of honor was as simple as it was inflexible. Keep clear of another man's sweetheart! And yet he would have been a wooden thing to stand there dumb and unfeeling. He held fast to her poor, limp fingers, and murmured consolations that sounded like endearments in that caressing voice of his. It was a situation which might have been misconstrued.

It was terribly misconstrued by a slender, olive-cheeked young man who appeared in the cabin at precisely the wrong moment. He was there instantaneously, as if shot through a trap. His approach had been unnoticed. Like one in collision with an invisible object, he rebounded a step or two, and stood, dazed, shaking like a sail in the wind. Incredulous, broken-hearted, Hamilton Elbridge wrestled with emotions so poignant that his mouth twitched, and the words would not come. The two victims of blind circumstance, it were most unjust to call them culprits, stared back at the accusing figure, and wondered why he should be making high tragedy of it.

O'Shea was first to break the silence:

"Loosen up, Elbridge, and quit the loony business. 'Tis not a theater you are in. Sit down. We are glad to see ye aboard."

"You're a liar, you blackguard!" cried the tempest-tossed young man, the blood rushing back to his face.

O'Shea understood. Resentment, fierce and indignant, possessed him. Not for himself, but for Jane Hardy, so outrageously insulted and condemned. He was in motion as he said, not loudly:

"Take it back, Elbridge, or I will

hammer the words down your throat. So help me, I have killed men for less."

But the girl had swiftly interposed herself in front of him, all her native poise and resolution returned.

"Wait, please, Mr. O'Shea. I insist. I want to know what he has to say for himself."

Her tones were low and even. It was strange to hear her speak so quietly after the passionate outcry of Elbridge.

O'Shea would have thrust her aside, but she held him fast by the sleeve, and he could not bear to use her roughly. Tense and alert he stood, with lowering visage.

Elbridge showed no fear of him, and addressed the girl, his mood changed from wrath to sadness ineffable:

"I tried so hard to put this thing out of my mind, Jane. You were all I had to believe in absolutely. But when I met this dashing mate of yours, I couldn't see how you could help liking him better than me. It was always too wonderful to be true that you cared for me. I accepted it as I did the sunrise and the spring. You needn't say anything. Blast the day I ever saw Pine Harbor!"

Jane Hardy moved nearer him, watchfully keeping between the two men.

"Do you expect me to forgive you for this, Hamilton?" said she. "You are in a fog of wild, wicked jealousy. Where did it begin? Why did you come to the schooner?"

"Where did it begin?" he cried, pointing at O'Shea. "He was smooth and double-faced. There isn't a straight hair in his head. He coaxed me into confiding in him, and he was laughing at me in his sleeve."

She glanced fearfully at O'Shea, but he growled, with a shrug:

"I will hear his silly oration out. 'Tis my turn later."

The girl's grave, unfaltering demeanor, as though she were the one to sit in judgment, sobered Elbridge. With stumbling haste he went on to explain:

"When I went back to my room tonight I didn't feel like sleep. So, after a while, I walked down Main Street, and out on the wharf. Two or three of the crew of Brent's steamer were awake, and talking on the lower deck. One of them had just been to the beach, and couldn't find his dory. Another laughed, and said he guessed the Hardy girl had taken it to row across the bay to her schooner. He had seen her running to the beach. I couldn't believe it, Jane. I had left you at the cottage a little while before, and you told me you were going straight to bed. I wondered what was wrong, and I came to find out. And I—and I—I found a pair of lovers in the cabin. You stole out in the dark, late at night, to meet him. I can never, never think of anything else as long as I live."

O'Shea had been tractable long enough. Jane Hardy tried to speak, but he was thundering:

"Not a word! The addle-headed boy that would dream of your breaking faith with him should be triced up and flogged to ribbons. I will stand no more of it. And he is lucky to get off with a drubbing."

A menacing figure he was as he jumped nimbly past the girl. Elbridge had caught sight of the revolver upon the table. The others had forgotten it. He snatched it up with one of his wonderfully quick motions. Heaven knows what his real intention was. Jane screamed, and tried to grasp the weapon. O'Shea lunged forward an instant too late.

There was a detonation and veiling smoke which slowly drifted to the skylight. Captain Michael O'Shea was lying across the hearth, his stalwart frame curiously relaxed. He raised an uncertain hand to his head, and his fingers found the bullet wound.

With a long suspiration he closed his eyes and was still.

CHAPTER VIII.

FORGIVE AND FORGET.

In the white bunk of Jane Hardy's stateroom lay the bold Captain O'Shea. With never a thought of flight, the mad young grocer who did the deed had helped the girl carry him thither from the cabin. She took command as though the *Speedwell* were in a storm at sea. Bidding Hamilton Elbridge go and fetch a doctor, Jane tore clean cloths from a sheet. Then, with a shrinking timidity that fought against her courage, she bent over the inanimate figure in the bunk, a candle in her hand, and hoped against hope that he still breathed.

The brown hair was matted and wet, concealing the mark of the bullet. She wiped a red smear from the forehead. Otherwise the tranquil features of Captain O'Shea were unmarred. She was left alone to wait in an agony of impotent impatience. It was like a very dreadful dream. Possibly Hamilton Elbridge had taken to his heels in panic in order to save himself from the gallows. The wretched girl felt herself responsible for the tragedy. She was a bringer of misfortune to those whose dearest wish it was to make her happy.

The doctor was an interminable time on the way. It is plausible to assume that Captain O'Shea, as dead as he was, had too nice a sense of the courtesy due a lady to leave her longer in this dismal, solitary plight. At any rate, he opened his eyes, groaned, and was evidently trying to comprehend why he should be stowed away in the sweet seclusion of Jane Hardy's stateroom. She cried out in an ecstasy of joy and terror commingled, uncertain whether this was a convalescence or a resurrection. It was even more disconcerting when, weakly but stubbornly, this stricken hero hauled himself to a sitting position and inquired, with the ghost of a smile:

"And where did I get such a divil of a thumping headache, if ye please?"

"Oh, dear, you mustn't talk!" she exclaimed, wringing her hands. "I am expecting the doctor every minute. A man who has been shot through the brain is not supposed to behave like this."

"Shot through the what?" His voice grew stronger. "Ye flatter me, Miss Hardy. A bullet would bounce off this teakwood block of mine. Oh, ho, I begin to remember. 'Twas the wild-eyed Elbridge that turned loose the gun."

"Are you really alive and talking to me?" tearfully implored Jane Hardy, gazing at him with the most absorbed fascination.

"I trust you mourned me loss. Sorry? Yes, I know." He winced and sighed. "But the look in your eyes would not bring a dead man back to life. Have you explored to see where the bullet went in?"

"I didn't dare to."

"Then fetch a hand mirror, and we will hold a survey. If I am actually drilled through the intellect I want to know it."

Between them they soon discovered that the scalp had been furrowed, stunning the owner thereof as if he had been dealt a heavy blow. Jane deftly clipped away the hair, and applied a compress. Then she commanded the patient to lie down and be quiet.

"If you are the least bit mutinous, Mr. Mate, I shall have to put you in irons."

"But I am full of delayed conversation, Captain Hardy. Why mind a crack over the head? 'Tis a trifle to what has been done to me."

"That sounds natural. The great Captain O'Shea is himself again."

"A braggart, eh?" said he. " 'Tis not manly to hit me when I am down."

The doctor presently arrived. Pallid, incoherent, Hamilton Elbridge had told him the patient was beyond mortal aid. A moment later Elbridge himself came below, peered in at the bunk, and discovered that O'Shea was chatting in the most matter-of-fact manner. Slumping into a chair, he covered his face with his hands, and sat there, unnoticed, crying his heart out for remorse and thanksgiving.

"Will he get well?" he asked at length.

"Of course," said the doctor. "The man is as strong as a horse. He must lay up for a few days. What about it, Miss Hardy? You are his employer."

"He will stay in the schooner to-night. To-morrow I shall find him quarters ashore."

"Are you going to sit up with him till morning, Jane?" timidly ventured Elbridge.

"Certainly. If Enoch Brent's men saw me come off to the vessel, as you say, there is no danger of their making a visit."

"May I stay with you? You need a man aboard. The first thing I shall do to-morrow, Jane, is to give myself up to the sheriff. I suppose I will have to serve a long term in jail for attempted murder."

O'Shea made himself heard once more before drowsing off:

"You will do nothing of the kind. 'Twas an accident, and I will swear to it on a stack of Bibles as high as the mainmast. You have come to your senses, and will suffer enough. I bear ye no ill will. 'Tis a matter between the three of us."

The schooner became silent. Jane Hardy stole into the stateroom, and waited until O'Shea was in heavy, slow-breathing slumber. Then she returned to the cabin and sank into the armchair. Hamilton Elbridge was moodily huddled upon the locker. He suspected that he had committed the most frightful blunder of his life. Jane Hardy had been given no chance to explain. As for Captain O'Shea, it was so noble of him to call the shooting an accident that it was difficult to believe him a scoundrel.

"What did you mean, Jane?" he asked beseechingly, "about Enoch Brent's men coming to the schooner to-night?"

"They meant to do mischief to Mr. O'Shea," was the weary response. "I came to warn him. But I can't discuss it with you now, Hamilton. I want to think. This is the first real spring night —and we thought it so wonderful—up on the hill with the stars and the fir trees. But I feel so cold and tired. Will you please build a fire in the grate?"

"Why don't you take a nap? I will stand watch and wake you if he needs anything, or has fever?"

"I can't sleep. My head hurts, and my hand throbs. I cut it just before you came in."

"I didn't notice, at first, that it was tied up, Jane. And that was why he was holding it? And telling you he was sorry? It's the truth. Of course it is. There was never in the world such a miserable fool as I have been to-night. I had to make a thorough finish of it in Pine Harbor. You are done with me, Jane. But don't tell me so now. You were a million times too good for me. I didn't deserve you."

Her sensibilities were benumbed. She could think of nothing she wished to say. The ship's clock on the wall tinkled the passing watches of the vigil. Toward morning Elbridge made tea, and Jane roused herself to talk a little, commonplaces, nothing more. Now and then the unhappy young man went on deck and walked restlessly. To sit inactive and look at the silent, sad-faced girl in the armchair drove him frantic with self-condemnation.

At six o'clock Matthew Halkett came on board, and, not finding the mate in his room, pottered to the cabin. Jane met him on the stair and explained:

"Mr. O'Shea has met with an accident. What makes you look so trembly?"

"I woke up last night, and heard suthin' like a pistol goin' off," mumbled Matthew. "My brother's house ain't more'n two stuns' throw from the shipyard. I was dreadful scared and worried. It wa'n't aboard the vessel, was it?"

"You are to ask no questions whatever, or I shall hire another cook. Mr. O'Shea's head hit something hard."

"Of all the exasperatin' information, Cap'n Jane! Can I stay and help you?"

"Yes. I must go back to Miss Titherbee's this morning. Do you suppose your brother William would be willing to take Mr. O'Shea in for a week? William's wife is very capable. And the house is near by."

"I'll run over and ask 'em, if you'll wait, but I ain't particular friendly with Mr. O'Shea myself. Him and me had a fallin' out."

"Nonsense! Do as I tell you," and Jane stamped her foot. Matthew trembled violently, and fled to obey. As soon as O'Shea awoke, she told him of the plan. He was quite like himself as he vehemently protested:

"I have made trouble enough. 'Tis mortified and disgusted I am. Let me stay in my room in the schooner, with Matthew to wait on me. I will not mind the noise of the calkin' mallets while she is hauled out. And I can see that the job is done right. I will be on deck in no time."

He was a hard man to argue with, and Jane had to consent. Said she, with a grateful smile:

"Very well. I give in for once. You have tried to help me in every way you could, Mr. O'Shea. But your business is to get well and take command of a fine, big steamer, where you belong. Forget us Pine Harbor folks. We are no more than a queer little episode in your life."

"Which means that I have made a sad mess of trying to help you, Miss Hardy. 'Tis true enough. The big talk is knocked out of me. I was going to twist this town by the tail, and look at me now. Nothing but worry and sorrow have I made for you."

She bade him a bright good-by, and went on deck where that abject slave, Hamilton Elbridge, was waiting to row her across the bay. It was her purpose to return later in the day and assume charge of the work of taking the *Speedwell* out of the water.

CHAPTER IX.

BRENT'S NEW MOVE.

When Jane Hardy came in sight of her aunt's cottage she was dismayed to see Enoch Brent walking to and fro in front of the gate. Hesitating, she felt inclined to retreat toward the village, but her pride rebelled at showing fear of him. Bulky and bland and important, he advanced to meet her.

"Good morning, Captain Jane! Miss Titherbee said she was expecting you, so I concluded to wait. Been across the bay?"

"Yes. My mate was hurt. Nothing serious. Your men probably reported to you that I went aboard last night." She looked him squarely in the eye, and his gaze shifted. "Have you anything to say about it, Mr. Brent? If so, better here than behind my back."

"Bless you, no," he chuckled. "It's no business of mine. What about hauling the schooner out?"

"I shall attend to it myself."

"You look sort of white and played out, Miss Hardy." His hand touched her elbow, and she moved quickly away. "Too much work for a woman. I came up to have a little talk with you. Shall we go in the house and sit down?"

"I prefer it out here, Mr. Brent. I haven't had time to finish the accounts for the last voyage. Will to-morrow do as well?"

"The profits from my shares don't make me lose any sleep. Pshaw! take your time," and he beamed the friendliest interest. "I took those forty shares over to oblige your father, when he was in a hole, remember? It was a favor to him."

"I remember very well," said she. "He was always hoping to be able to buy them back. And I'm quite sure you cheated him out of them."

The air was cool, but Brent wiped his face with a large silk handkerchief, and his self-assurance was perceptibly shaken as he resumed:

"I'm interested in your welfare, Jane. I never did approve of your going as master of the schooner. Last night I sent for Squire Markle to come and see me at the hotel. You borrowed some money from him recently on your sixty shares in the vessel. I heard he had been caught short of cash since he made that loan to you. I've done a good many political favors for the squire. He listens to what I have to say, like most folks in Pine Harbor. Well, to cut it short, I made him see it was good business to turn that debt of yours over to me."

"You did what?" she gasped. "You bulldozed Squire Markle into giving you my shares of the *Speedwell?* Then you hold every dollar of her?"

"I hold the collateral, Jane. The schooner is all mine unless you want to pay off the loan and release the security."

"But I can't pay the money. Squire Markle might have let the vessel earn it a little at a time, and perhaps pay it off, but you——"

"You think I'm a pretty sharp business man, eh?" smiled Brent. "See here, Jane, don't look at me that way. You're a sensible, level-headed girl. What if I do own the *Speedwell* outright?"

"I wouldn't sail as master for you if I had to starve on the beach," she passionately exclaimed. "It was bad enough to have you part owner."

"You won't have a chance. I think too much of you. I intend to hire a man to run her. You are high-spirited, but you won't fly in the face of reason. And now that you have quit going to sea, you will come around to my way of thinking. I never pestered you with sentimental talk, Jane. A girl that can navigate a vessel isn't apt to be that kind. But you can marry me whenever you say the word."

She did not appear to be listening. He chewed his lip, the massive head cocked, the hard, black eyes studying her face. Egotism and a will unchallenged had so warped a judgment otherwise shrewd that his plans were built upon the theory that, in the end, Jane Hardy would choose the path of least resistance. Her demeanor puzzled him, and he laughed uneasily.

"Thinking it over, are you, Jane? That's right. I know what's best for you. I'm considered a pretty able man. I should hate to see you trying to earn your living as a hired girl. But I don't know what else you are fit for ashore. No vessel owner'll want a skipper in petticoats."

Jane Hardy spoke slowly, musingly, her manner detached and impersonal.

"What a fool you are, Enoch Brent! Oh, what a wicked, simple-witted fool!"

"You're a great girl," was the good-natured reply. "Well, I'll call round again. You needn't bother with hauling the schooner out. That's my affair now."

"But Mr. O'Shea is sick aboard," she cried anxiously. "I will have him moved at once."

"Do as you like. I won't disturb him. Good day, Jane."

It was Hamilton Elbridge who carried the news to O'Shea that afternoon. The penitent grocer was in the throes of an immense reaction. He no longer hated O'Shea, who had refused to let him go to prison, who could forgive him for his incredible folly. As for Jane Hardy, he had not yet found courage to visit the cottage and further protest his unworthiness. And now Enoch Brent had taken the schooner from her. It was already talked about in the village.

Elbridge found a crew of Brent's men on the *Speedwell,* and instantly took alarm. He peered into the mate's room, a contrite, diffident young grocer, and exclaimed at sight of the bandaged head on the pillow:

"Do you know that Brent has sneaked the schooner away from Miss Hardy? Great Scott, Captain O'Shea, I'll have you carried over to William Halkett's house right away. This is no place for you."

"Hello! And how is the human firecracker?" was the unconcerned reply. "Old Matthew told me. He went on strike as soon as he heard it—refused to set foot aboard again. I found a boy to wait on me. I will not move quite yet. My head spins like a top, and 'tis more homelike to me here than ashore. Brent? Pooh, how can he touch me now? 'Tis his shipyard and his schooner. His watchman will be on duty at night. Brent is openly responsible for my safety. He would not dare trouble me."

"But I feel responsible, too," cried Elbridge. "You know what I mean."

"The argument we had in the cabin? Forget it! And what about your own plans? They are in a worse snarl than ever, thanks to me."

"I don't know what to do, Captain O'Shea. I might as well shut up the store and go away. I suppose Miss Hardy will never forgive me."

"I disagree with you there, me lad. But it might be wise to go away from her for a while. Absence has healed many a hurt. And you do yourself no good moping in the town."

"Perhaps you're right," sighed Elbridge. "I wish I had waited for your advice in the first place. You told me you had to fight the devil with fire. That should have satisfied me that you were playing straight. Oh, what a criminal idiot I have been!"

"Tut, tut! No more of that!" O'Shea vigorously declared. "It comes to me that I have a good friend in Boston—Kennedy, the ship chandler, the salt of the earth. He may be needing a fine young man to break into his business. He is getting old, and his trade is large. I will drop him a line, if ye like. 'Tis a suggestion for you to chew on."

Elbridge was effusively grateful. The coals of fire were scorching his curly head. Presently he became abstracted, and O'Shea, quick to fathom his thoughts, spoke up:

"I will be going away as soon as I am fit. Maybe we can go down to Boston together. And I never expect to see Pine Harbor any more. Being laid by the heels this way has spoiled any schemes I had to put a crimp in Enoch Brent. Me own business will be waiting for me when I get well."

The young man overwhelmed himself with reproaches. But he must talk no more. He called himself an unfeeling brute. Captain O'Shea looked pale and exhausted. Thereupon the visitor departed with his accustomed velocity. The doctor appeared a little later, bringing a note from Jane Hardy. She was so fagged that her tyrannical aunt had put her to bed. Mr. O'Shea was to be taken from the schooner at once, and she had arranged for him to have the best of care. He gazed long at her handwriting, and then slipped the note under his pillow before he said to the doctor:

"My thanks and compliments to her, if ye please. There is no other answer. 'Tis unlikely I will see her again. I will stay where I am."

CHAPTER X.

THE PLOTTERS.

The schooner stood high and dry in the shipyard next day. Enoch Brent directed the men, and was on board several times, but he did not venture into the mate's room. A guilty conscience explained this odd behavior to O'Shea, who sent word that, with the owner's kind permission, he would like to stay until he felt well enough to go ashore. The invalid was glad of the chance to be alone. It seemed as though the wound had wrought some subtle change in his temper. For hours at a time he lay staring at the ceiling, paying no heed to the boy who attended him. When he spoke, all his good-natured banter was gone. He was sharp, irritable, almost surly. His sleep was fitful, and many times during the night he roused up to light his pipe.

The broken head was mending rapidly, and gave him little pain. One day he felt strong enough to get into his clothes and sit on deck for a little while. The tap, tap of the mallets had ceased. The men had begun painting, and the schooner would soon be ready for sea. O'Shea felt the good salt wind in his face, and saw the blue water roll beyond the outer bar. It called him, but he turned away, and looked longer at a brown hill behind the village. The cottage was invisible, but he found a landmark in the grove of firs.

Presently he beheld Enoch Brent climbing a ladder that was set against the bow. With a scowl and a shake of the head, like one clinching a decision, O'Shea beckoned him aft. Brent summoned a friendly smile, and shouted a greeting. He perceived that a change had come over the wounded man, and he somehow coupled it with the so-called accident in the middle of the night. The thing had smelled of mystery. There had been no real explanation. Jane Hardy and Elbridge had been estranged since the affair. All sorts of theories had occupied Brent, and curiosity now overcame his distrust of O'Shea.

"I didn't want to bother you," said the Pine Harbor magnate. "Of course, you were welcome to stay aboard as long as you liked. Hard luck. Slipped and hit something, I suppose. Perhaps you forgot the main hatch was open."

"A man gets careless," replied O'Shea, speaking slowly. "See here, Mr. Brent, you laid a scheme to get rid of me. But your work was coarse, my dear sir. 'Twas too much like an amateur at the rough game. Now, don't look flustered. I have no grudge. Give-and-take, says I."

Brent was flustered, indeed, and his denial was stammering. O'Shea made no comment, and a long pause ensued. Then he looked up, and said, with heavy emphasis:

"I have had lots of time to think, twiddlin' me thumbs and feeling the wheels go round in my sore head. I have decided to tell ye that 'twas no accident. Young Elbridge shot me."

"Oh, ho! I guessed something was in the wind!" and Brent rubbed his hands together. "Why in thunder do you want to tell me? Want me to help you put him behind the bars? Delighted!"

An unpleasant thought occurred to Brent. It took him quite aback, and he was a trifle less ruddy as he exclaimed:

"I never dreamed young Elbridge was that kind. Why, he's dangerous. Liable to go gunning after me next. You see what I mean. He's all worked up over—er—certain business transactions. And now that I've taken the schooner——"

"Crowd a jealous, ruined, hair-brained man too far, and he will take the warpath," was O'Shea's grave assurance. "He ran amuck with me. And he has more reason to pot you. *I* am no rival of his. God knows I want to get clear of this town and all in it."

"But the girl has thrown him over."

"The more reason for him to be desperate, Mr. Brent. But you fool yourself. She will stick by him. This will blow over. I know ships, and by the same token I know something about women. Ye have made an unholy mess of trying to get rid of the lad."

Brent was impressed. O'Shea's stronger personality influenced him more than he realized. He felt bungling and provincial. And here were arguments that had the right ring to them. This briny gentleman of fortune talked logically. His motives were no longer fantastic. He knew on which side his bread was buttered. Enoch Brent was the man to join cause with.

"I thought I was going to get rid of him in pretty clever style," and Brent glowered. "But you're right. So you hate him, too? No wonder. Um-m! I guess I had just as soon see you disappear, along with Elbridge. Going away, sure, are you?"

"Sure. As one business man to another, ye might hasten my departure. I am not flush of funds. As for the lad, it could be done. Do ye catch the hint? It could be done. You want a clear field, and I want to square me own account with him."

The scheme was carefully worked out. O'Shea demanded his price, and it was a large one. But this was a business arrangement between men who had no use for "sentimental drivel."

It was on the night before the schooner was ready for launching that O'Shea received a telegram from Boston. He gave it to Brent, and said:

"Read that. 'Tis from Kennedy, the ship chandler. Captain Owen Crozier is in port, he says, fitting out his old whaling bark. This was all I asked Kennedy to wire me. He and I were talking about the old rip when I was last in the shop. Now the rest of it is plain sailing, Brent. I know Owen Crozier. Leave it to me."

"But are you sure you can get Elbridge aboard the bark without any slip? It sounds risky."

"Just because it sounds old-fashioned to shanghai a man for a deep-water voyage? This Captain Crozier is an old-fashioned skipper, and a hellion if ever there was one. I take your schooner for the run to Boston, with lumber. 'Tis easy for you to give it out that you are hiring me for a trial voyage as master. Give me a couple of your own men to work her. I want no mate. I will have them ashore when the job is done. And you appear in it nowhere at all."

"And you're sure that Elbridge will go along with you? Will he trust himself in the schooner with you?"

"I will handle that. 'Tis part of the bargain. And he will not come back to bother you, Brent. A few hundred slipped to Owen Crozier, and there will be a man lost overboard on a stormy night betwixt Boston Light and Valparaiso. He would drown his grandmother for five hundred."

Brent appeared shocked, and said:

"No more of that. I take your word for it. But five thousand to you is a staving lot of money. You earn it pretty easy."

"Then engineer it yourself," hotly returned O'Shea. "And a fine bungle you would make of it. Whose brains worked it out? Who takes the risks? Is it worth the price to you? Tell me that?"

There was no reply to this. Brent gazed at his shoes, and then glanced up, shrewd, calculating, suspicious.

"How do I know that you'll deliver the goods?"

"Because Elbridge shot me when I was unarmed. Is that reason enough, Mr. Brent? But suit yourself; you are a business man."

"Well, suppose I go to Boston by rail, not direct, but leaving here for Nova Scotia. Can't I slip aboard the schooner—after—after—the job is done? Then I can satisfy myself that the bargain is carried out, and you and I can have a settlement."

"A careful man you are. And ye trust nobody. Of course, you are rich," O'Shea indignantly exclaimed. "Well, have it your way. Come aboard in Boston, if ye must. Watch for the *Speedwell*, and I will hang a light in the main rigging."

CHAPTER XI.

CAPTAIN CROZIER'S JOB.

When the schooner was floated and towed across the bay to the lumber wharf, O'Shea was able to take command. Hamilton Elbridge came down to see him, and was much perplexed and disturbed. It did not harmonize with his chivalrous ideas of Captain O'Shea to find him acting master of the *Speedwell*, in the employ of Enoch Brent. However, unhappy memories made him cautious of his judgments, and he was open to explanation. O'Shea was ready for him. It was adroitly conveyed, without saying so, that the voyage was really in Miss Hardy's interest. He accepted gladly when invited to sail to Boston and interview the ship chandler in company with O'Shea.

On sailing day the new master of the *Speedwell* received from Miss Jane Hardy a spirited letter, inclosing a small sum of money. What she had to say was this:

> Dear Sir: Here are the wages due while in my employ. No wonder you didn't care to come and say good-by to me. That you should sail in *my* vessel, hire yourself to the most despicable man in the world is totally beyond me. This is the pitiful end of all your fine talk. You were not the successful shipmaster you pretended to be. I cannot understand why Mr. Kennedy recommended you to me. I shall write him at once. I suppose your blarney deceived him also. "A loyal friend." You have turned out to be anything but that. I will confess that it is a great disappointment to me. And to sell yourself so cheap. Poor old Matthew Halkett was right. Enoch Brent got the best of you.

Instead of tearing this insulting letter in bits, Captain O'Shea tenderly stowed it in his pocketbook, and folded the money in a sheet of paper to be laid among his treasures. His comment was uttered with much feeling:

"There speaks Jane Hardy, shipmaster, a girl that knows her own mind. And I love her for it."

The tide served at nightfall, and the wind was blowing half a gale from the northeast. The *Speedwell* went thrashing out to sea in a smother of foam.

It was five o'clock of an afternoon when the *Speedwell* crept wearily past Boston Light, and threaded a course among the anchored shipping until O'Shea sighted a dumpling-bowed, wall-sided, little bark whose stumpy masts and high bulwarks gave her an archaic appearance. He hauled the schooner to and let the cable run out within a short distance of the ancient New Bedford whaler. Fidgeting about the quarter-deck was the spare, bent figure of Captain Owen Crozier, last of the old-time deep-water skippers who made the sea a hell for Yankee sailors.

Calling Hamilton Elbridge aft, O'Shea said to him in a pleasant voice:

"The schooner is well battered up, and I will be some time making her snug. Ye are sick and tired of it, and have not eaten enough to fatten a sparrow. Go ashore and stretch your legs. There is mail waiting for me at Kennedy's place. Get it for me, if ye please, and then have supper ashore. Come off about eight o'clock this evening. I will have leisure then."

Elbridge was delighted. As soon as the boat had returned from setting him ashore, O'Shea jumped in to pull over to the whaling bark for a sociable chat with Captain Owen Crozier. Half an hour later these two appeared on deck, and climbed into the boat, which returned to the schooner.

As they sheered alongside, Captain Crozier showed a very shining set of false teeth, and cackled:

"Hee, hee! Ain't so spry as I was. You'll have to lend me a hand. But I manage to make 'em stand round."

You would have expected to hear the old rogue's bones rattle as O'Shea hauled him on deck, he was so wizened and sharp-featured, wagging a goatish beard streaked with amber juice.

"You made them stand round on the voyage I sailed with you years ago," said O'Shea.

"I recollect," giggled the other. "You tried to lick my third mate. He stretched you with the brass knuckles. I nearly died a-laughin'. I've kept track of you since, Cap'n Mike O'Shea."

"A bit of supper while we talk business? The man I spoke of is ashore just now. I wanted him out of the way for a little while."

They went into the cabin, and Captain Crozier cried in his shrill, jerky accents:

"Fixed up fine! Hee, hee! Looks like a woman's room. Well, I guess you have a soft snap. I ain't findin' it so. Great guns, Cap'n O'Shea. I've been scrapin' the water front to get sailors to man my old bark. Soft-shell swabs! They'd rather go coastin' in lumber boxes like your'n."

"Then you are in great luck to have me give you a man, and a fat bonus with him," softly spake O'Shea.

"Five hundred dollars is more'n my wages for the voyage." Captain Crozier licked his lips. "It's an act o' Providence. Is this a teetotal ship? Talkin' is dusty work."

A bottle was produced, and they conversed in low tones until the cook came in to set the table for supper. Then O'Shea sent the boat ashore on an errand. When it returned, he gave the crew liberty until midnight. Shortly after seven o'clock he hung a lantern in the main rigging.

Enoch Brent was waiting for the signal, and he came promptly. Knowing that the *Speedwell* would anchor close to the old whaling bark, he had been watching and waiting in a dingy little seamen's hotel of the opposite waterside. O'Shea met him on deck, and perceived that he was nervous and afraid of being found out.

"But I don't want the youngster to see me," said Brent. "I take no chances of his turning up later to put me in jail. Suppose the bark was stranded or dismasted at sea, and all hands rescued? It might happen before she works clear of Cape Cod."

"Stay on deck in the dark, aft by the house here," O'Shea replied. "The skylight is open. You can hear everything that is going on. 'Tis easy enough for you to keep out of sight while the lad is bundled aboard. Now, come below, and have a drink with Captain Crozier, and size him up for yourself. I will hear Elbridge's boat when it scrapes alongside. He will hire a waterman to bring him off."

Brent laughed, and complimented

Captain O'Shea for his clever tactics. They went into the cabin, where old man Crozier was burying his beak in a glass of rum and water, this tipple thoughtfully provided by O'Shea, who guessed that the skipper of the whaler would bring with him a simple, old-fashioned thirst. He turned a rheumy eye on Brent, and chirruped:

"The friend you spoke of, hey, O'Shea? He's helpin' you to throw a little business my way?"

O'Shea nodded, and Brent took a chair, a sleek, prosperous figure, whose appearance curiously contrasted with that of the aged, dilapidated little scoundrel from the whaling bark. As if to convince Brent that he was the man for the job, Owen Crozier piped in his cracked voice strange, forgotten tales of voyages when seamen jumped overboard to escape the brutalities of bucko mates, of decks that were like shambles, of such incredible horrors in stately clippers under the Stars and Stripes that slavery has no blacker pages. The old man giggled, and his false teeth clicked as he told them. His was a candor naked and unashamed. He was of the old school. A sailor was a dog.

O'Shea listened, and observed that Enoch Brent was properly impressed. Dispelled was any lingering doubt that Captain Owen Crozier would hesitate at kidnaping the young grocer for a price. It was a rare stroke of fortune to find the whaling bark and such an unregenerate skipper as this, surviving from another age of the sea.

At length, Captain Crozier jerked out his watch and cried:

"Hee, hee! Where is the man, O'Shea? I want to get action and see the color of my five hundred."

Captain Michael O'Shea leaped to his feet, formidable, truculent, his intrepid face quivering with a very blaze of passion. His finger was within an inch of Enoch Brent's face as he shouted:

"Where is the man? *Here is the man.* Aye, here is your man, Captain Owen Crozier—this big, oakum-headed swine in the chair!"

CHAPTER XII.

GETTING EVEN.

Enoch Brent's broad, jovial countenance turned as gray as old canvas. His fleshy hands took hold of the arms of the chair as if to save himself from falling, and the knuckles were white. Otherwise he sat motionless. Wide-eyed, unwinking, he stared at O'Shea, and the only sounds were his slow, wheezing breath, and a senile chuckle from the surprised Owen Crozier.

O'Shea threw back his shoulders and laughed. It was his own mellow, vigorous laugh, good to hear. Discarded was the hateful part which he had played so well. His voice had the lilt of a capstan chantey as he rolled out:

"Oh, ho, Enoch Brent! I tricked and I gulled and I played with ye. A grand man you were, and nobody could get the best of ye. And you took the bait and swallowed the hook like a booby fish. And 'twas your poor, silly notion that you were a match for Captain Mike O'Shea, that is known from Rio to Hongkong. A flabby, comical party you are, sitting there with your mouth open and all the strength gone out of ye. Sit there a bit longer."

Owen Crozier had wriggled around to look at O'Shea, and he shrilly rasped out:

"Here, what's all this play actin' about, hey? Are you jokin', O'Shea? Is this really the man you want me to take to sea? What about my five hundred dollars? You are the most amusin' cuss."

O'Shea bent over and plucked from the coat of the nerveless shape in the chair a distended leather bill book. Opening it, he stripped from the roll five one-hundred-dollar notes. The wallet, its contents scarcely shrunken, he carelessly dropped into his own side pocket. Tossing the money to Owen Crozier, he exclaimed: "There is your price. But ye need not get rid of the man at sea. Haze him. Work him up. Show him what a hard ship is like. He is overfed. Hammer the beef off him. And then kick him ashore in Valparaiso. And if ye are the shipmaster you used to be, Captain Owen Crozier, this same Enoch Brent will wish he had never been born. The five hundred will make ye interested in him. See that you earn it."

"Well, of all the entertainin' performances!" grinned the other. "You've certainly slipped something over on this fine, big, corn-fed lubber, but I ain't askin' questions. Payin' off a debt of your own, hey, Cap'n Mike? Bet you there's a woman in it. There always is. Hee, hee! Your man looks funny, don't he. I'll wake him up and make him step lively when I get him to sea. Will he make a holler when I dump him ashore? What about the American consul in Valparaiso?"

"Old Graydon, ye mean? He knows me well. I stayed with him when he had yellow fever. I will write him at once. And he will take my end of the story. And when Brent works his way back to this country he will keep his mouth shut. 'Tis clear sailing for ye, Captain Crozier."

Enoch Brent showed signs of reanimation. His face was mottled instead of gray, and he lurched forward in an attempt to rise. Choking, as if his neckband were constricted, he swore terrible oaths.

"What—what do you mean?" he growled. "You don't dare——"

O'Shea thrust him back into the chair, slapped his face, and savagely retorted:

"What do I mean? I watched you in Pine Harbor. I heard what people had to say of ye. And I planned to give you the kind of a dose ye deserved. Would I harm a darling of a lad like young Elbridge, whose little finger is worth more than your carcass? Would I allow you to insult a girl like Miss Hardy by breathing the air of the same town with her? Elbridge was plucky enough, but it took Captain Mike O'Shea to play the game with you."

A wordless bellow came from Brent, and he flung himself forward in a fury, but O'Shea dodged the clumsy attack, and let fly a fist which landed behind the ear. It was a jarring blow, and Brent staggered back, whimpering.

"Oh, stow all this rumpus," irritably observed Captain Owen Crozier, pulling out a pistol. "Here, O'Shea, bang him over the head with the butt, and put him to sleep. I'll whistle for my boat, and have him dragged aboard the bark right now. Nobody will think anything of it. Only another drunken sailor."

O'Shea grasped Enoch Brent, and hurled him in the armchair. "A bit of business comes first," said he. "I would welcome an excuse to empty your gun into him, Captain Crozier. 'Twould not shock ye, I am sure. Now, Mr. Enoch Brent, the bogyman, listen to me! You will not want to go back to your town at all. The bargain you made with me will prevent it. How do you know but I had a witness or two hid in the schooner while we threshed it out night after night? Your lawyer at home has a power of attorney to handle your business. I found it out. You will write a letter telling him you are going away for your health, and he is to wind up your affairs. Instruct him, if ye please, to sell out the piratical grocery store of yours to Hamilton Elbridge at the lad's own terms. Also to turn over to Miss Hardy the forty shares ye own outright in the *Speedwell*. You bunkoed her daddy out of them, I am sure. If you helped him out of a hole, you first put him into the same. Her own sixty shares that ye hold as collateral will be released to her if she pays off the loan you took over from Squire Markle. Do ye get that? I am displaying the wisdom of a judge."

The quaking wretch found courage to ask one question.

"What about my five thousand dollars? Are you going to steal it?"

"I fear you have no sense of humor," and O'Shea's eyes were dancing. "'Tis in me pocket, where it was meant to go. 'Tis my price for getting rid of a man, just as was agreed betwixt the two of us."

Then Captain O'Shea showed how much strength was in his compact, deep-chested frame. He hauled Brent to his feet, cuffed him several times, and hustled him toward the stairway like a bale of merchandise. Captain Owen Crozier was snarling and shoving, amazingly active, a vicious terrier of a man. On deck Brent attempted to make an outcry, but a hard hand was clapped across his mouth, and Owen Crozier pounded him between the shoulders with the pistol butt. A few minutes later a boat came from the bark. Brent suffered himself to be dumped into it, making no more resistance than a child. So inertly did he sprawl upon the bottom boards that O'Shea disgustedly remarked:

"The big coward has fainted. The heart of him is no more than mush. He will give you no trouble, Captain Crozier. Shut him up in a spare room till you go to sea."

"Aye, Cap'n Mike, and then I'll bring him to. Hee, hee! Much obliged. Hope I can do you a favor some time. You're an enterprisin' man. All the ginger ain't gone from seafarin' yet."

Waiting until the boat had reached the bark, O'Shea returned to the cabin, and carefully put it in order.

At length he took from his pocket the corpulent leather bill book of Enoch Brent. After looting the contents he tossed it in the fire. Counting the money, he assured himself that the total was five thousand dollars. This he wrapped in a sheet of white paper, and neatly tied the packet with a bit of twine. Then he wrote upon it:

A wedding gift to Captain Jane Hardy. From the mate of the *Speedwell.*

" 'Twill be enough to put the grocery business in shape," he soliloquized, "and make the schooner all clear. There is no need for them to know whose money it was. I will take the credit of being a plutocrat in disguise. My conscience rests easy. 'Twas me duty to do as I did."

At the sound of oars he stepped to the bulwark, and helped Hamilton Elbridge climb on board. As they entered the lighted cabin he saw that the young man was downcast.

"Well, me lad, how did you enjoy the big city? And was my good friend Kennedy in the shop?"

The boyish smile was troubled as Elbridge answered:

"Yes. Here are some letters for you. I met him, and sort of hinted at a possible business opening. I'm afraid there is nothing doing. His nephew has come in with him, it seems. The big city? Oh, I don't like it very well. I was happiest in Pine Harbor, of course. It's no use, Captain O'Shea. I can't do anything unless—until—well, there is only one thing in the world that counts. I have tried going away, but——"

"Come out of your dreams for a minute, lad," said O'Shea. "I have news that will take me from here at once. 'Tis good-by to you. A steamer is waiting, and I must go to sea. Old Kennedy will find a man to carry the schooner back to Pine Harbor."

"Whew, this is sudden! I'm terribly sorry. I was hoping——"

"That I would stay long enough to get the best of Enoch Brent?"

"Not so much that, Captain O'Shea, but I hate to have Miss Hardy misunderstand you."

O'Shea took the packet from the desk, and said:

"Give her this for me. 'Tis a trifle in remembrance. All I ask, Elbridge, is that ye make her happy. You are all she wants. As man to man, if I thought otherwise, 'tis straight back to Pine Harbor I would go. Well, 'I'm bound away.' "

He turned quickly and went on deck. The boatman had been told to wait. As they shoved off, Elbridge ran to the side, and shouted something in farewell. Seemingly Captain Michael O'Shea did not hear, for he made no reply. He was looking long at the white schooner.

The night gave her a beauty gracious and serene, and her tall spars were delicately threaded among the stars.

THE END.

Sheriff and Bad Man

By Frederick Niven

Author of "Hands Up," "Making an Example," Etc.

We would like to call particular attention to these Western storiettes by Frederick Niven. There's a freshness and charm about them that will delight you. We don't know any one who can give a clearer picture of his characters. Take the description of the sheriff in this story: "Jamieson was nicknamed Sheriff Baby, by his friends in fun, by his enemies in contempt; he had the face of a schoolboy and the large blue eyes of a Cupid." You can almost see that sheriff, can't you? The bad man is just as convincing, and when the twain meet there is a tug of war well worth the witnessing.

SHERIFF JAMIESON came down the Uintah road with a streamer of dust billowing behind him.

This was his first case, and he had to "make good." At the same time, he had no personal sense of the sinfulness of the criminal on whose trail he sped. He had, indeed, some sympathy with him—for the villain had held up the new automobile upon its first run from Solomonsville—on the railroad—to Uintah; and Jamieson had little use for the automobile. He was young in years, younger in spirit—and the automobile spelled to him ruin, ruin of all that made the West worth living in. No more gauntlets and buckskins, no more gathering up of the ribbons, springing back of the brake, whoop, and yell, and splendid making of figures eight over the heads of the whaling team of six with a long-lashed whip. Instead, a man with an unnaturally humped back, through sitting over the wheel, a man who wore a cap—think of it!—a cap with a scoop, in place of the broad Stetson with the rattlesnake band.

Jamieson was nicknamed "Sheriff Baby," by his friends in fun, by his enemies in contempt. He had the face of a schoolboy, the expression, and the large blue eyes of a Cupid. He came to the scene of the holdup as told by the driver, but did not allow himself to be blindly prejudiced when he saw the signs of the doublings and turnings the car had made in the chauffeur's attempt to rush it off the road, whirl it this way and that, evading trees, and get it back on the road again. It had been a wild and plucky piece of steering, but the trees had been too many for the driver—in the slang sense and the actual; and, once the brake had been put on, there had been nothing for it but to let the holdup man go through the bags.

"He surely told the truth," Jamieson cogitated, as he looked at the amazing track. "He did some stunts here with his gold-darn' auto-mo-beel, his durn gasoline buggy, his nickel-plated, piano-organ, petrol-drinking contraption! He is sure some lizard of a driver. Guess it's true he did all these turns without lowering speed to speak of. Well—I don't like his hat, and I don't like his derailed locomotive skallyhootin' through the woods, but he surely handled her—and I got to find this criminal."

He dismounted, and led his horse round the scene of the show-down of the gasoline buggy, presently mounted, and, sitting loose and bent in the saddle, sometimes riding very slow, sometimes increasing speed to a lope, went on, eyes to the ground. Jamieson knew Uintah County, having ridden the range in the land of the purple sage for many years. Not only its roads he knew, but its coulees, and "draws," and gulches, the intricacies of its benchlands, and the "bad lands" beyond; also the lower reaches of those blue sierras that showed their serrated ridge seventy miles off above the heat haze that trembled over the land. But it was to no mountain camp that his quarry was heading.

"Guess he's making for Yacobsville," said Jamieson.

The real name of the place was Jacobsville; but it was usually called Yacobsville in tribute to the number of Swedes who vegetated there—much as Rock Creek, the washed-out placer camp up yonder in the mountains, is called Lock Click—especially by labor agitators on their speechifying itineraries through the country—as a hint that there are more Chinamen than "white" men in its census return.

"Yep! Yacobsville, sure thing," said Sheriff Baby to his pinto pony. "The driver said the holdup had got away with a bunch of bills, and might be liable to run chances on getting them changed prompt, seeing there was more bills than golden eagles in the plunder. He could fetch Yacobsville in three and a half hours' hitting it good across here—if he knew the trail."

Jamieson knew the draws that were worth using—and those that, instead of being short cuts, were culs-de-sac. For a moment he hesitated at the crest of a ridge. If his quarry was actually going to Jacobsville, he should have held on along the top here; but then, perhaps, he did not know the country so well as the sheriff did. Jamieson hesitated. With his short legs outthrust he pressed inward, and the pony stopped.

"On the other hand," he considered, "he might not be headin' there. Anyhow, he ain't got far. He would have been if he had bust that cyar before he left it. I guess the driver whizzed her up to Uintah hittin' only the high places in the road. I'm closer on him than he reckoned on. Guess I'll stick to his trail. I would look pretty sick if I fluttered into Yacobsville ahead of him, and waited for his comin', and he didn't ever come! No! I ain't throwing any dice in this racket. Click!" The pinto shot forward, and Sheriff Baby stuck to the trail.

"All the same," he thought, riding up the next rise slowly to save the pony, "all the same, if he gets into Yacobsville ahead of me, and, by any chance, the citizens of Yacobsville get wise to him and incarcerate him it will be bully for law and order in this progressive State; but no Fourth of July for me! Only—I ain't gambling on this."

He came to the crest, rode up, head, shoulders, horse, and all—and there he stood; for on the mesa below was a spot of a rider tittupping in his direction, and fanned out behind him, at intervals, were four riders—five—six.

"Gee whiz!" cried Sheriff Baby. "Now, is this my auto-mo-beel despiser, or has there been somebody holding up on the Yacobsville trail, and figuring on cashing in in Uintah, same as my sport, I guess, figures on doing in Yacobsville." He rode gently down, so that he would not be monumental against the sky. "Don't see how it can be my holdup, for I don't think the telegraph line is finished from Uintah to Yacobsville, but——"

He went farther down, to the end of the spur, and halted, as still as the bowlders that lay around—bowlders that the Indians had a myth about, as some prying professor from back East had found out. The professor had written about the stones and the myth in one of the magazines—a copy of which, by some chance, had come in to Uintah and astonished the inhabitants, most of whom did not know that the Indians had any of "these there myths."

Jamieson must have grown somewhat excited as the pursued rider drew nearer, for his pony began to tremble. The quiverings recalled him to a sense of his position. He was not watching a race from the grand stand at the Denver annual sports, with money on the result. He was looking at something he might have to join in. He was, as it were, at one of the gates, ready to go into the arena, and he must go in cool. He watched the approaching rider, and noticed how he began to urge his pony —and drew his conclusions.

"Why, he's going to work a standoff! He wouldn't quirt like that if he had much farther to go. He would be saving some." He looked at the pursuers. "And he could afford to save—and that's whatever. He's working up for this here bunch of rocks to get in cover and open on them at a range that will give him a show to pot one or two before the whole bunch gets—steady, you pinto! You'll draw his eye, you spotted animal!"

Jamieson put up his hand, and, removing his badge of office from the outside of his coat, pinned it on the inside —so that the coat would have to be opened and held back before his aim in life—the arrest of lawbreakers—became evident. Up came the rider, glancing over his shoulder as he came, threw off his pony—and Sheriff Baby, looking like a grim little boy facing an ogre, sang out: "Don't pull your gun!"

His voice made the man's hand spring to his weapon instinctively.

"Don't you!" cautioned the sheriff. The man looked at him. "Come right up. I want to speak to you," said Baby. "I been watchin' your ride."

The fugitive led his horse forward. Its sides went energetically like bellows.

"Well," he asked, "what are you doing—playing at bein' a rock?" and his eyes smiled, a smile so cool as to spell danger; for a man who can smile in such a position is gritty.

"What's the trouble?" asked Baby. "Don't you flicker to your gun none, now. I don't want to have to do it. This here is only a or'nary precaution of mine. What's this racing and chasing on Canobie Lea, anyhow?"

The newcomer, thin, grim, long-nosed, smiled more easily at him. Then, with an expression as of considering, he hesitated, puckered his mouth, half closed his eyes, and looked over his shoulder in a slow and easy fashion.

"Plenty of sand," thought Sheriff Baby.

"Holdup," said the lean man, looking back at Jamieson again.

The sheriff's blue eyes shone.

"Whereabouts?" he asked.

The bad man puckered his eyes at him, head slightly on side; then, gruffly, "Uintah road!" he snapped.

"And what are them fellows? Yacobsville sports?" said Baby.

There seemed, to the ears of the lean man, contempt in the accent of the last two words. He nodded and gave his insouciant smile again—looked over his shoulder, became grim, and broke out: "Say! Where do you figure in this? Am I up against it, or what? I guess this don't vex you any; and them fellows are liable to draw a bead soon—excited."

"Not if I know it!" said Baby, and he slipped from the saddle, throwing the reins over his pinto's head in the way that is known as "tying to the ground," and is generally sufficient to keep a pony from straying far; most ponies, indeed, with the lines hanging so, stand stockstill till further orders. He stepped up to the holdup man with his forty-five in hand, in the light, accustomed style of the marksman; for you can tell a gunman by the way he handles a weapon even before a target presents itself.

"It's like this," said Baby, and he spoke sharp and meaningful, for the first of the pursuers was near enough for trouble. "Will you be lifted by a lone sheriff, or by a posse of Yacobsville pothunters?" And he held back his coat so that the star twinkled in the lean man's eyes.

Even as it shone, the sheriff, looking at him keenly as a doctor reading an eye for sickness, stretched his left hand deliberately and unhurriedly forth—his right, as the West says, "bending" the forty-five—and appropriated the tall man's six-shooter, which he thrust under his belt; then he felt his prisoner upon the hip and sides to be certain that there was no other weapon concealed, a weapon that might be less of the heavy-artillery order than the long-nosed Colt, but none the less a worry.

"Get back!" he cried now, and held up his hand toward the advancing rider. The man slowed up and looked round to his companions for support. Up they came and clustered in an undecided knot.

Sheriff Baby felt it was a great moment of his life. He felt intensely keen, and yet in a blurred world. What he saw he saw clearly; but all else was mirage.

"What do you want this fellow for?" he hailed.

"Held up the Uintah mail!" one called. "What you want?"

"You ain't a sheriff's posse, are you?" called Jamieson.

"No—but there's a——" began the man, but evidently the others said "Shut up!" Wits work quickly at such times, and it flashed through Jamieson's mind that the new wire spoken of recently must be actually in operation. Uintah must have telegraphed Solomonsville—and the mail people had telegraphed over the State, offering a reward. He opened his coat again and let the sunlight glitter on his badge.

"I got him," he said. "You can go home. He's coming along with me to Uintah."

"Huh! You the new sheriff?"

"All right, Jamieson," said another, who evidently knew him. "You better have us along, anyhow. He's slippery."

If *he* was slippery, he knew when he was "up against it." He stood now leaning against one of the bowlders, smoking a cigarette, observing the proceedings.

"Don't you let them work up too close, sheriff," he counseled. "They're liable to call your hand."

"You fellows get back," Baby repeated. "I don't need you."

Their horses milled a little, turning this way and that. Then, abruptly, one of them flicked up his right hand and fired. The shot went into the pinto's head, and it crashed down on its knees; and even as it fell the six riders fanned out and flash—flash!—went their guns.

Jamieson, feet on ground on either side of his pony, threw up and down his right hand, and a dart of light leaped from the Colt.

"Let me in on this, sheriff," the prisoner whooped. "You and I could hold off the whole burg of Yacobsville!"

Almost all in one gesture the sheriff raised his right hand again, and with his left tossed the six-shooter from his belt to the road agent, who caught it dexterously—and it cracked twice with extreme celerity. A man went down in the hopeless, limp, and quite-finished manner that told of a broken spine; another acted as if he had been given a blow of tremendous force on his right shoulder, a blow of such impact as to spin him in the saddle like a teetotum, and whirl him clean off. The right arm of the one that Jamieson had aimed at hung loose at his side, and with his left hand he grabbed his biceps, distorting his face with pain and rage.

One of the others, too crazy with the scrap to know when to stop, fired again, and the lean man beside Jamieson said "Ah-h-h-h!" and then let forth a string of expletives that told of wide experience with humanity—talkers of English—talkers of United States—United States is a dialect all its own!—talkers of Mexican. He said the same sort of thing in all three tongues. And his gun coughed again as he talked—and the man who had so nearly winged him as to slit his sleeve and send a burn over his forearm went forward on his pony's neck as if he was a jockey instead of a rider of a high-cantled Western saddle. The remaining two had a unanimous thought and threw their reins over their ponies' heads and held their hands high over their own, dropping their "Gatling guns."

Jamieson looked at the long, lean cause of all this trouble, his head turned oddly, his gun in hand. The holdup man looked him in the eye a long time. They considered each other for ages, admiring each other in the scrutiny—becoming friends. The road agent smiled at last, tossed his gun up like one tossing a flapjack, caught it by the barrel as it fell, and, stepping over

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